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## INTERVIEW II

DATE: July 24, 1984  
INTERVIEWEE: FREDERICK W. FLOTT  
INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger  
PLACE: Mr. Flott's residence, Washington, D. C.

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G: Now after escorting the Nhu children out of country, you were gone then for how long?

F: Oh, I was out of country for about two and a half weeks. I went from Rome back to Washington; as I mentioned earlier, I arrived there the day of the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas. Then I went back via the Far East, stopped off and saw our embassy in Japan and the people in Hong Kong. [Henry Cabot] Lodge went to Rome, and I got back to Saigon, oh, I would guess it must have been about the tenth of December.

G: Well, now, Kennedy was assassinated on the twenty-second, was he not?

F: Okay. Well, then I got there about the tenth of December. I got there about two weeks after the assassination.

G: Okay.

F: When I got back to Saigon I obviously had a lot of catching up to do because I was out of touch, you might say, with the members of the new military council, and the atmosphere was definitely one of being supportive of them. The embassy was doing everything they could to be supportive, to help them both image-wise and substance-wise, advice, support, everything, and there was some question about how well they do their job, and at the outset the impression was positive. Big Minh [Duong Van Minh] was perhaps a bit phlegmatic, but he commanded a lot of loyalties, and our impressions were positive.

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G: How long did that last?

F: Well, as long as the group did, as far as we were concerned. We were quite surprised by the [Nguyen] Khanh coup on January 30 of 1964.

G: Well, before we get to that, can we talk about the [Robert] McNamara visit of December 1963?

F: Yes.

G: From what vantage point did you observe this? Were you interpreter for him?

F: Yes, I was, but perhaps more importantly, I was sitting in the office with Cabot Lodge and McNamara and one or two other officers, and we were discussing what we were going to do on various subjects. I do remember definitely a little bit of a number game. They were very much interested in being able to announce that the number of advisers was dramatically reduced from sixteen thousand to fifteen thousand, because at that point in time it had been up to sixteen thousand, and they sent back to the States certain categories of advisers, saying their mission was completed and they can leave country. And there was the usual talk about improving the Vietnamese war effort and getting them to have a draft and that sort of thing. And then, of course, we also had conversations with the Vietnamese, for which I interpreted in French.

G: What was McNamara there for? Was this just one more fact-finding trip or--?

F: Yes, I think so, and of course MACV, the military people, were the main hosts--well, not the main hosts for his visit, but they had a heavy claim on his time. There were lot of things that went on, I'm sure, between McNamara and his military constituents that I wasn't privy to or just didn't happen to rub elbows with.

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G: One of the telegrams I think I sent you has Lodge asking McNamara for one hour of his time alone. Do you have any idea what transpired between the men? There have been reports that Lodge was trying to convince McNamara that the military reporting was not what it should be.

F: That would be very plausible. It could easily be the case. The one hour alone might have been that meeting I sat in on because it was a pretty small group, and I could imagine how Lodge might have got him alone and then invited in, say, Mike Dunn and myself. Or Lodge is a very courteous, attentive man on most matters, and it's quite possible that he figured if he had to give McNamara any bad news, he'd give it to him one-on-one, and it's quite possible there was indeed such a meeting. I know all of us felt that the military, as I mentioned at the outset, had this way of equating unquestioning and unreasonable optimism with being the equivalent of loyalty and suitability for command. And that, however good it is for taking hills, isn't the best way to deal with delicate Asian political equations, and that inherent failing of the military, I suppose, was made all the more harmful because of the nature of McNamara's own background. He was essentially an engineer, and now he'd be a computer whiz and a managerial whiz, and he was very much out of his element in Southeast Asia. You know, I have the highest respect for his integrity, intelligence, ability, everything else, except that if there was ever a fish out of water, it's the decent, forthright, hard-working personality of McNamara dealing with the opportunistic, self-serving leaders of successive Vietnamese coups.

G: Someone said that Mr. McNamara was the smartest man he had ever met but he had no wisdom.

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F: Yes, I saw that quote somewhere. I wouldn't go that far. I'd just say he was very much a fish out of water personality-wise, temperament-wise, and especially background-wise, in Southeast Asia.

G: Some of the cables from this period refer to Long An province and province representative Earl Young and some reporting that was coming out of there. Did you have any insight into that?

