INTERVIEW II

INTERVIEWEE: CHESTER COOPER

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

DATE: July 17, 1969

PLACE: Mr. Cooper's office in Arlington, Virginia

Tape 1 of 1

M: We had reached, chronologically, last time right to the brink of Marigold,but there are a couple of things I wanted to back up and do. Some of them have come up partly as the result of the article just coming out in Look Magazine which you've probably had a chance to know about by Norman Cousins ["How the U.S. Spurned Three Chances for Peace in Vietnam," July 29, 1969]. What about that alleged disclosure he's making of the U Thant 1964 activity? Did you get involved in that at all? Of course, that occurred before you actually took the Viet Nam assignment in the White House, but you said you were following Viet Nam at that time.

C: Yes. The U Thant initiative in '64 I think is one of the most titillating and mysterious, but not necessarily the most important, of the various initiatives. And it illustrates as much as anything the problems of trying to sort out what is important and what isn't important. And I'll explain that in a moment. I was involved in that, but somewhat later. And in fact one of the problems was that for reasons which are hard to discover there were very few people involved in it at the time; and if more had been involved in it perhaps he wouldn't have gotten into the rather embarrassing situation that we had. As I understand it, and this is based on an effort I made to try to reconstruct the events--

M: At a later time--

C: At a later time--when U Thant had raised the question with Johnson. This

was well before the Eric Sevareid thing [Look, Nov. 30, 1965]. As I reconstructed it--now this may not be the whole story--U Thant did suggest to [Adlai] Stevenson that if the United States were ready to meet with the North Vietnamese, and Rangoon I guess was the place that he mentioned in particular, U Thant had reason to believe that the North Vietnamese would join such a meeting. And that if this were the case, U Thant would be ready to help in any way he could with whatever U. N. facilities, translators and so forth, which could be made available. And that, as I understand it, is the essence of what U Thant told Stevenson. Stevenson apparently did not write any of this down, and subsequently when I went up to New York to talk to [Arthur] Goldberg--this was after Stevenson's death--about some other matters in connection with Viet Nam, I made several inquiries around the U.N. office there to see if there was anything in the files that Stevenson had recorded on this interview, and nobody could find anything. And, in fact, it was because of this that Goldberg himself decided that everything that U Thant ever mentioned to him he would record. And I guess Goldberg's records were fairly complete. But anyway Stevenson telephoned the Secretary of State and reported this; the Secretary, the story goes, talked to Harlan Cleveland who was then Assistant Secretary for International Organizations and some place there I understand, and I'm trying to get in touch with Cleveland to find out, although maybe you--

M: He's in Syracuse. Do you want his phone number?

C: Yes.

M: We've got his phone number in Syracuse. I could call it back to you--

C: Yes, I would like that, because I thought he was out in Honolulu.

M: No, he's in Syracuse and is going to be in Washington on August 12, if you

want to try to set up an appointment to see him.

C: Yes, I would very much like to see him.

M: I'm trying to interview him at that time. When we get through remind me and I'll call my office, and they'll be able to get this phone number for you.

C: Okay. Well, the critical thing to ask Cleveland on this is whether there is a memorandum or some record that he made on the basis of the conversation that he had with Rusk. If so, it's about the only thing on paper with respect to U Thant's interview, because Rusk did not go beyond Cleveland apparently. Now there may have been lots of reasons for this. I don't know whether you've talked to Rusk about this or not. It may have been that Stevenson in presenting U Thant's view was perhaps somewhat diffident about it, either in tone or content. It may be that even if he presented U Thant's view rather forceably Rusk felt that it was a very squashy kind of a thing and just, "Well, would you like to do it if I could arrange it?" kind of thing. It may be that Rusk whose threshold of interest in negotiations at that time was not very high for lots of reasons, anyway, for whatever reason, felt that it wasn't necessary to pass this on. Now, I know that it wasn't passed on, at least in writing. It's conceivable that he did phone the President; if' he did, the President later expressed complete mystery about it.

M: It didn't come in writing to the National Security Council.

C: It did not come in writing, because I made a file search later on to see if there was anything in the files from the State Department or from Rusk that would indicate that the U Thant thing had been passed on.

M: There is a mention in [David] Kraslow and [Stuart] Loory, The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam [1968] about a notation in a margin by [McGeorge]

Bundy, something like "as per our telephone conversation" in regard to that. Do you know anything about that?

C: No, I don't. And Bundy, I don't know what his recollection of this was, but I was morally convinced myself that the President had not been informed. Bundy may have, and actually at the time when I had to go through all of this, was at a time I remember--I'm going to actually see Bromley Smith at lunch today--but as I remember it, Bundy was away on vacation and so both Smith and I were trying to reconstruct this. And Bromley, who was the great paper handler, couldn't--didn't--recall anything. And together we went through this. So I am quite convinced that there was no communication between Rusk and the President and may not have been in any consequential way between the State Department and the West Basement of the White House on the U Thant proposal.

M: What about the other disclosure which, as far as I'm concerned, was the only thing that I wasn't well aware of in the Cousins' article? Was there anything serious in his chances for a meeting that either the White House staff or the State Department passed up?

C: No. Cousins was one of probably twenty citizens who went to Hanoi to see what they could arrange. Cousins was perhaps, at least in my judgment, among the most responsible of the people who did go. Many of the others were either outright leftists or outright pacificists, and many of them were very, very good people--nice people. But they had such a basic--so much of their motivations were emotional, and there was so much wishful thinking in their views, and they were so prone to any sort of encouragement that the North Vietnamese would give them that it was awfully hard to rely on them for any serious objective accounts of what was going on or really very difficult to use them as consequential channels.

M: Their discretion would be suspect?

C: Their discretion was suspect; their judgment was suspect; their emotional biases were suspect. And don't forget that many of us were trying awfully hard to work out something, and it wasn't that we were disinterested. A considerable amount of efforts were being made, but the problem was that some of these people that went--as I say, Cousins was probably of this group, the most reliable and responsible and highly regarded, you know, personally by many of us. But nonetheless it was clear more often than not that they would get something out of Hanoi which by other means we would discover was contradicted, denied. It was just hardly enough to warrant anything more than giving us a feeling for the color and the mood of Hanoi, but really not much more than that.

