

INTERVIEW II

DATE: June 30, 1982
INTERVIEWEE: Phillip Davidson
INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger
PLACE: General Davidson's residence, McAllen, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

D: By way of introduction, we were discussing infiltration in November 1972 [1967], in which the intelligence officers which appeared on the CBS program ["The Uncounted Enemy"] said that there was monstrous infiltration coming down the trails, somewhere, as I recall, around twenty-five thousand. My memory of it is that when Westy [William Westmoreland] got back from Washington, which would have been near the end of November 1967, we had noticed some unusual activity in North Vietnam. I don't think it had any relationship to the trail, that is, the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos. We went to see General Westmoreland and told him that there was some unusual activity going on at this time, but to the best of my knowledge we never put any number on it. We didn't say twenty thousand, twenty-five thousand.

G: What kind of activity was this, what form?

D: Actually it was people, divisions moving south. These were the divisions which eventually ended up largely at Khe Sanh, and also a part of the force that infiltrated down the coastal road from Vinh south and probably ended up in Quang Tri and Hue later on.

G: How were you following these divisions?

D: This I don't think we ought to answer even at this time.

Davidson -- II -- 2

G: Good. I just wanted to get it on the record.

D: This is highly classified, which I still believe to this day would be helpful to a potential enemy.

G: Fine.

D: I think you can speculate without going too far afield what it was, and of course there were certain other things which aren't classified. There were aerial photographs. We were also running SLAR missions-- Side-Looking Airborne Radar--up and down particularly the coastal road; we were running infrared missions at night, indicating great usage of these particular roads. Certain nighttime photography was also being used. But all of it sort of fitted together into a mosaic.

This movement, as I recall, was what convinced myself and General Westmoreland and the other senior decision-makers in Saigon, including the Ambassador, Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker, that the enemy really intended to make a major effort in the near future. And although I haven't got them here, a study of the intelligence estimates and the Weekly Intelligence Estimate Update, the so-called WIEU, would indicate that from this date on there was a growing sense of urgency in Saigon about this enemy offensive that we could see coming.

G: The movement of these divisions, how accurately could you identify who they were?

D: We could identify them by division number.

G: Okay. Did these figures get plugged into the infiltration statistics that were being reported then?

Davidson -- II -- 3

- D: This is one of the things that's got all of us confused at this stage, because the way we computed the infiltration statistics had sort of grown up through the years and was really a pretty complicated thing. Basically, the way we did it was we watched them come down the trail through North Vietnam, and there were two or three infiltration routes. They might switch over to the west and come down through the Mu Gia Pass, which threw them into Laos far up the pipeline, and down that way. Or they might come down through Vinh and then turn to the southwest and come across the DMZ about where it runs into Laos, what we called Road 1001. Or they might come straight down the coast along the coastal road. To the best of my memory, we could watch these, but we did not pick them up as infiltrators until they came into country. Now, I could be wrong on this.
- G: Well, let me give you a slightly more than hypothetical case in which a couple of divisions would come down the trail until they were, say, opposite Khe Sanh but still be in Laos. What do you do with them?
- D: That's a good question, and this is the one that we've asked each other in the last few days. Basically, our memory--and I'm speaking of ours as Danny Graham's, Charlie Morris', and mine, and it makes some sense--[is] that as soon as they got within what we would call an operational area, in other words as soon as they could make an impact on Khe Sanh, for example, without more than a day's march or something, we would pick them up. And I'm sure this is what accounts for the twenty thousand which the infiltration statistics indicate was the infiltration figure for January of 1968, which is after the months of

Davidson -- II -- 4

October, November, and December that these intelligence officers who appeared on the CBS program said the high infiltration rate was happening. But when they came within striking distance, within operating distance, we picked them up. This would be a sensible thing to do. They might still be in the DMZ, although they'd just be a few kilometers from Khe Sanh. They could be in Laos and just be a few kilometers. As a matter of fact, they could shell it from those positions, and did.

G: What about exfiltration? Did anybody try to keep track of that, when they would move back across into the sanctuaries?

D: Not in any organized way, no. Once they came into country, if they moved back into Laos or Cambodia, we still carried them; we didn't drop them.

G: Once you put them on the OB [order of battle], they were there?

D: That's right. And to the best of my memory, nobody, none of the North Vietnamese ever went home. They never even went home in a box. There must be hundreds of thousands of them buried around Vietnam. Or not buried at all, as in the case of Khe Sanh, which incidentally is a story I think worth repeating.

The area around Khe Sanh is inhabited by a very, very primitive tribe called the Brus [?]. They're even primitive by Vietnamese Montagnard standards. They have no written language; they have very little language of any kind. They have a smattering of French, and that's really about all. And when we would get these people and bring them in for interrogation, we couldn't get much out of them because

Davidson -- II -- 5

there was no way to communicate with them. But we would ask them about bodies, and they would describe the North Vietnamese casualties as "beaucoup body, beaucoup body." Bones everywhere, which I don't doubt, the way the B-52s worked them over, and our artillery, and a lot of other things, fighters. And they just apparently left them, and the jungle would grow over them. I don't suppose you could find them now.

But the best record for the infiltration is contained in the official documents--[of] which I have a copy somewhere in these files--that says not what we thought it was in 1967, that is, the infiltration of the last quarter of 1967, not what we thought it was at that time, but what we pretty much knew it to have been a year later. And those figures, as I recall, generally showed seven thousand, eight thousand coming down the trails.

G: Which is what Westmoreland testified to.

D: That's right, that's what he said. He let himself be led astray on that matter, that remark, and Westmoreland is easy to lead. I've seen him now for many years, he's much too agreeable. Instead of simply saying, "I don't remember that," or "That's not my memory," he says, "Yes, maybe that's right."

G: I have to remark that when Mike Wallace asked Westmoreland what infiltration was, Westmoreland said twenty-five thousand, which he later said was a misspeak, but it's a curious misspeak in that it agrees with what the critics have said.

Davidson -- II -- 6

D: That's right. I don't really recall whether he was led into that or not. I would have to view the program again. Do you have a copy of the Mike Wallace program? You might check that because I don't know-- Wallace was very adroit at drawing him into these traps--whether he [Wallace] said, "These intelligence officers say that there were twenty-five thousand," and he [Westmoreland] might have said, "Well, that may be," or some such thing. But I don't recall the program to that--

G: There's the problem of editing involved, too, because I don't have the unedited version.

D: Oh, no, I don't either. I have merely a copy of what appeared on the air. Jesus, I don't know who's got Westmoreland's transcript, the entire transcript, now. He gave it to the TV Guide people, and they gave it back to him after they'd used it, and then he gave it to--gosh, I think to the Los Angeles Times. I don't know, the latter is a guess.

And again, in let's say September 1968--I don't know what the document's date is, but it's somewhere around there--there was no reason for us to falsify the infiltration figures. This is the very best figure we had. We didn't know that this was going to be a matter of all this controversy. As a matter of fact, this is rather a recent phase of the controversy. The original controversy covered just the estimate of guerrilla strength and whether the secret self-defense forces and self-defense forces should be covered. That was the basic argument of the OB conference in September 1967.

Davidson -- II -- 7

In the Harper's article, which I believe appeared in 1975, [Samuel] Adams added another one, which we had never heard of before and which he has apparently dropped, and that is he said that there were thirty thousand enemy agents within the South Vietnamese government and South Vietnamese armed forces. None of us had ever heard such a figure. God knows that you can't have any rationale for such a figure. Enemy agents don't go around registering themselves. But I notice he's since dropped that. But he added the infiltration thing. And I have no doubt that in the subsequent programs a new phase will pop up, or in his book a new phase will pop up. He spins off of this central core of the guerrilla strength and whether these odds and sods, as the British would call them, should be counted. I think that probably is about all I can offer on the infiltration.