F: I'm sure I must have at the time. That doesn't ring a bell, and I don't recall that. Long An, I went down there once myself. It's south of Saigon, isn't it?

G: Yes.

F: I went down there once, and that for a while seemed to be a more hopeful place, if I'm not mistaken. Or at least we hoped it would get better, but it was just par for the course, and I don't remember the details.

G: Okay. Anything else on the McNamara visit that we need to get into the record?

F: No, I don't think so on that one.

G: Okay. Did you at the time have some evaluation of the performance of the new junta?

F: I thought they were--it was our impression, because basically most of my impressions were secondhand, a condensation of what other people had told me--I thought they were doing rather well, yes.

G: What vantage point did you have to observe the events of the Khanh coup in January? Let me ask a specific question first of all. Did you have any hint that the coup was coming?

F: Oh, none at all. And that was one coup during which I did not happen to be duty officer. I was peacefully at my apartment, came into the office

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at seven o'clock in the morning and learned that there had been a coup. Even Mike Dunn had only learned about it about half an hour before himself because Lodge called him for some arrangement with the military or something.

G: How was it possible for Khanh to keep such secrecy? Surely some Americans must have known. The American advisers to the troop units, perhaps?

F: Not really. First of all, the American military advisers, you might say, were also fish out of water in that environment. I'm sure they were doing a very good and conscientious job of advising, giving perhaps tactical advice or training advice and all that, but my inclination would be to doubt that they would really get through to and establish buddy-buddy relationships with conspiring Vietnamese who'd talk to them. In other words, the military did not have a Lou Conein in its quiver of arrows, which may be one reason why the military don't like Lou Conein.

G: Do you know who Khanh's adviser was?

F: Yes, and that was a personality. There was indeed some American general--I'm sort of backing down from what I've just said now, when you mention his adviser. If I remember correctly, there was some American officer. It may even have been a young general or colonel who was very close to Khanh and with whom--I wouldn't say Khanh leveled with him on the preparation--but whom Khanh sought out the minute the fat was in the fire, yes.

G: You don't recall the name, do you?

F: I don't, but it's a matter of public record. It was in the press at the time.

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G: Was it Jasper Wilson? Does that name ring a bell?

F: It doesn't, but I wasn't very good on American military names so--

G: Okay. What was Ambassador Lodge's reaction to this development?

F: Well, in the first place, I don't know all of his reactions. I think like any man with an inquiring mind--one of the main burdens of Khanh's argument was the reason, the justification, the *apologia pro vita sua* for having the coup was because the four generals were about to betray everything to the French. Lodge approached that, I think, with some instinctive skepticism, just wondering, "Are things really that simple?" and "Okay. Fine. You say that's it. What are the proofs? It would be very helpful to have evidence in support of these things."

It just happens that that day, that same day for lunch, I was invited to the residence of the French chargé d'affaires, Georges Perruche, and I went into Ambassador Lodge's office just before going off to lunch with Perruche, and General [William] Westmoreland was there. Westy had just fairly recently arrived in country and was just meeting all the players, and I told him, "Well, this is a funny, fortuitous time. The luncheon invitation has been planned for about a week or ten days, I guess, but it's a funny coincidence that I'm having lunch with the French." And I sort of got my last-minute instructions, which probably weren't any instructions because they figured I already knew what I was supposed to do. I said, "Well, it's really going to be fun going over all these charges." Because Khanh had already gone on the air with flagrant charges against the four generals for selling out the country to France and alleging that France was behind the plot and all that.

And you know, in a way, where there's smoke, there's a little fire. But the way I would situate that is, of course, that some French

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instinctively resented the American pre-eminence in Vietnam, which had been their turf. In an emotional way they resented it. Now, to carry that to say the French government was planning coups is, I think, ridiculous and untrue. But you can see, in terms of generally known attitudes, where somebody had a straw to grab on in embroidering on this issue and making these allegations, even if it weren't warranted or not fully warranted and not even 3 per cent warranted.