M: I was interested in the fact that his contacts seemed to be [Jack] Valenti and [Bill] Moyers, at least part of the time which would be outside the normal National Security staff operation.

C: Well, that's another problem that one confronted there. Everybody was in the act, and for awhile Valenti and Moyers, individually and separately, were in the picture. And it was very hard if you were on the NSC to figure out just what the channel was. [Douglass] Cater was mucking around for awhile, and some of them, at a staff meeting or whatever, or rather a separate meeting with the President, would pick up something they thought the President wanted to know, and then dash off and try to do it. Now, one can have a great deal of respect for these people, but the problem was that the whole question of trying to get on a negotiating track with Hanoi was at this point pretty sensitive and complex. Lots of lines and channels were out; by then a few people had assembled a fair amount of information about other channels that were being explored, the results of

them, what Hanoi had said to visitors there, or what some North Vietnamese representative had said to some Norwegian at a meeting in Sweden; and all of this was beginning to form some sort of a pattern, but the pattern wasn't by any means clear. But one got the feeling that Hanoi was doing some fishing, was very loath to commit itself in any way directly to the idea of talks, but was sort of putting various lines out; and the problem was that many of the lines were to people, as I say, whose judgment was hard to trust because they wanted so badly to get something started. And when you matched what they reported up with what we got from someone else, it was really awfully hard to feel that you had anything very robust or reliable.

M: Of course, the non-NSC people who were involving themselves weren't reading the traffic.

C: They weren't reading the traffic at all, no.

M: They got one feed-in, and that was all.

C: They got one feel for this. To some extent with a guy like Cousins, who after all was a fairly influential journalist and, you know, a person of some consequence generally among the intellectuals, there was a feeling that somebody like Valenti and Moyers ought to give him kind of special massaging because the President was having plenty of trouble there, you see, and they just wanted to make sure that Cousins at least didn't leave Washington with a feeling that all he talked to was some minor functionary either in the NSC or in the State Department.

M: What about his business on the translation? That's not new--that has been printed before. Is there anything in that?

C: It's a sort of an interesting--it's interesting, but it's not really consequential. And it was a fairly standard thing by then and certainly

M: But one they used frequently for that purpose, I take it.

C: That's right. He was a chosen instrument, so you regarded this as significant. Secondly, it did relate a stopping of the bombing to the possibility of talks. Now other people had reported this back, but there's no way of knowing that this was true. And in fact it didn't even have to go to Hanoi to sense that perhaps they wouldn't talk unless the bombing had stopped; and yet there were occasions when they <u>were</u> talking and the bombing hadn't stopped, like the [John] Guthrie channel, you know, that brief tentative session with [Le] Trang. That was the second, the formula that he used. And the third significant part of the Trinh interview was that it was repeated in the North Vietnamese newspapers a day later. That was the first time that the North Vietnamese government had hinted to the North Vietnamese people that they were even <u>considering</u> the possibility of talking with the United States.

M: That's late. That's fairly late in the game.

C: Right. But up to then the North Vietnamese people had no idea of this. Now, I'm not talking about the fellows around the Foreign Ministry in Hanoi and so forth, but I mean the--

M: Average Vietnamese.

C: Yes, right. So anyway, that was the significance of the first Trinh interview; and then, you know, you got to the question of, "What do you mean by could?" And it's not even sure that--you know, this is one of the fascinating things about the whole business of trying to communicate on such sensitive issues with people who are not used to communicating with one another. You're not even sure, you know, one is not even sure that Trinh, or whoever he cleared the speech with, was aware of the significance of the "could." Whether he in fact, when he said it really

meant that it was a conditional thing or whether he meant that "could" was used in whatever the Vietnamese form was, not in the subjunctive but just as a business of, you know, "can." "I can do it--I am able to do it," as opposed to, "I will do it if you--"

M: So that's true then of all the Vietnamese communications. There's going to be questions about the translation.

C: Right. And really what they had in mind, and whether they attached at that stage of the game, when they first did it, as much significance to the conditional use of "could" as we attached; because our reaction as time went on was, "What do you mean by could?" "That's not good enough," we kept saying. Well, I'm not sure of this, but you can make a good case that as soon as they discovered that in this statement they had yet another lever, you know, that, gee, they went pretty far but they still had a bit of leverage in that one sentence, they began to milk that one. And later they were quite sophisticated about the "could" and the "would" business--

M: They learned their English pretty well--

C: Yes, and then when they really wanted to send the signal they changed the "could" to "would." And when somebody, I forget offhand, what the--when the query was made to them, "Did you mean could or would?". At that point, they said, "We mean would, and the change is significant." But by then it was quite clear that the semantics were known to them, but I am not sure, you know, I am not sure whether in Trinh's mind, or in Pham Van Dong's mind, when they first gave this interview to Burchett, they themselves realized the significance of the "could." It was only later, perhaps, that they did.

M: They never issued such a clarification on the one that Cousins is talking about--

C: Yes.

M: They did?

C: Yes.

M: About what they'd meant on that occasion, whether or not they meant--

C: No.

M: They did not.

C: No.

M: So that's going to remain a matter of speculation?

C: Yes.

M: Just more or less in summation of all of that, you said last time in another connection that at about that point you thought our position in regard to being willing to negotiate might have depended on how public the bite was. You were not intimating, I take it from what you say now, that this Cousins thing was the kind of private bite that we could renege on therefore we did renege on? It was just one that we didn't think was very important.

C: That's right. Cousins would not have been regarded as a chosen instrument I don't think, although he was regarded as perhaps a more serious and reliable and perhaps sómewhat more objective fellow than any one of twenty people who had gone there and come back.

M: The only other topic that is outstanding, to get us back on to where we left off--we've taken a long time to get back there--was the background of the Honolulu conference which you indicated you thought was of some interest.

C: Right. The Honolulu conference started on February 6, or 4, or 3--

M: Very early in February, '66.