Wait a minute. It might be of some value to know how we really computed.

G: Surely.

D: There were all sorts of intelligence [sources] bearing on it, and the accuracy of it varied during different phases of the war. I'm purposely being very careful here since I don't want to give away what I consider to be, to this day, very valuable sources of intelligence that I'm sure that the enemy never realized we were exploiting. But basically our infiltration was gained and confirmed by a simple analysis of PW reports and captured documents. For example, a PW comes into the country in December and then moves around until he gets into a combat situation, let's say in March, and gets captured. And as

Davidson -- II -- 8

part of the interrogation they always ask him, "When did you enter the country?" Well, most of them didn't know. Their knowledge of where they were and what they were was abysmal. Occasionally, though, you'd get some fellow that said, "Yes, I came in so-and-so." "Well, what was your packet number?" "Well, we were 99-F" or "5034." "How many people were there?" "Well, there were"--if he was a bright guy and kept his ears [open]--"about a hundred and fifty." "I see."

Then on that one source alone--it was picked up as a possible infiltration source--no, an infiltration figure was possible. If we got another PW or another document which confirmed largely what he'd said, it was picked up as probable or confirmed, I've forgotten now. But it took two to really make sure of it. And then, of course, normally beyond that you'd get additional confirming evidence. Now, as you can see, with this sort of a system your information was virtually nil when the man came into the country. He hadn't come into any kind of contact. I don't mean to say we didn't know about it; we might have a very good figure as to how strong he was from other sources, but we might not. But you can see then that the infiltration strength figures tended to improve month by month as time went on. And so we used to feel maybe at the end of six months we'd have a pretty good feel for what the infiltration was. At the end of nine months, we might have a very good figure. And this was all done open source; the South Vietnamese used the same sources. As a matter of fact they were partners in this CICV that did this sort of thing as part of their primary job.

Davidson -- II -- 9

G: Is that S-I-C-V?

D: That's Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam.

G: Okay. C-I-C-V.

D: C-I-C-V, yes. Set up by Joe McChristian, employing both South Vietnamese and Americans, limited to secret information. We did not use certain types of intelligence at all. This gave rise to part of the controversy in this program. A bunch of the people who were working on these documents and seeing what they considered to be large infiltration, or this, that, or the other thing, were people working on a low grade of intelligence, compared to the leadership, very restricted in numbers, who were working on not only this low-grade intelligence, relatively speaking, but on all sources of intelligence. So a lot of times when people would come to you with something that they had gained from the secret [data] only, you'd know it might be only partially true or it might literally be untrue. They didn't have the whole picture. And this gave rise, in my opinion, to some of the statements which these officers made that they couldn't get anybody to listen to them. They'd say it, but the senior people would just ignore it. Well, it's [for] a very good reason: we knew it wasn't true or when it was only partially true. So they'd go back and they'd say, "They won't believe me." It wasn't that we didn't want to believe them, but we had better information.

G: Wouldn't it have been a relatively simple matter for, let's take for an example the lieutenant whose name, I think, was [Richard] MacArthur [?],

Davidson -- II -- 10

one of the people who testified on the Adams program, if that's the right word, who said--his specialty was guerrillas, I believe--

D: Yes, as I recall it.

G: And he said somebody had cut his figures in half, and there was a confrontation of sorts because he thought his figures were being meddled with. Wouldn't it have been relatively simple for his boss simply to say, "MacArthur, I know things that you don't know"?

D: Well, yes, it would have. But that really wasn't what took place. In the first place, the sources that would have allowed us to have made a more accurate estimate on guerrillas than McArthur had did not exist among the guerrillas. And again, I'm going to have to go into something I think highly classified here, but to make any sense--the guerrillas didn't operate radios. I'm talking about guerrillas now. They didn't come on the air and whatnot in any sense that we could normally make much use of it. They'd be flightees [?]. So really, we didn't have a much better hold on the thing from some peculiar, secret source of intelligence.

Now, the thing that caused us to reject MacArthur's figures was that we simply did not believe that he made a credible case with the evidence at hand. I remember the briefing; I can remember it very well. It was one Sunday afternoon, and MacArthur had a very bad time of it, and I thought it was a very bad briefing. He's the only one of that whole group I remembered, other than old Gains Hawkins and whatnot, who was--that's a different story. But he simply didn't have the evidence to support what he was trying to sell. I don't remember

Davidson -- II -- 11

whether it was smaller or larger. I don't think at that time--and I would have put this at around August, or some such thing, of 1967--we certainly saw no great controversy looming on the horizon about this thing. But his briefing simply didn't hold together and didn't make sense. That was why it was rejected. I remember it very well.

He was working in the most nebulous of areas. I don't think anybody, and this includes everybody from [Vo Nguyen] Giap on down, had any idea, within 50 per cent, of the true strength of the guerrillas. They kept no records. They were part-time soldiers at best; they might do nothing for six months. They might move out of the area, or get run out, or do any number of other things. We do know that this Colonel [Tran Van] Dac--

G: How do you spell that, sir?

D: D-A-C--was the political commissar for the Saigon area, and just before the Tet offensive he went around and visited all of the guerrilla units in the outskirts of Saigon and around Saigon, armed with the reports of how many guerrillas these guerrilla leaders had said there were. And in his PW interrogation, which you'll find repeated in Don Oberdorfer's book, Tet!, they found that it was nothing like the strength that these people were reporting. And yet Adams would have us accept vast hundreds of thousands of these people, when as a matter of fact, the concrete evidence available would indicate to me that we--MACV--on the lower side of the estimate, overestimated. The main evidence, other than Dac's statements, which said that they simply weren't there, he said these men had been lying. And it's

Davidson -- II -- 12

easy; that's a hard-nosed bunch. [If] they tell you to get a hundred guerrillas, you'd better have a hundred, or you'd better lie about it, or you'd better do something, because they're liable to come out there and not only strip your little rank from you, they're liable to shoot your ass off.

But the other, more direct evidence--and it bears on one of these questions--is it's accepted throughout the intelligence community that at the very most no more than eighty-four thousand troops participated in the Tet offensive. These were basically, except in the I Corps area, up in the north, basically VC main force units, and VC guerrillas, sapper units, all sorts of things. Now, there are other estimates that put this figure as low as sixty-five thousand, but eighty-four thousand is generally accepted as the upper figure. Now, we gave in our strength figures for the VC main forces, local forces, and guerrillas, a much higher figure. Yet this was an all-out effort. They weren't holding back anything. The plan for the Tet offensive, so-called--and it's not the Tet offensive in the language of the North Vietnamese and the VC, it's called TCK-TKN [?]. It means great offensive, great uprising [general offensive and general uprising], and these are abbreviations of the Vietnamese words.

Actually, we now know that this envisioned a three-phase operation. The first phase, which Giap captured after the successful strategy which had upset [Henri] Navarre and brought about his defeat at Dien Bien Phu, was to attack in widely separated areas around the periphery of South Vietnam, for two purposes. One, to lure the

Davidson -- II -- 13

American forces out to the periphery where they could then infiltrate behind them into the cities and the heartland. This turned out to have been a mistake. He didn't realize the vast strategic mobility of the American forces that can fight one day out here in Song Be, and two days later be sitting in their base camp at Cu Chi, with their air-mobility.