But anyway, when I remarked I was having lunch with the French chargé and it was going to be fun seeing what he had to say in reaction to Khanh's remark, Westy's remark, which I remember was, "Boy, this is going to be quite a lunch. Your host doesn't realize yet just how bad a luncheon this is going to be." He thought that was a good joke, and I went off to lunch and, of course, had my conversation with the French chargé. And as usual, we just were awaiting more information and more facts, and nothing of great significance came out of that luncheon. I think from his point of view, if I can presume to judge what he was trying to do, he, I'm sure, was trying to look to see if the Americans were beating anti-French drums, which we were not, and I think I may even have had authority to tell him that Lodge had asked for proof of all these allegations and was willing to look at evidence, but so far we had none. I would imagine that Perruche was relieved to see that the Americans--especially Lodge--were not uncritically accepting the line of the Khanh coup about French intrigues.

G: You see this French involvement or alleged involvement. It crops up over and over again in the Vietnam story, and you get the impression that people were using it like a red herring.

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F: Yes. On balance, I don't want to be accused of being soft on the French or anything, but I think I am objective, and I think I know as much about it as anyone because that was one of my principal responsibilities, that and Free World Assistance. People were using it as a red herring, and some military adviser who wasn't very effective with the Vietnamese he was advising, perhaps through no fault of his own--but it was very easy for him to blame his difficulties on the alleged fact that all the French rubber plantation managers were selling information to the Viet Cong and that sort of thing. There were a lot of allegations made at a low level, and on the French side, there were a lot of low-level types who thought, "Well, the Americans want to take our place here and take over our pizza parlors and things," which of course was not the case.

G: Let me ask you a hypothetical question on the French business. If the French chargé or the ambassador could have written his own ticket for Vietnam's future for a resolution of the conflict and so on, what do you suppose it would have looked like?

F: Well, I think it would have been the Quai d'Orsay line, leaning towards neutralism. But, as Ambassador Lodge pointed out wisely many times, you can't settle for neutralism when your military affairs are going downhill. Lodge mentioned many times, "If the French had had a conference on neutralism with the Germans, who were occupying France in 1943, it wouldn't have been so good." It was not the moment to do it. But I think the French had a feeling, which ultimately proved to be correct, that real national fiber in South Vietnam just wasn't there. The human qualities, the will to sacrifice, the ability to forge a popular



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political base, just weren't there to win the thing, and that rightly or wrongly, all things being relative, the communists were the more attractive party to many of the people whose views would be determinant, namely potential recruits for the Viet Cong and the highly motivated North Vietnamese army. And of course the French attached great importance to a continuing French presence, cultural and economic, in Indochina.

G: Right. Okay.

F: The French were closer to that reality, and the Americans still had a sort of ebullient can-do, which impression was enhanced by all these bright, young military advisers who had learned at West Point that any platoon they commanded was the best in the world and all that sort of thing.

G: Right. Okay. The Khanh coup generated a rather unique problem, and that was the problem that was referred to as the "plight of the Dalat generals," I think, in a few places. What is that all about?

F: Well, the Dalat generals, the first thing that should be said about them is that they were the artisans of expelling [Ngo Dinh] Diem in the November 1 coup--

G: Except that Big Minh was not with them in Dalat.

F: Yes, but Big Minh was sort of a sacred cow, and the Khanh group simply isolated him. He was so passive anyway that they didn't have to put him under house arrest. They could just shove him off to a side and not give him copies of all the telegrams, and he was just as much out of action playing tennis in Saigon as he would have been under house arrest in Dalat. The other four were more active, and they were accused of having French ties.

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Now these are all men who, from their previous military history, had indeed been close to the French, but they were not pro-French to the extent of being anti-American. I very much doubt that they were engaged in any plot with the French, but it depends on what you mean by plot. They might have had a drink with some Frenchman who subscribed to this sort of neutralist line, or the theory that rather than bleed the country white, you should make an agreement or settle something, but that doesn't mean the French were pushing an agreement. What I am saying is, there were a lot of Frenchmen who were, perhaps, inclined to seek to foresee that kind of a solution. These generals might indeed have talked to some such persons without necessarily buying what they had to say, even. But that would be my gut feeling about what the extent of the problem was. But from our mission point of view, these Dalat generals were highly *persona non grata* to the Khanh government, to which we were trying to be supportive because after the January 31 coup it was the government in power.

G: But did their plight present some kind of a problem, an attitudinal problem for the mission or--?

F: Yes, Lodge was very concerned that these four men, good men with whom he had been dealing the day before, were suddenly under house arrest. And Lodge made the predictable representations that any high American official would have made: well, these men should get a fair trial, and if they're accused, the evidence should be presented, or if there is no substance to the evidence, that they should be acquitted and released. Lodge did that, as much as he could, without running into problems of intervening in Vietnamese internal affairs.