C: Early in February, right. And the fact that it took place so soon after

the resumption of the bombing, which was Jan.31/Washington,Feb.1,Saigon, is certainly no coincidence; and the fact that the Fulbright hearings were to start very soon is no coincidence in terms of the timing of the Honolulu conference. The President, when he was queried about the apparent haste of the Honolulu--of assembling, getting together, the Honolulu conference, made the point that he had been seriously considering such a meeting for about six months, but that his operation and other things had intervened and that this was by no means something that was done on impulse. There was a grain of truth in this, but only a grain. Late in the summer of '66--

M: '65?

C: '65--Jim Thompson and I had had some talks with Ambassador Louis Jones who had been Ambassador for many years to Djakarta. Jones was taking up the post as Chancellor or president of the East-West Center, and he was taking over in October, I think, or the beginning of the school year. The ceremony marking his assumption of that job was going to be a fairly elaborate one, or the East-West Center wanted to make it one, because I think it was the fifth anniversary of the East-West Center. Well, Thompson and I thought we might be able to do something pretty cute on that. We thought that if we could get the President to go to Honolulu and officiate at the installation of the new Chancellor, Jones, and make some nice noises about the East-West Center on the fifth anniversary, we could also do something else. We could invite the heads of state of all the Asian nations to participate.

M: A logical place for them to go.

C: A logical place for them to go, and it could be a kind of great ceremony. And during that occasion, Johnson would have an opportunity to talk

privately to each of them. Now, the thing that we had in mind more than Viet Nam was Sukarno, because Jones was a great friend of Sukarno. At that point, if you recall, we were in a hell of a jam in Indonesia, it was just before the coup; it looked as if Indonesia was going down the slippery slope. And Sukarno just refused to have anything to do with the Americans; the Embassy was being stoned. I guess this idea was advanced in the summer. As it turned out even if the President wanted to do this, the Sukarno thing probably would have washed out a little because there was the coup in October I guess, or late September. But nonetheless the thought was that he could go to Honolulu and meet all these guys and have in a sense private summit conversations, including, you know, with Thieu, of the Vietnamese government. Johnson turned the idea down. And it wasn't because of his operation, he just didn't like the idea. So that was the end of it, and I had forgotten about it. But apparently he had remembered this in the back of his mind. So when he was queried about this, this was what he thought.

M: That was what he meant by "under consideration?"

C: Right. But in point of fact, the thing was arranged very hastily. On the Thursday before he left for Honolulu (which was Saturday), I was out to lunch. It was the first time I had left the White House grounds for lunch in about three weeks. The bombing had started again and there didn't seem to be--anyway, business seemed to be slow that day, so I left for lunch. I went over to the--well, it doesn't make any difference where I went. I was in a restaurant and I was out for about two hours. I got back at about 2:30, and I found that Bundy was raising hell looking for me. And I went down to his office, and he said, you know, "For God's sake, where the hell you been? Don't you know we're going to be meeting

somebody decided we damn well better inform the Vietnamese government about this although they must have heard a little from Saigon.

M: Or read it in the newspapers.

C: Yes, read it in the newspapers. Anyway, I know the Vietnamese Ambassador here hadn't heard about it except for what he read in the newspapers. So, since he was brought in and the Vietnamese were told directly about what we wanted to discuss on Friday, on Friday night or later on Friday it was thought that you ought to bring in people like [John W.] Gardner and [Orville] Freeman; and Freeman then assembled a bunch of agricultural experts on something like two hours notice--anyway, it was a very hasty ad hoc operation. And the conference itself wasn't bad considering all that--

M: But something like that is going to be mainly cosmetic.

C: Oh, it was mainly cosmetic. And then just to make sure that the momentum could be maintained there was this instant decision to send [Hubert H.] Humphrey on that trip and a few other guys on other trips, just to keep the thing going. Humphrey didn't know anything about the conference and had been out of the Viet Nam picture for quite awhile; and the briefing he got from the President was about a half hour as the President's plane came from Honolulu and Humphrey's plane was going out the other way, and then Humphrey got about another hour's worth in Honolulu and some more on the plane. It was a pretty good example frankly of how the Johnson Administration operated when it got into a--

M: It's consistent with some of the points you made last time, the way the decision got made.

C: Yes. And there was a certain flamboyance; there was a certain ad hocing; there was a certain stretching for the gimmick; there was a certain business

of piling extravaganza upon extravaganza to make sure that, you know--
This is a very good case study of how the Administration operated, I think.

M: That brings us back to where we left off now finally, which was on the brink of Marigold. You said that Harriman and you did not know about it when the group was originally formed. When and under what circumstances did you get involved with it? After the Manila conference--that late?

C: Yes. The ancestors to Marigold were some talks, basically bull sessions, that Lodge and [Janusz] Lewandowski and [Giovanni] D'Orlandi were having on occasion in Saigin; and they were interesting. It was interesting that Lodge would even meet with the Pole, and the circumstances were rather titillating, etc. But they weren't very nourishing, but it was sort of an interesting channel. Nobody took it terribly seriously, although it wasn't disregarded either because we had tried on other occasions to use the Canadians who had the opportunity to travel back and forth from Saigon and to Hanoi to sort of pass messages and get a sense of mood and so forth. The fact that the Pole was occupying this role made it in one sense a little more exotic, but in the other sense somewhat less promising. And these conversations, as I say, went on--

M: These began in the summer of 1966?

C: These began in the summer, right. And they weren't terribly closely held; as things go, I guess they were in about the second order of--Exdis, or whatever--and they were generally known. But after Manila when Harriman and I made this swing around, we stopped in Rome. And when we talked to Fanfani, he made some references to the fact that he knew about these conversations that his Ambassador was having, or stage-managing, and indicated that he took them very seriously and was pleased that D'Orlandi was able somehow to help in this. And he then said a few things which were

interesting because he said them--he was a good fellow--but did not take on the coloration and the importance at the time that they did about a day later. One of the things he said was that he felt that the Americans would be wise to begin to develop their own ideas of what a settlement in Viet Nam would be like, and perhaps to present the ideas for a settlement to the North Vietnamese so that the North Vietnamese would have a sense of how the thing was coming out. And then if you get some basic general agreement to that, perhaps you could negotiate from the present point up to a generally agreed-upon end of the thing. And that the negotiations in a sense would be a means to an agreed-upon end rather than--

M: Sort of set piece, in that sense.