The second reason that he launched into these attacks--which we could never understand; there was a tremendous slaughter at places around Dak To, for example, up in the DMZ, and down around Loc Ninh--he was testing the tactics that he thought would have to be used during the great offensive, the great uprising, against American forces. We bloodied him up so badly that he decided that the smartest thing to do was leave the Americans alone. That if you're going to attack, bypass them; attack their airfields, their headquarters, but devote most of your effort towards the South Vietnamese. Now, this leads into an ideological conflict which raged for years in North Vietnam, whether the main enemy were the South Vietnamese or the Americans. However, at this stage I don't think it's a profitable pursuit [to discuss that issue].

The second phase of the so-called TCK-TKN was to be what we now know as the Tet offensive. Once the American troops had been drawn out to the peripheries, then they would strike against the cities and whatnot. This phase had three prongs, as they called it. The first was the purely military prong, which they characterized, which Giap himself characterized, as the lever; if it worked, the rest of it

Davidson -- II -- 14

would work, and when it didn't, the rest of it collapsed. The second was what they called troop proselyting. It means, in effect, to secure desertions and defections. And the third was to encourage the civilians to rise up against the government. Had they been able to have destroyed ARVN or shredded it badly, then it's possible that they could have secured these desertions and defections, and once that happened, the people might have risen [up], but it didn't happen.

It's worthwhile I think in commenting, although this may be on the other tape, that there is no intelligence now or at any other time available that the original intent of TCK-TKN was to make any impact on United States public opinion. All of the testimony of senior PWs that we captured, or the defectees--some people saw what they thought was the end of the line right after the Tet offensive and gave themselves in, like Dac, for example. We also either captured or a regimental commander defected at the same time. There's no evidence whatsoever that there was any intent to strike a psychological blow against the support of the war in the United States. This was totally unexpected. You can read all their documents, talk to all their PWs. There's no question but that they intended to try to do just the three-pronged thing that they said. This is perhaps even more strongly confirmed by a document published the first of February, the day after the main Tet offensive, which said, "We failed."

G: Whose document is that?

D: This is a COSVN [Central Office, South Vietnam] document. I have a copy of it.

Davidson -- II -- 15

G: C-O-S-V-N?

D: Yes. They said, "We failed," and they went into a long list of why they failed, and then they prescribed, as they usually do, some corrective actions. As I say, I have a copy of it. Nowhere in that document is there any remark that that part of the offensive designed to influence U.S. public opinion in support of the war was successful or unsuccessful. Really, at that stage, they wouldn't have known. But they all discuss straightforwardly their failure to carry off the objectives of the great offensive, great uprising.

G: Could I get a copy of that from you?

D: Yes. I'd be happy to. The document, as a matter of historical note, was highly controversial in MACV headquarters. We captured it, as I recall, very shortly after it was issued. We captured not one, but several copies in various parts. What made it controversial was that those who thought the document to be a fraud said, "They meant the night of the thirty-first [of January]." Now, the major attacks--let me go back and review the chronology of the Tet offensive very simply, to show you why people, including myself, challenged the veracity of the document.

In VC MR 5, Military Region 5, which is basically the northern central part of South Vietnam--Binh Dinh, Quang Ngai, sweeping on across over to the Central Highlands--the whole Tet offensive was postponed twenty-four hours. As the marines say, there's always some guy that doesn't get the word, and they didn't. Or if they did, their troops were already on the move and they couldn't contact them and get

Davidson -- II -- 16

them back, or tell them to lay low or whatever. At any rate, in places like Kontum, Pleiku, Binh Dinh City, Nha Trang, Quang Ngai City, these guys attacked. We had prior notification at Pleiku and Kontum, so the United States troops were able to forestall those attacks. The others, they really weren't very successful.

The next morning, I went in about five-thirty. I read these reports. I went up to see Westmoreland immediately, very early in the morning, I'd say six or six-thirty, as he came in. I told him about these, and I said, "Now we know what the Tet offensive is. We know that tonight they are going to strike all over the country." He said, "I agree." So he put all of his units in the air force and the navy and everybody on maximum alert. They were already on alert; he put them on maximum alert. Sure enough, that night and the next morning, the main attacks took place throughout the rest of South Vietnam, other than MR 5, including the now-famous Embassy thing, which really didn't amount to much one way or the other, and the attacks on the other cities.

This document would have us believe that by that evening the COSVN people knew that the attack and that their great offensive had failed. I challenged it. I said, "We didn't know at that stage exactly what the situation and the results were. We knew there was heavy fighting all over the country. Their signal communications are vastly inferior to ours, no question about it." As a matter of fact, we now know that not only did the one guy jump off early, one major command, but the people in Saigon couldn't communicate with each other

Davidson -- II -- 17

and couldn't communicate outside the city. And I'm sure that there were many other serious communications failures. And I said, "They would have us believe that they knew this thing had failed that quickly? Even if they did, how could they get out this document, this five-page document of some twenty-five hundred words? Carefully worded, it's no hasty thing." Of course, this is an English translation. Those people who believed the document valid, credible, had no answer for this.

I came later to accept the document; it was accurate, it was actually what happened. Their argument was, "Why would anybody put a document like this out if it wasn't accurate, if they didn't mean what it says? It's a defeatist document." I said, "Well, have you ever considered that the South Vietnamese might have done it?" I went over to see them. They had a copy, too. They said, "Jeez, we don't understand. We didn't do it." I said, "I know goddamn well the Americans didn't do it." Now, the only explanation, which I now accept, is that somebody in the North Vietnamese Politburo--Giap himself, perhaps, who was very reluctant to enter into the Tet offensive; he did not believe in it--somebody had written that document before the attack. [It's] the only explanation that makes any sense. Somebody sensed or knew or thought it was going to fail. They might have written it like we do a lot of drafts. You know, "If it comes off, we've got to get something out real quick because, hell, this is a hell of a morale blow. We're telling these guys the war's going to be over, and now, Jesus Christ, they're getting their asses shot off. And furthermore, we never gave them any retreat plans."

Davidson -- II -- 18

G: I was going to ask about that.

D: No, there were none. They couldn't dare do it. They couldn't ask for a maximum effort to win the war and then say, "Now if this doesn't work, fellows, here's the way you get out of here." There were damn few people [that] got out. I don't think we killed any forty-five thousand, not enemy troops. I think a lot of innocent bystanders got killed. You start fighting in cities, that's what's going to happen. We know that for every man that goes forward, one porter somewhere along the line goes forward, at least. It may well be a ratio of two to one. So when the 7th VC Division and the 9th VC Division began to move towards their battle stations and into the combat, they probably had a lot of hapless civilians, a lot of low-grade secret self-defense force and whatnot, carrying stuff for them. Now, most of them just ran away when the shooting started, but then a lot of times when an artillery battalion concentration hits you, there ain't much to run away in that area. But that's the only explanation which I've ever been able to arrive at.

G: It seems at first glance to me the explanation [is] that there might have been somebody with the insight and the position to write such a document ahead of time, and at the same time not insist that some contingency plan be fielded in case things didn't work.

D: Well, we never had any evidence that they had a contingency plan to withdraw in case it didn't work. We talked to high-ranking officers. One of the things that some of the high-ranking officers objected to,

Davidson -- II -- 19

why they deserted, they said they just put them in there and left them, in effect, to die.

But you can't read the document without being struck by the accuracy. And then it goes on to prescribe corrective measures, but they don't really make much sense. They are what they'd been saying before. For example, instead of, "We're going to win the war in the shortest possible time," which were the buzz words associated with the great offensive, great uprising, they now talk about, "It'll be more phases than one," obviously trying to get their morale up, or "a protracted war."