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G: Was there fear that these men might be done away with, executed?

F: No. Not quite, because Khanh wouldn't have dared go quite that far. In fact, the following Christmas after it all happened, I happened to have Christmas Eve dinner with them and with the French chargé, in Dalat. Now, again, he drove up to Dalat two days before Christmas of 1964 and offered me a ride to go along with him. It was a chance to drive through about three hundred kilometers of country that embassy officials didn't usually get a chance to drive through, so I touched base with the appropriate people. Ambassador [U. Alexis] Johnson and General [Maxwell] Taylor were there. They approved it. I asked colleagues like John Burke, who was another first secretary in the political section. I said, "Do you see any reason why I should not do this, any perception that it would be misunderstood or misinterpreted?" I just touched base with everybody, and everybody was for it, so I went up with this French chargé, who, in a very thoughtful way, brought to the Dalat generals the appropriate trappings for a French Christmas Eve dinner and all--*bûche de Noël* and champagne.

G: Wasn't that contested country at this time?

F: About half of it was, yes, that we drove through. I flew back. You see, I figured it was quite safe to drive up if the plan to do so was kept under wraps--and then presuming that, if we had been stopped by a Viet Cong patrol, I could have successfully passed as a Frenchman. I had no weapon, no American clothes or papers on me. The Viet Cong wouldn't have questioned it. I figured it was reasonably safe, but once I was there and once the secret was out of the bag, so to speak, I would come back by plane. Arrangements were made for a plane to bring me back.

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G: But the Viet Cong would not have bothered a Frenchman if they knew he was a Frenchman?

F: That's right. At that point in time and that stage of the game, a Frenchman, even if stopped, would simply identify himself as a Frenchman, and they would probably wave him on. That doesn't mean that the French were helping them. It simply means that the Viet Cong had enough of a fight with us and didn't want one with the French as well. As it turned out, we weren't stopped. I had worked all night and the night before, and going through the worst part of Zone D or the hairiest part of the road, I fell asleep in the front seat of the car through much of it, I was so tired from being up all night before translating something for General Taylor.

G: Who drove the car?

F: The French chargé.

G: So there were just the two of you?

F: Well, we had his two servants in the back seat, but one was Chinese and one was a trusted Vietnamese. They had no advance knowledge of my plan to travel with Perruche. I did not feel in great danger, but I prudently would not have driven back because the word could have gotten out, "There's an American from the embassy up here. You can catch him on the road back," so I flew back. But the first pass at a target you can get in for free, and I did.

G: So what transpired at Dalat then?

F: Well, we had this very pleasant Christmas Eve dinner, and they had talks, and I'm sure that Perruche, the French chargé, did, from his point of view, some good political reporting. He heard out these people

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who were, after all, under house arrest because of being accused of plotting with him. Again, the fact that he took them a Christmas cake and had this Christmas Eve dinner and took me along sort of suggested the relation was something less than conspiratorial or sinister.

G: Yes.

F: And these four generals were behaving in a very collegial, buoyant way among themselves, getting on very well and being very nice to everybody. But I'm sure Perruche heard everything they had to say, and my guess would be that they probably concluded that Khanh was just sort of a low-level opportunist, who had to accuse these people of something. There is a French proverb, "Qui veut noyer son chien, l'accuse de la rage." "Anyone who wants to justify drowning his dog says he has rabies." And Perruche, who was very concerned about improving my French and making it more distinguished and literary, taught me that expression in that connection. I think it was probably a point well taken as far as Mr. Khanh went.

G: Was that what Khanh was, a low-level opportunist?

F: Essentially, yes.

G: What was he trying to do?

F: Put Khanh in power and then get the Americans to win the war for him.

G: Well, that certainly puts it in a nutshell. Did we intercede for these generals in any overt way?

F: Yes. Ambassador Lodge, with a very fine sense of style and integrity and the art of the possible, made all appropriate representations, and Lodge did this just enough to convey the impression that they had better not go off the deep end and really hurt these people, and their

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conditions of captivity were certainly not terrible if they were hosting dinner parties and things up in the most pleasant part of Vietnam.