C: Yes. And some of us had brooded about that, but it was interesting that he said this. Then, I think it was the next day, he arranged a lunch at the villa that the Foreign Ministry uses for VIP affairs; and he had, I guess, about ten or twelve people at the lunch. And by God, I found myself sitting next to D'Orlandi, and I didn't even know that D'Orlandi was in Rome. But there he was sitting next to me. And he didn't waste any time. After about a minute or two of small talk--he didn't waste any time at all--he made two or three points. One was that, by God, he wasn't feeling very well but he was going back to Saigon fairly soon because he felt that his role there in this sort of little operation that he was participating in was terribly important, and that the next few months would be critical. Those were, as near as I can remember, his exact words. And then he said, "You know, I'm convinced that it's about time you fellows stopped passing on to Lewandowski just questions or platitudes to bring up to Hanoi. Why don't you tell him something that the North Vietnamese can chew on? Something consequential?" And he said, "You really ought to

do that because--" D'Orlandi said that he thought that the North Vietnamese were ready to do this and Lewandowski himself felt strongly that it was about time that he stopped just carrying bits of inconsequential stuff. And then he said, "Why don't you think in terms of presenting Hanoi with your conception of a political settlement and then see if you can negotiate back from there?" And it was quite clear obviously that he had already briefed Fanfani and Fanfani had repeated it to us. I told D'Orlandi then, I said, "Look, for God's sake," oh, he said that he had to get back, he was leaving the following day or two days later, and he was going to stop off in Cairo for a few days and then he was going to get to Saigon, I think on the 8th of November. Yes. And that Lewandowski was scheduled to go back to Hanoi the following day; and this was one of the reasons why D'Orlandi felt that he damn well better get this back to Saigon even though he was sick, because he wanted to see Lewandowski before he left for Hanoi. And I said to D'Orlandi, "Well, hell, Harriman and I wouldn't get back to Washington until I think the 8th or 9th of November," and that I felt that D'Orlandi was right. It was about time that we sent something useful up to Hanoi or asked them, you know, really searching questions, or told them something. But that there was nothing Harriman or I could really do until we got back to Washington; telegrams going back and forth were much too unsatisfactory on a subject like this, you couldn't get anything really done. I asked if he could persuade Lewandowski to postpone his trip for several days which would give Harriman and me a chance to get back to Washington and get something started back there, although I couldn't promise him anything would be done. D'Orlandi said that he would try to do that, he was quite sure that Lewandowski would agree. And then after lunch Harriman and I met with D'Orlandi for

about a half hour in a corner and D'Orlandi repeated many of the things he had told me. And I sent a telegram back to Washington describing this discussion and pointing out that I thought they ought to get on the stick and do something about it.

M: To whom? To Bundy or to--?

C: To the Secretary of State. Okay. When we got back to Washington, it was about the 9th or 10th, nothing had happened.

M: That's about four days?

C: Yes, about three or four days. Well, hell, it was longer than that. Oh, it was longer than that, because we had gone on from Rome to Paris and from Paris to Bonn and from Bonn to London and from London to Rabat, and then back. Hell, it may have been a week. But nothing had been done. This wasn't surprising. You know, the Congressional elections were coming up; everybody was busy, and besides, a telegram of that kind is interesting, but unless there's somebody there to really push it on the other end, it'll just be talked about or something, but no action is likely to happen unless somebody pushes it.

When we got back, we started to push. And as a result of this, a telegram did go out to Lodge a day or two after we got back which was pretty forthcoming. To be sure it contained an awful lot of the stuff that was already in the fourteen points, but that's all right. You know, that fourteen points. Because that too was a very consequential document and in point of fact if we had used it more and really believed it, or indicated that we believed it, it was a very good set of propositions; in fact, much of what Nixon said in his speech was basically that sort of stuff. It had a lot of that. But the one new thing it had in it was something that surprised me, frankly, because somebody had dredged up a

proposal I had made in preparation for Manila. It was kind of an attempt to get over the hump of the bombing, "What will you do and what will we do?" That syndrome. And it was the so-called Phase A-Phase B thing. I had prepared this as sort of a working document for Manila, if we could float it to see what would happen. And it wasn't dealt with in Manila.

M: It was not?

C: It was not dealt with in Manila. And I thought it was in the graveyard with a lot of other stuff. But apparently Bill Bundy or the Secretary, probably Bill Bundy, did the original draft, but anyway, I didn't do the original draft.

M: Of the wire to Lodge?

C: Of the wire to Lodge, no. I worked it over, but the original draft was done by somebody else. But anyway, whoever did it, Unger or Bundy, had dredged up this Phase A-Phase B thing; and that was the new thing we were presenting.

M: In what form now was Phase A-Phase B at that point?

C: Well, it was pretty much in the same form that lasted through the subsequent talks in London.

M: Was there a specific time lag between--

C: No, it was, as I remember it, the time lag between Phase A-Phase B went something like this. In a reasonable amount of time--paren., e.g., two or three weeks, close paren. [thesis], was the formula.

M: And the mutual de-escalation at that point was what was in it, was it not? We were not to initiate the Phase B--it was to be mutual?

C: Yes. Well, the formula then and really for a lot of time afterwards went

something like this: We would stop bombing--Phase A; but we would do it on the basis of a prior secret agreement that after a reasonable period of time, paren., e.g., two or three weeks, close paren., the North Vietnamese would stop infiltration ostensibly in exchange for the commitment we were prepared to make that we would stop reinforcements of our troops. And that if Hanoi wished to make the point, publicly, that the bombing had been stopped unconditionally and that subsequently we reached this agreement for mutual stand-down of reinforcements, we would not pull the rug out from under them.