G: Now, you said a minute ago that the VC made a maximum effort at Tet, but we do know that some main force units were held out, a good many North Vietnamese units were held out.

D: Mostly North Vietnamese, yes.

G: And the only place where they seem to have reinforced their initial assaults was in Hue. Couldn't they, in your opinion, have turned the balance in any of these other places if they had piled in with another couple of regiments, let's say?

D: Oh, I don't think there's any question, particularly in I Corps, and perhaps in the western Highlands. But you see, there was a phase three. I've only covered the first two phases. Phase three was based on the assumption that phase one had worked partially at least, and phase two had worked at least partially. So that you had a badly shaken South Vietnamese government, maybe considerably weaker than they actually were, that you had a badly shaken U.S. government wondering, "Who are

Davidson -- II -- 20

we trying to defend? If the government is collapsing and the people are going over to the VC, we are suddenly isolated in a sea of hostile people here. What are we here for?" At that time there would have been the phase three, which was a grand finale, set-piece battle.

G: Khe Sanh.

D: Probably Khe Sanh. One knowledgeable PW said he thinks it would have been in the western Highlands, but in his interrogation report it's hard to--again, you've got the language barrier--it's hard to settle just what he means by the western Highlands. Khe Sanh could certainly have been called the western Highlands. But I think, yes, that's where it would have been. At least that, coupled with a serious negotiating thrust, so that they would have attempted--what they were attempting to do was to duplicate Dien Bien Phu, in which, just as the negotiations opened, there was a resounding military victory which completely destroyed the French morale at home. Although it was a relatively minor defeat when you consider the entire Southeast Asia theater, ten thousand men out of what, three hundred thousand? Something like that.

They made the move on Khe Sanh, I don't think there's any question about it. They did the things which we said they would do if they were going to seriously try to take it. The first thing they did was to take the hills surrounding it. Then they started the same stuff that they did at Dien Bien Phu, and that's digging these zigzag trenches and whatnot, getting up in there. Of course, they made the mistake that so many soldiers make, officers, in that they saw the

Davidson -- II -- 21

similarities of the Dien Bien Phu-Khe Sanh situation without seeing the tremendous differences, and the main difference, of course, being the United States air and artillery power. Plus the simple fact that nobody, from the President on down through General Westmoreland and General [Robert] Cushman, the marine commander, was going to see Khe Sanh go under. I mean, had it become close, I'm sure we would have launched the 1st Marine Division and the 1st Cavalry Division in a counterattack.

G: Have you heard about the famous sand table, the scale model that Lyndon Johnson had constructed of Khe Sanh?

D: I don't doubt it for a moment. I have heard of it, yes.

G: I was wondering if you were tapped for any information on it.

D: We had--I wish I'd kept mine, and I don't know why I didn't--we saw one of these relief maps that the engineers make, of the Khe Sanh area, on about a one to ten thousand or five thousand [scale], greatly blown up, which is about the same thing, you could see this. And we had it on the wall and we used to post things on it. I saw one of those in the President's office in a picture taken.

G: It may have been the same one.

D: Well, I knew he was quite worried about it, of course, depending on who you listen to. He apparently had the Joint Chiefs sign there in blood that they were not going to lose it. I think that's something of an exaggeration, but he did force them to reassure him.

G: We have that thing in the [LBJ] Library.

D: It must be an interesting document. I don't doubt it.

Davidson -- II -- 22

G: Let me ask you something while we're on the subject. There's some controversy about why General Westmoreland wanted to hold Khe Sanh. There's been some criticism of his decision to stand, because of the nature of the war, the old canard about how terrain didn't hold all that much importance and so on and so on. What was important about Khe Sanh?

D: I think there were two things, perhaps three. One, Khe Sanh was the backup position for a reconnaissance base that we had at Lang Vei. Now as you know, early in the fighting, Lang Vei got overrun, and some very heavy fighting took place there; as a matter of fact a Congressional Medal of Honor or two were won there. This reconnaissance base was where the native troops and some of our Green Beret people would go--and the SOG people would go--on over into Laos and reconnoiter around the trail.

G: That's the special operations group?

D: Yes, special operations and that sort of thing [Studies and Observation Group]. That's one of the things.

The second reason is that we know that as far back at least as March of 1967 at the Guam conference, we know that subsequently in November, and we know finally after the Tet offensive in the famous troop request, that Westmoreland had a concept of going into Laos and cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail with a corps-sized force. He had asked for these troops in March and had been refused. He had kept talking about it, and again, of course, he asked for them. Part of the two hundred and six thousand that [Earle] Wheeler requested, roughly one

Davidson -- II -- 23

hundred and five thousand were to go to Westmoreland, which was the corps-sized strike force.

Several plans were drawn up. One, we were going into the Bolovens Plateau, if you know, in southern Laos, this huge thing over there. I've only seen it from the air, and I don't suppose anybody must have seen it from the ground.

The other one, the one which I think would have been adopted had any such scheme ever taken place, had us moving out Highway 9 through Khe Sanh, through to Lang Vei and into Laos, striking that angle which would have been near the DMZ, [which] would then of course have cut off all the territory south of it, all the roads south of it. So for that reason he wanted to hold it. Now, I'm deducing this; I don't ever recall that I heard him discuss it in any way.

The other reason was that to some extent Khe Sanh controlled a natural avenue of approach to Quang Tri City and Hue. As I recall, it was the Cua Viet River [?], but I could be wrong. It slanted down from Khe Sanh in a southeasterly direction toward Hue and Quang Tri City. It happened, of course, that once you got bottled up, you weren't going to do much controlling, although you could do it by air. They went in and laid mines and stuff like that down in the stream beds. This was possibly another reason.

I think above and beyond and behind all of those, I don't think anybody ever worried at MACV, nor at the Marine Amphibious Force headquarters, 3rd MAF, I don't think anybody ever felt that Khe Sanh was in any great danger. I never heard one word in all the weeks

Davidson -- II -- 24

saying, "We're liable to lose it." So why take them out? Furthermore, by the time such a decision would have been indicated, that is, when we were absolutely certain that--I believe it was the 325th--the 325th Division had closed in, too late. The worst thing in the world you could have done would be to try to get those marines out down that narrow road, or over those hills, in the face of an enemy onslaught. They would have lost them, sure. So once they were there, that far, they had to stay. Now, much of this is deduced; I've never heard--

G: I understand.

D: I have never heard Westmoreland--it's an interesting point, if he's ever. . . . In his book he's remarkably frank in a lot of places; it might be he says something in the book about it. I don't recall it and I'm a close student of it. And he doesn't necessarily have to be truthful either. Some of the things I know are shaded, largely to protect the reputation of certain people, and I think this is a good thing. I don't see any use, for example, in bringing up all of the difficulties they had with the 3rd MAF people up there, for example.

That question [on your list]: "At the beginning of 1967, how important was Cambodia as a supply route and sanctuary for the enemy in South Vietnam?" I wasn't in Vietnam in [early] 1967; I was G-2 ARPAC, which was overwatching to some extent, but not nearly as close as when you get to the combat area. I think at the beginning of 1967--and I want to emphasize that--it was beginning to be an important supply route and sanctuary coming up from the south, from Sihanoukville. Because the North Vietnamese forces were beginning

Davidson -- II -- 25

to push further south all the time. They hadn't quite got as far south as they would eventually get, of course, but it was beginning to be, in my opinion, an important route for the expansion of the war which was then taking place in 1967, supplying the VC as well as the supplying of the North Vietnamese forces. But I do not believe at the beginning of 1967 that it was nearly as important as it was a year later, when you had, in my opinion, the lower two-thirds of South Vietnam being supplied through Sihanoukville.