G: Right. Okay. Did you know these men personally, Tran Van Don and--?

F: Yes, I happened to know all of them quite well.

G: Would you characterize them for us?

F: Tran Van Don is now living in Orlando, Florida, and eventually became vice president of Vietnam and all, very French-oriented, very smooth, very sociable. He was the kind of person that a French-oriented American would like very much, as I did, because he was easy to talk to. He spoke perfect French. He was pleasant socially and everything else. Having said that, I would say he was not a man of iron will or driving commitment to duty. He did his duty, he put in his time on his watch, but he wasn't the kind of driving force who could weld a nation together.

Let's see. Le Van Kim was his brother-in-law. Le Van Kim was a really brilliant man by any standard. He would have been Phi Beta Kappa and top of his class at MIT if he had gone to it. Offhand, I don't remember if Le Van Kim spoke English, but he was very, very bright, and his son graduated at the top of his class from one of the best universities in France, one of the so-called *grandes écoles*. Kim was just a brilliant man who saw all the problems, I thought, pretty well, but again, he could not really lead the country.

And Ton That Dinh was sort of a Mexican jumping bean, pod-of-pepper who had been attacking the Americans before the anti-Diem coup, then who was sort of the last man to join the October 31 coup against Diem. He was sort of an amiable lightweight, unpredictable, but perhaps

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with some leadership qualities. As inspector general of training, he probably would have been all right to that extent. He would have made sure the platoon leaders had fire coming out of their nostrils, at least, although a great intellect he was not.

Mai Huu Xuan was a more withdrawn figure, who had been the chief of the Secret Police in the old days. When we had this dinner with them, there was a field generator in the villa--the generals were under house arrest--one of those that you turn with your hand knob, and as you may know, there have been allegations that such generators had occasionally been used to facilitate interrogation. I made a crack to Perruche that "out of deference to the presence of Mai Huu Xuan, the other three generals didn't ask anyone to use the electric generator." (Laughter) They thought that was very funny. But Mai Huu Xuan did have a Secret Police background, and--

G: Did he have a Sûreté background as well?

F: Yes, whatever it was. I don't know the names of those intelligence agencies exactly, but it was that kind of thing. And there were stories going way back to 1952 where there was a problem in some marketplace, and he left fifty dead people there as an example that he was not a man to be trifled with, and if that may be partly apocryphal, it is perhaps not entirely apocryphal.

G: I see. So he had something of a sinister reputation?

F: Yes. Yes.

G: Do you know what became of him?

F: I don't. Offhand, I don't.

G: What finally became of these people?

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F: Oh, they were eventually released, and Don, when Lodge came, you remember--this is getting ahead of our chronology--but Lodge came back to Saigon in March of 1965, and he was going to be--well, history shows that three months later he was reappointed ambassador. That was for his second term. But he came back on a visit, and Ambassador Taylor, typically of his good sense of organization and style, assigned me as an aide to Lodge for that visit, knowing of our past relationship. I was sort of running Lodge's temporary office and running his message center and facilitating his mission on his visit there, which had many facets. This is all in roughly March of 1965, and among others who came in, Don wanted to come in and see him.

Don by then had been released, and when they met Lodge apologized, so to speak, or explained the circumstances to Don of why he had not been able to be more active on his behalf when he was under house arrest, which Don understood perfectly well. Everybody understood, and I had already covered that ground with the four generals, making sure that they knew of Lodge's goodwill and protective instincts for them. And Don said that he wanted to get back into a job; he absolutely had to be doing something. He wanted to get into the war effort in any way that he could be fitted in, and Lodge said, "I know how you feel. I've been out of office myself, and it's just like giving up smoking. It's terrible, but my advice is, don't make waves. Wait two weeks. Wait until they find something. Make haste slowly." And Lodge gave him good and friendly advice which Don accepted in the spirit in which it was offered. I was present at that meeting with them.



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And the others, in one way or another, were fitted into something. I don't remember the details. And Don, of course, eventually became vice president of Vietnam.

G: Right. I heard that Xuan lost his mind.

F: Yes, Mai Huu Xuan. Maybe he did. I don't know.

G: What shall we move to now?

F: The third from last line there.

G: Okay. David Nes. You know David Nes, of course?

F: Yes.

G: What was his position in the embassy? It seems to me that he was in a rather ambiguous spot.