M: And that's the way it went to Lodge?

C: That's the way it went to Lodge to pass to Lewandowski. And that was really the new thing. And then the rest is, you know, fairly standard. Lewandowski met with Lodge and D'Orlandi, took careful notes, went to Hanoi and stayed there two or three weeks--two weeks, I guess--came back, met with Lodge, read off to Lodge his understanding of Lodge's discussion with him earlier which reduced itsel to ten points--

M: How different was that essentially from what we had sent Lodge, really?

C: Well, actually, you see, it was very much in the same ballpark. It really was. He had reduced this long conversation to ten essential points. Now, the problem that arose with respect to those ten points was that Lewandowski apparently either wrote the ten points before he met with Hanoi's official and put the best gloss on them that he could or he may have diddled with them after he talked to them, you know, changing some of the things to make it somewhat more suitable. In a sense, he may have conducted a kind of a negotiation, you see.

M: And we didn't know?

C: And we didn't know that. The order in which the ten points was made was

a little troublesome to us; it puts one or two things--I've got to dredge my memory, I don't have those ten points and I've got to get hold of them. But I remember one issue was that, I think, the question of stopping violence and then elections, and the question of whether we had insisted that--I think it was our view that violence should stop and then elections, and their view was that there be elections and then the NLF would foreswear violence or something. If you were talking about these things as a sort of an academic matter, perhaps some of these things wouldn't be important, but the thing that troubled us was that Lewandowski came back and said, "Look, on the basis of this, Hanoi said that they might be willing to talk to you," and that we should, you know, "providing it's kept secret and providing you meet in a good place like Warsaw." And we weren't quite sure what that meant, whether this was in fact an agenda for the talks, whether we'd be stuck with this as a contract or whatever. And so there were a couple of exchanges between Washington and Saigon on this, with Lewandowski claiming that we were trying to wiggle out. Well, the fact of the matter was that it wasn't unreasonable for us to try to say what we meant, or what Lodge meant, rather than for Lewandowski to say what Lodge meant. It wasn't that we were trying to edit Hanoi's views as reported by Lewandowski; we were trying to edit our own views as reported by Lewandowski. And it was consequential because it was quite clear that Lewandowski, and possibly the North Vietnamese, regarded this as a consequential negotiating document. Well, anyway, it was left sort of unresolved, really; and the decision was made to move the whole business to Warsaw. And when that took place, the code name Marigold was slapped on it, and very few people were privy to it. And for the first couple of days, I was cut out of it; and Harriman was then abroad. He went to

Tunisia and one or two other places--France. So it was academic whether he was cut in or not; he didn't know about it, and I'm not sure that he would have known about it had he been in Washington.

M: Was this on direct Presidential order that the squad was cut here?

C: Yes. And I didn't know about it for about two or three days. Anyway, I was sore as hell I remember, when after a period of relative quiet--two bombing attacks in Hanoi, I think it was the 2nd and 4th of December--

M: 3rd and 4th of December. Is that in fact accidental as it is now alleged to be?

C: Yes, it is. It was accidental in the--yes.

M: Accidental in the diplomatic sense?

C: Yes, it was accidental in the diplomatic sense. It was accidental in the sense that the way those Rolling Thunder programs were worked out, the military was given a kind of a voucher. It was good for a certain number of days and if they didn't use it on a Monday, they could still use it on a Thursday, or whatever. And that voucher was given them, I think in about mid-November. I'll have to check this more carefully, but I think the voucher was good for about thirty days.

M: So that there was no--that's just one of the things that happened to happen. That's not true of the next bombing.

C: No, that's true of the next one.

M: There was a debate before those were laid on?

C: That's right. It was not true of the next one, but it was true of this one. Now, that doesn't mean that this one couldn't have been stopped. Others had been stopped. The voucher was like a meal ticket. You know, with this voucher you're entitled to get three pieces of apple pie, two pieces of steak, and some hamburger, whatever. And on this voucher, they had in it those targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. Now this wasn't

unknown. It was just ignored. It wasn't unknown to the people who were holding the clearances for the early period of Marigold. They just didn't think about it. Nobody said, "Look, remember there's this Rolling Thunder thing that might happen any day, and we'd better--" They didn't think of it. Anyway, those two raids took place before the talks started in Warsaw, and Lewandowski did warn Lodge, you know, "Hell, watch it, this doesn't look so good as an indication of what's going on," and Lodge really made a brave and sort of almost naive attempt which Lewandowski seems to have swallowed, saying, "Look, you fellows want to keep this secret; if we cancel these raids, somehow people will suspect that something fishy is going on, so the best thing that Hanoi can have is these raids as a good cover."

M: Bombing is really good for you and all that.

C: Yes, exactly. And somehow Lewandowski swallowed that. But he did say, Look--"

M: "No more!"

C: Yes. Anyway, at just about that point [Amb. John] Gronouski got into the act, and a no more surprised man there was--and talks started in Warsaw with the Poles, I guess about the 5th. And Gronouski had to pick up where Lodge left off on the arguments about the ten points, you see. It was still an unresolved question. But it looked as if this were manageable. It wasn't something that would have broken off--there were some sharp exchanges, "You guys are trying to wiggle out of it," but it could be worked out. The fact was though that as the days went by there was no evidence that the North Vietnamese were anywhere around; and that was the deal. In fact, the deal was that Gronouski would meet with the Poles for a day or possibly two days and that shortly after that in would

walk the North Vietnamese; that the conversations between Gronouski and the Pole foreign office people would basically kind of set up the thing. And then of course the thought in Washington was when that happened, the ball would be pretty much taken away from Gronouski and they'd send somebody over there who could find Viet Nam on a map, and really get into the thing. But up until then, they'd left it with Gronouski, who did a very good job incidentally. But nothing happened. No Vietnamese.

And then of course came the raids of the 13th and 14th. Now those were really disgraceful; I frankly damn near picked up my marbles and just left. It was just an obscenity, it really was. Because the targets were fixed targets; it wasn't as if you didn't bomb them then, they would go away. They weren't troop concentrations massing to go down into South Viet Nam. They weren't a covey of bombers that if you didn't hit would pick up and fly away the next day.