G: Did you feel this at the time?

D: It came on us, I think, rather gradually. I want to give the credit where I think the credit is due, and that's the naval intelligence setup in Vietnam. The Commander Naval Forces Vietnam and his two, at that time a navy captain by the name of Rectanus [?]

G: Would you spell that for us, sir?

D: R-E-C-T-A-N-U-S, who later, as a matter of fact, retired as a vice admiral--took my job; the last job I had, he replaced me--they had some agents working in Sihanoukville. They began to put this stuff together, and they came up one day and we had a big briefing and talk, and I said, "Well, it sounds real good, but I don't think we've got enough to really go public with it at this time. Let's just keep watching it." And we did, and they were very convincing, I thought.

Basically what was happening was that the Chinese Communists' ships were coming in about once every three weeks or once a month, and they had even managed to get some copies of the manifests, which were dummies. But it indicated that roughly ten thousand tons, or some

Davidson -- II -- 26

such thing as that, was being unloaded about every month or five weeks or something like this. We were then able to piece together some other stuff--aerial flights, photography--and we were able to get some direct evidence of it. For example, they'd pick up boats on the Mekong and the subsidiary streams with a hell of a lot of supplies in them. The Green Beret people who lived in these isolated little camps out near on the Cambodian border, I remember one of them, a young captain I talked to [when] I was out there one day said, "Hell, General, you can see them. They come up here right across the border in huge truck convoys, fifty, sixty goddamn trucks, and they unload over there at night. You can see their lights. You can count them; I counted them." So then we began to send in reports and estimates that Sihanoukville was becoming a major port of entry, and that the supplies for at least the southern half, and probably the southern two-thirds, were coming up that way. You could just move a hell of a lot more material.

G: Mainly munitions?

D: Munitions, yes.

"Were MACV and CIA estimates at variance?" Yes. I don't know that I can comment any further. We believed it was a major source of entry, they didn't. I think it's about where that was.

You say, "In February, CIA published a paper arguing that Cambodia was in no way vital to the enemy." I don't recall the paper, but even in February of 1967 I can't imagine CIA publishing such a paper. Because it was obvious that the Cambodian sanctuaries--let's

Davidson -- II -- 27

forget for a moment Sihanoukville and the supply business--but the sanctuaries were tremendously important. They couldn't maintain their forces in any other way. We'd already run them out of the country in III Corps.

G: It just occurred to me, were there any political complications to this? You said "going public" a minute ago--

D: Yes, there were. There were serious political complications and overtones. Before I discuss that, let me put on the record here, from a document written in 1974, which is supposedly the intelligence lessons learned in Vietnam. Now, this is just the executive summary of a four-volume thing that towers this high. But it covers this particular thing, and I quote from this document: "The most famous example of institutionalization"--now, by that we mean [when] somebody like the CIA or MACV or CINCPAC study a given intelligence problem, and they finally arrive at their conclusion, this is the way it is. Intelligence being the kind of thing it is, vague, confused, subject to various interpretations, nevertheless we found once a headquarters or agency fastens onto a given position, they practically will never be driven off of it, except by the most overwhelming evidence. And this is what we mean by institution. In other words, a given position gets set in concrete. There's no budge, there's no give anymore. There's no discussing it.

"The most famous example of institutionalization arose in 1968"--now, you might want to remember that--"in the controversy over whether the port of Sihanoukville was the major supply center for Vietnamese

Davidson -- II -- 28

logistic operations in the lower two-thirds of South Vietnam. The navy first developed the view that significant amounts of enemy logistics were coming through the port of Sihanoukville, thence by road and inland waterways to enemy forces in South Vietnam. MACV, after considerable study, adopted the same view. PACOM did not take a position initially but eventually supported the navy-MACV view. DIA and CIA took a diametrically opposed position, stating that virtually no logistic materials were coming through the port of Sihanoukville, and that the entire NVA and VC force in South Vietnam was being supported by road movement down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. Both views were given wide circulation, and the institutional positions were locked. Eventually the senior members of the executive branch determined that this split viewpoint could not continue. Not only did it impair national level decision-making, but more important, there were tremendous political implications as to the role of [Norodom] Sihanouk, and what actions the U.S. government should take in regard to Sihanouk and the government of Cambodia." There is your political ramification.

G: Who were these senior members of the executive branch?

D: I don't know. I had the same question as I went through it. I don't know why we used that. I believe the President was briefed, which if 1968 is correct would have meant that Walt Rostow was in on the thing.

"To determine the validity of the opposing viewpoints, the executive branch appointed a committee composed of representatives of CIA, DIA, State Department, and other Washington intelligence agencies." I

Davidson -- II -- 29

don't know who the other Washington intelligence agencies might be, NSA maybe, I don't know. "This committee was instructed to proceed to PACOM, examine the intelligence held regarding this question, then to go to MACV to study the intelligence there and to reach an understanding of the problem. The committee carried out these instructions. While in South Vietnam, all intelligence available to MACV was made available, as well as field trips, talks to senior officers, junior officers, enlisted men, and even prisoners of war, regarding the use of Cambodia by the enemy. At the conclusion of the committee's visit in South Vietnam, the senior member of the visiting committee"--who was a Mr. Graham [?] from CIA; I've forgotten what his first name was, if I ever knew. I do remember the word Graham--"informed the MACV J-2 that there was no intelligence available in MACV that was not also available in Washington."

Now may I say parenthetically, that's a very necessary statement, because one explanation for the dichotomy might have been we held intelligence they didn't. That wasn't true; they had everything we had.

"Their other conclusion was that there was no overwhelming evidence"--quote, "overwhelming"--"that the port of Sihanoukville was being used as a principal enemy supply port, and that it appeared that the supplies to enemy units throughout South Vietnam were being moved overland down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This view was later formalized in the committee's report on its return to Washington. Thus the institutional views of all the headquarters involved were frozen once

Davidson -- II -- 30

more." Really, this time. Once you go on record for it, you have locked.

"When the United States troops made their incursion into Cambodia in 1970, additional evidence was obtained which reconfirmed the navy-MACV-PACOM view of the use of Sihanoukville, although virtually nothing new was added to the substance of intelligence known two years earlier." It's a hell of an indictment.

"Rear Admiral Rectanus adds"--this is a footnote--"'The navy estimate of munitions shipped through the port of Sihanoukville was within 10 per cent of the actual tonnage figures. They were based primarily upon HUMINT,'" which is enemy agents.

G: Agents, right.

D: Agents. "It is evident now that the institutionalization of intelligence hampered the decision-making process of the highest authorities in the United States government. It demonstrates the difficulty of an institution, and particularly the members of that institution who have espoused publicly a given view, to recant that institutional position in spite of evidence to the contrary."

Now, this sort of answers the rest of it. [Reads from interviewer's questions] "Was there ever evidence as to who was right?" In this case, yes. They captured the actual munitions records, which showed, as Rectanus there says, that we were very close to being right.

G: Does the name Paul Walsh ring a bell in this connection?

D: Walsh?

Davidson -- II -- 31

G: He was a CIA analyst who was very interested in this problem.

D: Could be. It does ring a bell but

Now, let me get back to the political aspects. Graham talked to me several times. Twice I can recall we spoke alone.

G: Now, this is the CIA Graham?