F: Well, his formal position was very clear-cut. He came out as deputy chief of mission (DCM), appointed by various official telegrams, and they rushed him out there after he had been chosen and everything. One of the problems he had was he was used to being number-two man in a clear-cut situation where the number-two man is the alter ego of the ambassador and has instant access to him and can discuss everything, and, in private, can disagree or suggest to the ambassador alternate courses of action. That's the normal position of a DCM. He found himself cut off by what he probably regarded as a whippersnap lieutenant colonel, Mike Dunn, who clearly not only had the confidence of the Ambassador but perhaps even more, had a charter from the Ambassador to screen people. It's hard to tell just to what extent Mike Dunn was acting on instructions or to what extent he perhaps overdrew on a vague guideline; these things are awfully hard to adjudicate. But rightly or wrongly, Mike Dunn at one point apparently told Nes that he could not

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see the Ambassador without first getting Mike Dunn's permission, and that was not David Nes' old-line foreign service officer notion of how a number-two man has access to his chief. I think that was the inherent difficulty, and I'm not in a position to judge either of them because I don't know to what extent Mike was acting on Ambassador Lodge's instructions.

G: Neither man confided in you, I gather.

F: Well, I got peripheral observations from both of them, yes, but nothing that would add anything significant to what I've already said.

G: Okay. Well, what was Mr. Nes given to do exactly?

F: Well, on paper he was functioning as a DCM, and he did indeed become chargé d'affaires when Lodge was absent from the country. Cables went out in his name and that kind of thing. When he had less and less access to Lodge, he took up other duties like dealing with Cambodian-Vietnamese relations and things like that. He supervised all the career foreign service bureaucracy in the embassy, which Lodge certainly did not supervise directly. Nes, as far as I could tell, was a man of good, professional conscience. I recall an incident where there was a need for somebody to go out and represent the United States at some major dedication of a bridge that was symbolic of a reconstruction effort in a province and all. This was something that he thought the United States should be represented at, and everybody did, and he had a fever of 104, went out there for two days doing that, at some risk. He was a very conscientious officer. Now he may have somewhat missed the boat on how to deal with Ambassador Lodge, or it may have been a hopelessly intractable thing.

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G: I've heard that he was supposed to be the chief administrative officer, that he was going to run the mission, and Lodge was going to be the man--

F: Well, that to a certain extent is always the case with a DCM.

G: But this is supposed to have gotten him in trouble with Lodge. Lodge was not willing to relinquish his control over AID and so on.

F: I'm sure there's something to that, and I would also submit that David Nes would have been as good as any foreign service officer I know, you know, to handle these complex relations with other constituent parts of an embassy, of a country team. I did the same job myself in Indonesia, and I know something about what a DCM does. I was acting DCM out there for about nine months. Yes, logically, that would have been part of his duties, but by then, the AID mission, instead of being a group of twenty-seven people who specialized in water pumps for irrigation or something, suddenly was a massive force in the thousands dealing with pacification and things in support of the GVN [government of Vietnam]. And they had prima donnas at the top who wanted direct access to Lodge, and maybe Lodge wanted direct access to them to make his own judgments.

G: Right. When did you learn that Ambassador Lodge was leaving Vietnam?

F: Putting all this on whatever day it was on Saigon time, I believe he told the press the story in confidence at 6:00 p.m. By then, I'm sure the President had been notified and all that. I did not see those telegrams at the time. They weren't my business directly. I was busily working on Free World Assistance, the More Flags business, and there was no good reason why I would have seen those telegrams.

I think when Ambassador Lodge discovered that I did not know about this, or hadn't known it, he very thoughtfully called me up about one

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p.m., about five hours before he talked to the press and said, "Look, old man, you came over here with me. I just wanted to take leave of you and let you know that I am going home very quickly for political reasons that I have already discussed with you in some measure," as he had over, say, the previous two weeks, his view that it would be very unfortunate for the Republican Party if Barry Goldwater were nominated candidate. He would have preferred, I am sure, to have seen Governor [Nelson] Rockefeller named, but [William] Scranton, he thought, was the better choice, and he was going back to campaign for Scranton. Then the next morning, he got us all together--you know, a staff meeting of his principal officers--told us that he really felt as a question of conscience, that he had to go back and get into the Republican convention to see to it that the party of Abraham Lincoln did not become the party of Barry Goldwater, and he would be leaving in a day and a half. He was going to have a farewell reception that night, and I was very much involved in making the arrangements and last-minute guest lists and making lots of last-minute telephone calls to get people there who might not have received their invitations by messengers.