M: They weren't even very consequential according to [Harrison] Salisbury's report.

C: Exactly. They weren't very consequential. But it was a kind of a principle of the thing. There was a feeling on the part of some people--

M: Now, was this primarily Rusk and Rostow?

C: Rusk and Rostow, primarily; there may have been others in the wings, but anyway they were primary--that the whole thing was a put-on in Warsaw, and that Hanoi was hurting badly, and they were going to do anything to stave off one more day of bombing. And that we were just being made suckers of and if they really wanted to talk, they'd talk anyway, bombing or no bombing. And this was a show of strength and our determination, and here we were ready to talk to them but we were not going to give up this thing. So, okay. They bombed. And the talks were broken off, virtually

on the day following that. A few of us would go around saying, "I told you so," and so forth. But you still had the kind of a front that, "Well, hell, obviously they didn't want to talk."

M: No North Vietnamese had still been there?

C: "There weren't any North Vietnamese anyway," and so on. And you could have made a case, I guess, that this was--in fact, I'm inclined to believe that basically Lewandowski came back from Hanoi and Saigon with no commitments from the North Vietnamese at all, but a kind of a thing that said, "This is interesting. See what you can work out, and if you can carry it off, we might play along with you." And I think that Lewandowski and the Poles, too, perhaps quite innocently or perhaps with malice, I don't know, overstated the North Vietnamese commitment. Maybe they wanted to; maybe they really believed in it. So it's conceivable that the whole thing in Warsaw was basically a holding operation for the North Vietnamese to have the Poles try to get the best--to see what they could get out of the Americans and this kind of thing. At the end of a certain point, if they thought they had the best possible terms they would walk in, and if they didn't feel they had the right terms they wouldn't; and that this was primarily something which they couldn't--it was a no-lose thing for them.

M: How did the timing on this now relate to the Guthrie business in Moscow? Was that about the same time?

C: No. The Guthrie talks in Moscow didn't start until after the Marigold talks on January 10. Guthrie didn't know about Marigold.

M: But he was talking to a live North Vietnamese?

C: He was talking to a live if very nervous and uncommunicative North Vietnamese.

M: This was Trang?

C: Yes, the Chargé of the North Vietnamese Embassy. But the North Vietnamese wasn't talking to him. But he was in the presence. But anyway, just to finish up the Marigold thing, nobody knows for sure what the North Vietnamese had in mind on this; and to many of us it seemed, even though the odds--at the most optimistic I felt the odds were probably low that you could bring something off in Warsaw--nonetheless it would seem to us to be worth giving it a full run for its money so that at the end at least we could have said to the Poles, "You see, we did this in good faith and the North Vietnamese didn't show up," and at least the onus would have been on them. But it turned out that the onus was on us.

M: You were never told subsequently so far as you know by either the Poles or Russians or anybody that the North Vietnamese were or were not serious--?

C: Yes, the Poles, and the Russians to a lesser extent, have made the point time and time again that the North Vietnamese were serious; that they would have talked; and that we sabotaged it. And in fact this was the case they made in early January when the Poles leaked the thing, and we had a hell of a problem as a consequence of that because just an awful lot of people believed it, and who's to blame them?

M: You can make a case either way.

C: Yes. That we deliberately sabotaged the talks, because what man in his

right mind would want to bomb Hanoi at the moment that the North Vietnamese seemed ready to talk to us, especially after getting a warning?

M: So, then that is the antecedent to the further Phase A-Phase B negotiations that you--

C: Well, there was yet another thing going on in November, and that was George Brown's trip to Moscow. When Harriman and I saw Brown when we were in London in early November, post-Manila, Brown said that he was going to Moscow; and he and Wilson made a fair amount--they were fairly optimistic that they could talk about Viet Nam and might be able to work out something there. But they were both always eager to see what they could try, but nonetheless they made a case that Brown was invited to go there, and the time was propitious, and while he was there he would take every opportunity to see what he could work out on Viet Nam. And Brown asked was there something that he could take to the Russians, (again, almost like the Lewandowski thing). Was there anything that would be worthwhile his discussing with them? So once again when we came back to Washington this was the other thing we noted and actually Brown sent a few telegrams back reminding us of this and reminding the Secretary and so forth. So it was decided to give <u>him</u> the Phase A-Phase B thing to take to Moscow with him. And it was spelled out in much greater detail than Lewandowski had gotten. Instead of a paragraph, there were about two pages; and the pitch was that, "If you think the time and the case is appropriate, you can raise the following idea as if it were your own, but you can indicate that your friends in Washington would entertain this very seriously and sympathetically." And that was the general pitch that we gave to Brown, and then he got the Phase A-Phase B.

M: And no virtual difference, even though it was spelled out?

C: No, there was no essential difference. Now, the British didn't know about Marigold at the time. Well, they obviously didn't know about the Guthrie conversation because that didn't take place until after Brown had been there. So by the end of the year, there had been two surfacings of the Phase A-Phase B thing: one to Lewandowski, and the other to Brown. Guthrie didn't raise it. That wasn't part of the Guthrie thing at all, although it could have been if the thing had gotten beyond the preliminary talks and into something more substantive. Okay. Just a sidelight on the Guthrie thing: it's not clear why it was that the North Vietnamese were ready to talk to Guthrie. We got from--I'm quite sure it was the Russians who suggested that if we called the North Vietnamese Embassy, they might be ready to open the door, and that's what they did.

M: Guthrie was not the top official, and neither was Trang?

C: That's right. And it was convenient because neither of the top officials were in Moscow at that time. And in fact, you know, I forgot about this until this point. The Russians for a long time had been saying, "You know the way to settle this is for you to talk to the North Vietnamese," and we'd been saying to them: "We'll be ready to talk to the North Vietnamese, but we need somebody to introduce us."

M: "Where and how?"