D: The CIA chief of this thing. On both those occasions, he strongly inferred that he had been directed not to find the port of Sihanoukville in heavy use.

G: Did he give a source?

D: Yes. Before I lead up to this, though, the last time I think was the most significant. This was the exit interview. We sat down and I said, "Mr. Graham, I know what you're going to find, and I don't think that there is anything to be gained from your discussing your views, trying to convince me, or my discussing mine, trying to convince you." He said, "I agree." And then in the ensuing conversation, it's my memory that he said something to the effect that there are people in Washington who don't want to find Sihanoukville being used. And I recall the name Bundy. Now, whether it was Bill Bundy or McGeorge Bundy--

G: Well, McGeorge Bundy was out of government.

D: He was out by then. So it couldn't have--I would not have thought it could have been him. But I don't know why the name Bundy associated itself with this, but I remembered it all this time. In confirmation of that, several years later--now, this was 1968--in 1971 I went back to Vietnam when I became ACSI in the Pentagon. Since I'd left Vietnam

Davidson -- II -- 32

in 1969, in the ensuing two years I'd been at Fort Ord, totally out of the intelligence business. I went in to see General [Creighton] Abrams in 1971 and we got to reminiscing about the times that we'd shared together when he was deputy commander under General Westmoreland and then when he was the commander. And this particular subject came up, I've forgotten how now. And I said, "Oh, General, I think they knew better. I think they were directed to find that." I can remember him, because Abe was normally a guy that didn't think too highly of the human race anyway, and such a charge would not normally have aroused much emotion one way or the other. But he got very irate, and he said, "Now, isn't that a hell of a goddamn thing!" I remember recoiling, you know, "What the hell have I done?"

G: You stirred him up?

D: Well, he says, "Isn't that a hell of a thing, when people come out here, high-level civilians and whatnot, and they go back and they deceive the President of the United States?" I said, "Well, I guess it is, General, you know, but that's it."

So that's what I know about the thing. It would make sense in that I'm sure nobody really wanted to find that Sihanoukville was being used. Because you'd have to do something about it, and what are you going to do, other than widen the war? So it makes sense to me that Bundy or somebody else might have said to this guy--you know, there are any number of ways you could pass the word, and I'm sure if you asked the guy he'd deny it to this day. I don't know why he told me, why he inferred it even, other than I think his professional pride

Davidson -- II -- 33

was hurt. I could barely conceal my contempt. I said, "There's no use trying to persuade each other, but my God, man, the evidence is overpowering!" "Well, that may be, but we have other things to think of."

So then I remember a follow-up on that. Andy Goodpaster came into the headquarters as Abe's deputy commander. And of course Goodpaster knows where all the bodies are buried around Washington and whatnot. He was Eisenhower's executive officer for years and probably [was] the first national security adviser, although he had a limited role in that respect. But he came in, and we got to talking about this at the Saturday conference, the WIEU, one day. And I said, "Well, it seems to me that with the Nixon Administration coming in, they might open this thing." In other words, they might find that Sihanoukville is being heavily used and something has to be done about it. And Andy just looked at me--and I can still recall--pityingly, and he said, "You just don't understand, Phil, how Washington works." Now, Andy is a classmate of mine from the Military Academy and we're fair friends, and I think that's a fair comment: I didn't. I thought Nixon would be only too happy to show that the Johnson Administration had been concealing this fact, but without thinking what is he going to do about it?

G: Nixon wanted to get out; he didn't want to get further in.

D: Yes. So I suspect that. . . .

G: Let me ask a naive question. I'm sure it is a naive question; I don't know the way Washington works either, so. . . .

Davidson -- II -- 34

D: Even when I'd had two more tours up there.

G: This is probably entirely too speculative, but I have to ask it anyway. If indeed your reading of this is correct, and it was a political decision, "We don't want to know this, because if we know it we have to do something about it," surely there is a less Byzantine way of approaching it, isn't there? And that is simply to tell CIA, "Look, just keep it under your hat. Just leave it be."

D: My guess is that what happened was something like this, and if you ever get a chance, you might talk to Walt Rostow. My guess is that Walt or Johnson or somebody got hold of one of these reports. Walt apparently was a great fellow for getting half-raw intelligence and a bunch of other stuff, and he says, "We've got to find out about this. We've got to do something." You know, he's an activist, a charger.

G: And would not have been afraid to widen the war.

D: Oh, no, no. As a matter of fact, he might have been only too happy to have done so. So he says to CIA, "I want you guys to get a committee together and go out and find out about this." Well, in the meantime, if we're going to name names like Bill Bundy--and again, I'm merely trying to say what a nebulous connection I'm making here, certainly nothing you could take the witness stand with. But you could see the sense it would make if Bundy suddenly says, "Oh, Jesus"--over in the State Department--"these bastards go out there and they're going to find that, and we're going to get it back up there, and the first thing you know, Walt, and the President, and a bunch of other guys are

Davidson -- II -- 35

going to be asking, 'What the goddamn hell are we going to do about it?'"

Furthermore, they had other negotiations with Sihanouk in tow. I went over on two separate occasions and briefed Ambassador [Chester] Bowles in India, who was a personal friend of Sihanouk, and he was going over and talking to Sihanouk, giving him sheaves of documents that we prepared for him, showing him how the enemy were using his country. And eventually, as you know, he told Bowles, who transmitted it to the President, "You go over there and bomb the hell out of those guys, that's fine with me." And that's what started this bombing business where they were keeping false records, not to confuse and mislead the American people and the American armed forces establishment, but to keep from getting Sihanouk into trouble.

G: Oh, really?

D: Yes. Sihanouk said, "As long as I don't know about it, you can bomb the hell out of them. There aren't any Cambodians; they ran them off when they took over. Go ahead and knock the shit out of them," or words to that effect. I don't know whether Sihanouk would use that vulgar language.

So the whole concealment was to protect Sihanouk, first. Second, they got misled because they thought the North Vietnamese would protest the bombing, thereby admitting that they were in Cambodia, and in effect they just took it on the quiet. So the whole thing collapsed, and then months or years later this other thing blew up of literally a conspiracy, I don't--

Davidson -- II -- 36

G: Did you provide the intelligence on the Cambodian targets?

D: Some of it. Some of it. That's an interesting thing that might deserve a historical footnote, though. And part of it is covered in Walt's book [The Diffusion of Power]. The original bombing of Cambodia was done on intelligence provided entirely by MACV. I would say this was about March of 1969. No, that wouldn't make it right, would it?

G: That's pretty late, isn't it?

D: Well, I'm going to say that. I could be wrong. But we picked up a defector from COSVN, apparently a pretty high-ranking guy, and he gave us a lot of information about where COSVN was located, and how it worked, and who the personalities were, and all of this sort of stuff. We worked on him with the CIA people. CIA had an expert polygraph operator. Well, we had them, too, but ours weren't as good as theirs. We seriously considered the use of truth drugs, but I objected, and General Abrams supported me, in [that] that's a violation of the Geneva Convention and we don't want to have any part of that. Everything he told us, though, fitted into the other vast reams of intelligence that we'd been collecting over the years about COSVN.

(Interruption)

We developed this target, had two briefers, a major and a lieutenant colonel. We sent them back to CINCPAC, and they sent them back to the JCS, and they sent them to the White House. And we got permission to bomb the target. Supposed to be COSVN. The results, I think, are probably unknown to this day. There was a hell of a lot of smoke and

Davidson -- II -- 37

fire, and I tried to put some Green Berets, SOG men, in just as the last bombs hit, hoping we could maybe snatch a dazed prisoner or get some documents or something. Those guys were shot out of the sky in a matter of seconds. We'd run into something. I happen to think that COSVN was the oldest circulating headquarters in the world. It circulated around a rather wide given area, at least the radios did. But again, it was all bunched into an area, a large area, not that you could carpet bomb it or anything.