G: I can imagine.

F: Mike Dunn and I both worked very hard putting that together.

G: How did the Vietnamese react to Lodge's sudden departure?

F: I think they were puzzled by it, but in a way, it figured. When a man of that background, a very political background, goes back to help one of his political friends, not only did the Vietnamese understand it pretty well but LBJ understood it very well.

G: There was some talk that Mr. Lodge was wanting to run himself.

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- F: Well, it wasn't a question of that at all. He was not a candidate. I remember once there was this volunteer primary effort on his behalf at some point, and people were running through the hills of New Hampshire voting for him. I remember one day he had flown on a prop plane--he'd flown up to Hue and back in one day and came in the office about six o'clock, soaked in perspiration, covered with dust, which was all the more visible because he had on an open-collared, white shirt just covered with red mud dust. And there was a telegram, just a report, a wire-service report about how he had won the New Hampshire primary without even running in it, and he said, "There's a lesson for you, my boy, in this. There are two lessons for you in this. One is, stay out of your country and keep your mouth shut!" He said, "This time I did not campaign, and I was nine thousand miles from home, and I won. It makes me think of all those hard, cold winters when I tramped around in the snows of Massachusetts or New Hampshire trying to get votes, and here I stay away and keep my mouth shut, and I win a primary." He just made that sort of an in-house joke, but he was clearly touched by the outcome.
- G: Well, I wonder if the press had anything to do with that. We've already mentioned that he seemed to have had a very good press in Vietnam, but he had not had a good press in the United States when he was a candidate.
- F: Yes, that's true. I know all those horror stories from the Nixon-Lodge campaign, but, well, I think the press did very much respect the job he was doing in Vietnam--trying to do. They respected certainly his patriotic motivation in being there, but I am certain he did not go back

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to the States to run. He went back to shore up what could be called the Rockefeller-Scranton wing of the Republican Party. And that he had discussed with me over a period of perhaps two weeks before, just as an informed citizen observing, without tipping his hand at all that he was going to go back.

G: Well, what effect did this have on your situation, on your personal position?

F: Well, the duties he had given me some time before this, the duties I had sort of drifted into, were--my main jobs were responsibility for this Free World Assistance. It was originally called Third Country Aid or More Flags. I think LBJ put the More Flags name on it. He was very keen on the project. He literally sent out telegrams of guidance, or prodding us, or kicking us in the tail about once a day, and I was made officer in charge of that. That figured because of my closeness to Lodge and everything. Lodge obviously had to delegate the nuts and bolts to somebody, delegated it to me, and that was a full-time job. I also had the secondary duty of keeping track of the French community and handling our relations with them. And that was enough on my plate, and when he left, I continued to do the same. Lodge very thoughtfully helped arrange this. As you know, Ambassador Johnson, U. Alexis Johnson, arrived there three hours before Lodge left, and they had a quick meeting, and after the meeting was over, Lodge called me in and said, "Look, I've got everything fixed up with my successors. You're going to continue to be in charge of these same programs." He then called me in to introduce me to Alex Johnson and sort of pass on the mantle in his presence and with his blessing, and my transition with the

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new group was perfectly normal. Two days after he arrived in Saigon, U. Alexis Johnson was flying up to Dalat to see Khanh, and people in the embassy had recommended me as the best person to go along to be his interpreter, which I did. When General Taylor got there, he said, "I understand your French is good. I speak some French myself. Whenever I make a mistake, I want you to make a note of it and correct me. Teach it to me correctly when you get a chance." And General Taylor really meant this.

G: And he prided himself on his linguistics skill.

F: Oh, yes. Well, he was a good linguist. Considering that he had also been chairman of the Joint Chiefs and doing other things than speaking French, he spoke very good French. It was the kind of French that was so good that what I did was: if I saw that he was systematically, repeatedly making a rather important type of mistake, I'd say, "Look, you consistently do this wrong. The way you should do it is this, this, this," and I'd solve the problem. If he just mispronounced some little thing or something or had the gender of a word wrong, or something, I wouldn't bother him with that, but Taylor was a very good man to work with. He worked me very hard. If he'd received a long, detailed instruction from LBJ to raise certain points with General [Nguyen Van] Thieu, who, at the time--or Khanh or whoever it was--I forget the older man who was president for a while, he used me to help get the message across.