C: Yes, where and how. So, I guess it was in early January that the Russians gave us the word that if we called on them, the North Vietnamese guy, he would open the door. There may have been a reason for their doing this we often forget or rarely mention. Early in the fall or late in the summer, U Thant had been in Moscow.

M: This is '66 you're talking about?

C: Yes. He had come back from Moscow convinced that the time was right for

some sort of initiative. He told Goldberg that he would like to have something that he could--

M: Now, this I think we may have covered last time. The first thing was what the Harriman group did? [See tape #1.]

C: Right, okay.

M: The four point thing, and you said then that this might have some relation to later events. This is the later event you're talking about?

C: Exactly. And it's very possible that as a result of that development with U Thant--

M: Although they never said so?

C: No, they never said so--that this may have been one of the influences that led the Russians to suggest to the North Vietnamese that they couldn't lose anything by trying. Now why the Russians would have done this after Marigold is a good question.

M: I wonder if they knew about Marigold?

C: They knew about Marigold. Well, yes, I think it's almost certain that they knew about Marigold. In fact when I asked, D'Orlandi in Rome whether he thought that Lewandowski was acting on his own or with the knowledge of the Polish government, whether he was just free-wheeling it, he assured me that the Polish government knew about it. And then I said, "Do you think the Russians do?" And D'Orlandi himself was virtually certain that the Russians did. Whether Lewandowski told him this or not, I don't know. But anyway I think it was a pretty safe assumption that the Russians did know about Marigold. Why the North Vietnamese were ready to even get these little tentative feelers going in Moscow at the time of Marigold is a good question. It may have been that they didn't trust the Poles; they didn't want to get the Poles in on it. Or it may have been

that the Russians suggested, "Let the Poles play this one the way they want to, but maybe you're better off in dealing directly with these guys." I think it's quite clear that the Poles didn't know about the Guthrie conversations. I'm sure of that.

M: That could suggest a number of things if you play with it a little.

C: Right. Well, anyway, that ended '67.

M: '66?

C: '66. Early in '67 the Poles leaked the Marigold thing and they put the best light on it from their point of view. And we first heard about the Polish leak because the Australian fellow, their Minister there, burst into the State Department and said, "What the hell have you guys been doing in Warsaw?" And it was quite clear that that morning, or within a half hour before, he had gotten a call from the Canadian Ambassador to the U.N. who had heard from U Thant or somebody there that U Thant had heard from the Poles that America had been playing footsies with the Poles in Warsaw and that they goofed. And here the Australians, who are also very closely involved in Viet Nam, they didn't even know about it. And this guy was sore. Well, it was quite clear that the cat was out of bag. And in fact very soon afterward, it was evident that the Poles, I think, had gotten the word to the Pope about this, and then Esterbrook had a column in the Washington Post, so that within a matter of a couple of days, it was all over the place. And we had some pretty irate allies to deal with, not excluding the South Vietnamese who didn't know about this.

M: Irate for different reasons, perhaps.

C: So everybody was sore, and it took a fair amount of time to brief them. But among the people we had to deal with in this were the British. And we

got a stinging communication from London. It really was pretty rough, so rough that it was decided to send me over to London in January to tell the British--to tell Brown and Wilson--about Marigold and anything else that seemed appropriate. So I went to London, and they really were sore, just as sore as hell! And the thing that made them all the more angry was not only Marigold which they didn't know about, but it was the fact that Brown had gone to Moscow during this period and that Brown was convinced that the fact that he got nothing--that nothing came of his approach on Viet Nam in Moscow--was because we made him look like a damned fool. He was convinced in retrospect from certain things the Russians did that they knew about the Warsaw talks, and here he was innocent of them. More than that he took us seriously when we gave him the Phase A-Phase B thing. And he claimed that the Russians surely must have learned about Phase A-Phase B by way of Lewandowski; and here he was presenting it as a brand new idea.

M: And his own.

C: And as his own. He was really sore. Well, it was a fairly rough few days. My pitch to Brown--

M: Was this in early February?

C: No, this was in January.

M: You made two trips to London?

C: Yes, right. This was in mid-January. My pitch to Brown was that--well, first of all I didn't blame him for being sore, but that's too bad. We couldn't tell him. And he'd just have to swallow that. The whole thing hung on its being a secret, and I didn't think that he and Wilson would want the responsibility of knowing because of the consequences of a leak. And they sort of reluctantly agreed with that. And I also told them that

I wasn't at all sure that the Russians had known about the Phase A-Phase B because we had gotten absolutely no play back from either Lewandowski really, or the Poles later, about the Phase A-Phase B.

M: It was just one of the points?

C: Yes, it's just one of the points. It was no great deal. And thirdly, I told them that when we sent him the Phase A-Phase B thing to present, we knew--we were quite conscious of the possible disadvantages of sending it both to him and Lewandowski, but we felt that it was terribly important that Moscow should realize even if they got it from Lewandowski, and especially if they got it from Lewandowski, that we were serious; that we regarded this as a serious enough proposition so that we would make a special effort to get it to them through two independent channels. And Brown was no dope, and he understood that this was probably a good gambit. So he was reasonably placated, but both he and Wilson insisted that they be informed of every new diplomatic move that we made in connection with Viet Nam. They wanted that assurance because they were cochairmen; they wanted that assurance because they were in trouble in the House of Commons and were bending over backwards to support us; they wanted that assurance because they thought they had a special relationship with us, anyway. Well, finally we agreed that no government could give that kind of a commitment to another government; that basically all I could say was that the Administration had indicated that to the extent possible and reasonable they would do it; and that that didn't mean that there wouldn't be some things that they wouldn't know about; just as I was sure there were some things that they were doing that they wouldn't want to tell us about.

Anyway, from London then I went to Paris. Oh, one other thing. I told Wilson but not Brown that there were some conversations that were just

beginning to be started in Moscow with the North Vietnamese; that they were just being started; that they were preliminary, tentative and so forth. Anyway, I just wanted him to know that.

M: Good faith at least, telling him because he had asked.