That was the first Cambodian target. That was on our intelligence. I don't know, we probably hit something, I don't think there's any question about it. The most fortunate strike was of course in early July of 1967, when apparently a B-52 dropped a bomb, either by mistake or something else, and killed an enemy commander, General Thanh.

G: That's T-H-A-N-H?

D: Yes. Nguyen Chi Thanh. And no doubt changed the complexion of the war to some extent.

Well, our time is running here.

(Interruption)

G: I've written these questions in a more or less chronological perspective. Some of these things you have already answered. You've told us how up-to-date you were on MACV OB while you were in Hawaii. Did you get to see the raw data that MACV was using?

D: I could have seen it. We got most of it, I would say, in ARPAC. I

Davidson -- II -- 38

looked at it from time to time, but I didn't follow it on any close day-to-day basis.

G: How widely was that sort of thing circulated at that time?

D: Oh, hell, I suppose the document and PW dissemination went all over the intelligence community, all over almost anybody that had any responsibilities for the war, including the White House, according to Walt, and a hell of a lot of places where people couldn't have had any more than a cursory interest in it. You see, what you had to do--and this my predecessor, Joe McChristian, General McChristian, did very well, because this was his forte, organization and staffing and things like that--was that you had to develop a method, a procedure which would be followed invariably in these matters. For example, you couldn't just interrogate a PW and make a few notes and dash it off and run down and give it to the J-2 or to COMUSMACV. These things all were put into a format giving date, time, the name, alias, the PW's background, all the rest of these things, and then what he had to say. And he had a number, so that if somebody wanted to follow up, they'd say they wanted somebody to ask the following questions of PW number so-and-so. These were mimeographed, widely circulated, all over Vietnam, all over the intelligence community, and as I said, a lot of people I'm sure wondered what the hell they were supposed to do with them.

The same thing with captured documents. There was a sorting out. Jesus, the document mill was turning out reams every day. But I think the important ones--and this has been largely testified to by all of

Davidson -- II -- 39

the agencies--the important raw intelligence data was being pretty well circulated throughout the intelligence community. Now, when you get into the more sensitive types of intelligence, signal intercept, for example, signal intelligence, this was largely out of MACV's hands anyway. We were the direct recipients; they did what we asked them to do, and I didn't give a damn who they technically worked for, as long as they would service my requests when I made them, and I would establish the priorities of their targets, which they'd do. But this went all over: NSA, you name it, obviously the White House.

So I think there was no withholding of information. I don't doubt that there were occasions when for some reason something didn't get fully disseminated that should have; after all, the quantities of documents you're dealing with, and reports--that was not the problem. It was the interpretation of the intelligence is where the problems arose.

G: Was MACV the unique holder of the responsibility to construct an order of battle?

D: I'm not sure that titularly we were given that responsibility, but we had it, we assumed it, and we carried it out. So that the MACV order of battle was certainly going to be accepted at CINCPAC, and ARPAC, probably DIA, although DIA could--I saw occasionally they could--they were a weak agency at that time, so you never really could tell what they were likely to do. But nobody was pressed, or nobody had to agree with us. They could have done it on their own, as the CIA people did, as Adams did. This is the source of the argument.

Davidson -- II -- 40

G: Did you go to the order of battle conference in Honolulu in January of 1967?

D: If I did, I have no memory of it.

G: That seems to have been the initial attempt to--

D: It might well have been. The thing you've got to remember about ARPAC at that time is that its operational and intelligence responsibilities were Pacific-wide, whereas the MACV people, of course, were dedicating and devoting themselves directly to the situation in South Vietnam, and to some limited extent in North Vietnam.

Actually, I found that I could be most productive by concentrating on the other areas, and there were certainly plenty of areas to concentrate on. North Korea, for example, [we] had problems there; Indonesia was in the throes of a great civil war; Thailand was always a [problem]; Burma; the Philippines, of course. So we had plenty other than Vietnam. We just sort of kept an overwatch on Vietnam.

The other way, I found when I moved in that Joe McChristian, through this genius for organization and for empire-building--and there's really no other word for it--had built up a tremendous intelligence machine at ARPAC. So I spent the first two or three months wondering what in the hell all of these people were supposed to be doing. The answer was they weren't doing much of anything. So I did two things. I went over to see a Major General Grover Brown, air force, who was the J-2 CINCPAC, and I said, "I know you people have a lot of problems here. You're running the bombing. In addition to that, you're titularly, at any rate, over Westmoreland. Can't we help

Davidson -- II -- 41

you? Can't we take some of these functions and do them?" Well, it's a fine comment, I think, that this is probably the worst thing you could say to a guy. He thinks you're trying to move in on him. All I was trying to do was use the people I had to the best advantage. And eventually we did work out a pretty good scheme. We did a lot of photographic reading and print-outs and that sort of thing. We did develop, with our engineer--we had a big map-making outfit there--again, one of these plastic maps of the Mu Gia Pass, showing likely spots that it could be cut and blocked, which they were struck. And it was cut and blocked, and then going lickety-split twenty-four hours later. Never were able to really keep it closed.

The other thing I did is that shortly after I took over I went out to see Joe, who of course had just moved from ARPAC out into MACV as the J-2, and I told him very frankly that I couldn't figure what the hell I was supposed to do with all of these people he'd left me, that I thought he was fighting the war, and I knew he was short of people. Joe was always short of people; you could give him twenty thousand, he'd be short. But in this case, I felt that justifiably he was building up. I said, "We can't transfer all of these people, but we've got plenty of money"--God, those must have been good old days--"You take whatever you want on a six-months TDY. You know the people, you know who might be useful to you."

The only other thing we tried to do was we tried to get the people credit for at least that much of a tour. I'd say, "If a man spends six months there, let's go ahead and transfer him to Vietnam,

Davidson -- II -- 42

let him complete his year and get it over with." Which we were able to do to some extent; to some extent we weren't. Some of them weren't six months; we began to phase them out. Some people were a month, some two, three, four, and others would go in. Joe later conceded that it proved very helpful. That was basically what I did with the ARPAC people.

(Interruption)

I think as a general summation I did not pay extremely close attention to the war in Vietnam. However, of course after I got my orders, or was informed that I was going to replace McChristian, I then began to pay, as you can understand, very rapt attention.

Tape 2 of 2

G: Did the South Vietnamese intelligence people take a position in this at all?

D: I'm sure they did. I don't recall what it was. However, I'd be willing to bet five to one it was very similar if not identical to ours. After all, we were working off the same data. As I recall from time to time there were minor variations, but I don't recall anything else.

G: Have you read [Nguyen Cao] Ky's book?

D: Who's Ky?

G: Premier Ky. His memoir.

D: I've got it. I've skimmed through it, but I haven't read it in any detailed sense.

Davidson -- II -- 43

G: I was astonished to see that he accepts Adams' thesis in one place in there. He doesn't make a major point out of it, it's sort of in passing, and apparently just accepts it wholeheartedly.

D: Does he identify it with Adams?

G: Yes.

D: Hm! Well, that's a kind of a dangerous piece of information. Of course, he didn't know anything about it. The only positive indication I can give is I have no recollection that the South Vietnamese J-2, with whom I worked fairly closely--I'd see him once or twice a week--ever coming to me and saying, "You know, I think you've got a lot too few." I don't ever recall that. Since they were all working off the same sheet of music down in CICV, I would presume they had about the same figures, although they were certainly at liberty to draw their own. I don't ever recall them getting into it. I know they didn't get into the Adams dispute at the September issue, and I don't recall them raising the thing again.

Ky is a . . . well, I don't know.

G: Of course, we acquired, I presume, a mountain of intelligence as a result of the Tet combat. How did this affect the order of battle?

D: Well, it resulted in a massive study. As soon as the outlines of the offensive, and the failure, and the casualty figures and whatnot [came in], I told Charlie and his people, I said, "Now, let's get together here and see--we've got to get as close a figure as we can on what this aborted offensive has meant to the enemy." So we went out, we took the units that we knew were in a given area, from not only

Davidson -- II -- 44

our previous holdings but from prisoner of war documents, unit identification on bodies, all that sort of stuff, and we said, "In this fight, at this town, against what we now know as the second battalion of the seventh regiment, or some such thing, our people report umpty-ump casualties." Now, we used some judgment in this, as I recall, generally reducing them, because as I said, it's hard to separate out combatants and non-combatants and part-combatants and all the rest of it. But we came up, to the best of our knowledge, with a casualty figure placed against each of the major VC and NVA units that had engaged in the offensive and then drew up a new order of battle.

G: How long did that take?

D: Hell, I'd say probably--you'll have to ask Charlie about that. Everything had to work fast out there. I started to say I probably started it early in February and didn't finish it, I would guess, till mid-March or maybe later, because the fighting was going on and the figures were cumulative in all of this.

G: Did any new units appear as well as--?

D: Never. Never. One of the things that distinguished the Tet surprise--and there was an element of surprise--from the Battle of the Bulge, for example, is no new units showed up. Every unit had been placed accurately in its area of operation. So we suddenly didn't find ourselves with a huge new army somewhere that hadn't been there before, as they did in the Battle of the Bulge. As a matter of fact, some of the units didn't participate, as we've already mentioned.

Davidson -- II -- 45

G: Yes. Now you said that you didn't credit, necessarily, General Westmoreland's figures for enemy killed in action.

D: Well, they weren't General Westmoreland's figures. We didn't necessarily accept the unit body counts.

G: I see.

D: In Saigon, for example, God, there were bodies all over the place, all of them in black pajamas. That's what the people wear.

G: How many do you think there were killed in action? I realize what a soft question that is.

D: I can't improve on the official figure, which everybody has some question about, but I have never heard it disputed and never heard another offered, of forty-five thousand. My guess would be that the figure of dead combatants would be somewhere around thirty thousand. There's no question that we virtually eliminated the VC. Now, if you're willing to credit them with being one hundred and twenty thousand strong, and the casualties were concentrated in their cadres, I think thirty to forty thousand is probably a pretty good figure. The only confirmation we got is Giap himself, who when he was interviewed by [Oriani] Fallaci, the Italian biographer, admitted that our killed figures were accurate. He said, "Yes, they're very good bookkeepers. That's accurate."

G: Of course, he was referring I think to total--

D: To the total. But no, nobody will ever know. The enemy himself doesn't know. You see, this is the other thing about this dispute with Adams and CBS. Nobody knows who's right. Nobody knows how many

Davidson -- II -- 46

of those people there were. Nobody knows how many got killed. They don't know how many they--as you say, you could get their records, like old Dac did. He said, "Hell, they said they had a hundred people. They didn't have ten. I went around, I couldn't find anybody." But nobody knows who's right. And yet Adams has the gall to insist he's right and everybody else is wrong about a matter nobody knows who's right and never will. But that's neither here nor there. If you look at it, this whole Adams thing is just ridiculous, just ridiculous. He's been unable, all of these years, to prove any conspiracy, and yet that's what he has alleged. I don't care, CBS can back off from it if they want to, but that's what he's alleged. And they can't say, "Well, we think the word conspiracy is improperly used," or some such thing, because goddamn it, if they're going to stand with the program, that's what they've got to stand by. A worldwide conspiracy is what he charges, reaching from the top levels of the White House down to the bottom of MACV and, God knows, countless other agencies, and not one man credibly has come up and said, "We conspired to alter the figures." All of these years, not one man knowledgeable. Furthermore, you could get every one of those sons of bitches on that CBS program, put him under oath on the witness stand, and a clever cross-examination will break him down every time.

G: Let's talk about one of those guys for a minute, one that bothers me. I believe his name is [James] Meacham, a navy man, commander, I believe.

Davidson -- II -- 47

- D: Let's see, you've got to be back by five-thirty? Because I think the answer is I don't know.
- G: Meacham alleges that then-Colonel Graham came down and ordered them to alter the record.
- D: False. False. Graham told me, he told the press conference, he said he's willing to repeat it under oath, that he never did that, he had no authority to do it. He said, "If I'd have done a thing like that, all they'd have had to do was to go up and see Charlie Morris and General Davidson. Those two sons of bitches would have torn my ass off. I'd have been fired on the moment. I had no authority to go in there and do that. And I wouldn't have touched it with a ten-foot pole." I think he's absolutely right. Danny had a highly developed sense of personal survival; he wasn't about to get his ass in that crack.
- G: One more. If our casualty figures are right about VC casualties during Tet, critics of the body count, critics of the order of battle charge there wasn't anybody left.
- D: Well, the way they do this is they misconstrue the figures. Let's say that there were one hundred and fifty thousand VC. Let's say eighty-five thousand participated in the attack. We say we killed forty-five thousand. A figure which we later developed says roughly one out of three of those people--if we kill three, one more will be wounded so bad that he won't ever return. So this would put it up to sixty thousand, still leaving a substantial force out of the attacking force, not to speak of the others that didn't participate in it. If

Davidson -- II -- 48

you go further, and you admit, as the knowledgeable people admit that I know anything about, including myself, that you had to have killed a lot of impressed porters, that you had to have killed a lot of the so-called low grade, probably impressed people that were around, if you count civilians, and you have to know that with the bombing and the strafing and the artillery fire, the fighting in cities, that there were no doubt thousands of people killed, thousands of civilians killed. Then the figure, as I say, of forty-five thousand, I don't think anybody accepts it other than perhaps as a general casualty figure. There were other people left. But whether it's forty-five thousand or thirty thousand or twenty thousand, the significant fact is not the numbers, but the fact that we virtually destroyed the Viet Cong, which never again rose to any significance in that war. The main big thrust in 1975 was all North Vietnamese. The big attacks in 1972, [North] Vietnamese. The VC were over. As a matter of fact, the pacification program, which had been stumbling, immediately after Tet just took off in full bloom, because there was nothing out there to oppose them.

So the VC were blown away, whether--the numbers by themselves are not significant. But that is the answer. A lot of people have gotten themselves into difficulty, in my opinion, by first place, swearing on a stack of Bibles that the forty-five thousand figure was right. Hell, everybody out there could be like the saints with honesty and you're going to have double and triple counting, and all that sort of thing. In the first place, they bought that. The second place is

Davidson -- II -- 49

that for humanitarian reasons they have not seen fit to say, "Yes, a lot of civilians got killed, let's face it. After all, we didn't start the fight in the cities."

So once you put all these factors together, I think you can make the numbers. But the essential point is, the VC were destroyed as a force really to be reckoned with, and from there on the war was a strictly conventional war of invasion from the North to the South. The people's war part of it disappeared with the Tet offensive. Unfortunately, so did a lot of other things, including the American will to resist.

We'd better get going.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II

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