C: Yes. Then I told him that I was going to Paris and that there was a possible channel I was working on there, and they were very concerned about that, and I wouldn't tell them anything more about it, and they still really don't know very much about it. But Wilson and Brown were so anxious to carry off Viet Nam mediation role, and they were having such trouble with de Gaulle anyway that they were really kind of a little nervous about this one. Anyway, I went to Paris then where I met with this chap, Jean Sainteny. Sainteny was an old Viet Nam hand. He had been in Indo China before the war; he was there during the war; he escaped to South China; he was head of the French sort of intelligence operations group for Indo China. He was the guy that OSS brought in to Hanoi in late 1945 after he was stewing around a lot, and he was also the guy that was confined to his quarters for awhile while the Viet Minh and some of these OSS guys were riding pretty high there a few weeks, a couple of weeks; and he was pretty bitter about all this. But he was, by the time I saw him, mellowed a bit. I saw him as a follow-up to a session that Harriman had had with him in November--

M: Right. On your trip back there--

C: No. On the second time Harriman--actually it was in early December. You see, Harriman came back to Washington and then went back again. And he went to Tunisia and one or two other places, one was Paris and saw Sainteny then. And he saw Sainteny because [Henry] Kissinger suggested that he see him. Kissinger knew Sainteny's wife; she was a student of his

at Harvard; she was quite a dish--a very bright gal, and so forth. And he had gotten to know Sainteny, and Sainteny had been in Hanoi the previous July, July of '66. And he thought that Harriman ought to talk to him. Harriman did, and Sainteny was sort of--he told Harriman that he thought that somehow the only way to solve this thing was direct talks between Americans and Vietnamese; but that these had to be arranged through an intermediary. And he went down a list of possible intermediaries: the Eastern Europeans were not very good and their business was too public and too spectacular; the Russians were not terribly useful, he felt, because Hanoi was nervous about the Peking-Moscow-Hanoi axis and didn't want to give the Russians too much latitude; the French government wouldn't do it because de Gaulle was worried about getting in too soon. And Sainteny implied, he didn't say it, but he implied that really the way to do it would be to have somebody, a person who had the trust--a skilled diplomat, a knowledgeable guy--who had the trust of both America and North Viet Nam to try to be the marriage broker, a guy like Sainteny. And he didn't say this, but this was the general--

M: Implication.

C: Implication. And then he also pointed out that the North Vietnamese really didn't trust the Americans for good reason. And a lot of things that they were worried about. "For example," said Sainteny, "we keep talking about the spirit of the Geneva agreements of '54," he was convinced when he was in Hanoi in July that the Vietnamese put a fair amount of stock in those agreements and he felt that it would be very interesting to the North Vietnamese for them to learn about our views about those '54 agreements. Okay.

So, from London I went to Paris as a follow-on to that visit by

Harriman. And I brought with me to Paris first of all, a letter from Harriman to Sainteny saying these things, "Look, I'm a good fellow and Sainteny can talk to me as if he were talking to Harriman." And more than that, I had with me a paper that we had worked up in Washington which was our assessment of the current relevance and validity of the '54 agreement which I could give to him--Sainteny. And I was also advised to tell Sainteny that we had a lot of things in mind; that we had a proposal worked out, which we did--I forgot to mention this, it was done in December--on a settle-first, negotiate-later scenario. It was a big thick thing which started from that D'Orlandi idea that maybe it would be better, you know, at a certain time to say, "This is how we want to end this thing. How should we go about ending it?" And then I was authorized to mention the fact that we had been doing some thinking along these lines--

M: Did the State Department dispatch you on this journey now?

C: Yes.

M: Not the White House shop?

C: No.

M: The State Department?

C: Yes. The White House gave agreement to my going to London, but basically, the follow-on was State Department. Well, anyway, this was about what I could tell Sainteny. I couldn't mention Phase A-Phase B; I couldn't tell him about the Marigold exercise except to explain some of the things that had already been explained publicly; I couldn't tell him about the Guthrie conversation. In short, it was basically an exploration. And the pitch was, "Mr. Sainteny, we trust you; the North Vietnamese trust you. Could you go to Hanoi on a personal mission to just see if you could

work out some sort of a dialogue?" And it was quite clear that this was something he wanted to do so badly he could taste it. But he said he would think about it very seriously. And frankly I had a feeling though that he had some second thoughts between the time he met with Harriman and this time; at least I was led to believe from my talks with Harriman that Sainteny would be a lot more enthusiastic, or conspicuously more enthusiastic, about this than he appeared to be when I talked to him. Maybe he was just playing--he's a lawyer, and maybe he was playing it very cautiously. But in any case, it was evident that he was terribly interested in this, but I can't say that he fell over backwards and grasped me with great enthusiasm. But he did say that he had to talk to de Gaulle, because he wouldn't go unless de Gaulle approved it. Apparently he still had a very good entreé into the Elysée, but he was a little out of favor and apparently he felt that he was walking on eggs on this and he was terribly anxious to get back into the government. He had been a minister in the government, and he didn't want to do anything that would prejudice those chances. So I agreed that I would come back to Paris in a few days when he could tell me the results of this. So I went back to London, or I guess actually there was an interim in that. I guess I saw Brown and Wilson one day and went to Paris and then went back to London. Anyway, I came back to Paris a few days later, and Sainteny said, "No," he couldn't do it"; that de Gaulle said that the time wasn't right and even if Sainteny went as a personal mission, the North Vietnamese wouldn't believe him and they would think that he was emissary from de Gaulle and this would prejudice anything else de Gaulle might want to do. So end of Sainteny thing.

From there I went back to Washington. I got back to Washington and

shortly afterward the Kosygin visit to London was firmed up; Wilson write a letter suggesting I come back again before the visit and brief them once again about all the developments that had taken place between the time I was there a few weeks before and then; so that there would be no loose ends before he met with Kosygin on February 6, I think. So I went back to London.

M: Let me interrupt you here. We're about to run off this tape here. Would you like to continue this morning, or schedule one more time? I'd like to get all this particular one together; it's a very complicated one.

C: Let's do it once again, because I think--

M: That's fine. We're running right off the end here now and--

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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By Chester L. Cooper

to the

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