G: Gosh, there were so many.

F: Yes. Anyway, so a lot of these people didn't read English, and in the diplomatic business, there's such a thing as giving a person what's

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known as "a piece of paper"--"un bout de papier"--and that is in effect you give them an outline of your talking points, so they can remember them and get it straight. So if there was a twenty-page telegram message from LBJ to give the President of Vietnam, Taylor would come into my office at 6:00 p.m. and say, "Fred, I've just received this from the President, and I wonder if you'd translate it into French so I could leave a copy with President"--whoever it was--"tomorrow morning?" And I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "I'm going to see him at seven-thirty a.m. I'd like to have it by six-thirty. Why don't you come and have breakfast with me then, and we can discuss it?" Well, he was decent enough to invite me for breakfast. He kept me up all night and I'd sure be hungry by then, and also, I was really honored to be asked to stay up all night working for Max Taylor. He had kept other people up all night before in his career, and I was glad to be part of the distinguished group. That was the nature of our relation. And if he ever had a sudden cancellation at one of his official dinners, he'd very often call me to fill in and fill up the table. He was a very good man to work with, and he occasionally took me back with him on his trips back to the States.

G: How would you compare or contrast his style as ambassador with that of Mr. Lodge?

F: He had all the best qualities of the American military and applied them to his work. He was also a man of unusual intelligence and breadth of interest and that sort of thing. And Lodge had all the best qualities of the United States Senate. The two types operate in a different way. A senator, at most, commands perhaps as many as fifty people, whereas if



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you are chairman of the Joint Chiefs, you are commanding more than that, and your modus operandi reflect it.

I remember there was one incident. There was a certain friendly ambassador to whom Lodge personally had been very close during his tour. When Lodge came back on this March of 1965 trip before being renamed, when Taylor was still ambassador, Lodge remarked that this friendly European ambassador had complained to him that he didn't have the same kind of close relation with General Taylor that he'd had with Lodge for the simple reason that Taylor didn't really have any important business to do with him and spent his time on things that were directly related to his mission. Lodge said, "You know"--he told me privately; we were riding somewhere in the car--"You know, it's a pity this difference came up between the two. It's not important, but it's a pity because Taylor could have handled this differently. You know, when I was up at the UN, there was always a certain body of information that was not really secret. There was no real national security reason to keep it secret, but I didn't release it. I didn't throw it out on the open market. Why? Because I'd save it as tidbits to give from time to time to people just to improve my relation with them. And now Taylor could have done that. There are a lot of things he could have told this particular ambassador with no harm to security and all, just to maintain a better relation with him. Taylor didn't realize that. He doesn't know that." Then Lodge threw his arms up in the air and said, "But, of course, I don't know how to run an airborne division!"

(Laughter)

That was, I think, a pretty good illustration of the difference between the two. I respected both of them, and I liked both of them.

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- G: But I think you're saying that it's very hard to compare them.
- F: It is indeed. Yes. But they were both first-rate in their ways.
- G: And both effective.
- F: Yes. As much as you can be effective at nailing jelly to a wall, which is trying to do such things as making South Vietnam into a cohesive force with fire coming out of its nostrils.
- G: Well, in that vein, let me ask you this question. It's not on the paper, but it's certainly relevant, and perhaps you won't mind addressing it. I think Taylor tried to nail the jelly to the wall in December of 1964, didn't he, when we had the coup that--?
- F: Where they said they wouldn't deal with Taylor? Oh, yes.
- G: He was almost declared persona non grata.
- F: He almost was, and that was, of the telegrams I saw, that was the only time I saw a telegram from the State Department, possibly from Bill Bundy or [Dean] Rusk--I don't know who, one shouldn't speculate on the actual authorship of those things--but there was a telegram from high places in Washington saying, in essence, "Look, if the Vietnamese keep up this business of having a coup every two weeks, it makes it impossible to win the war, and we may have to conclude that the thing can't be won and that we shouldn't participate in it any further." It was the only time that I saw a speculation of the cut-our-losses-and-get-out sort that was in print from high places.
- G: Were you present when Taylor called the generals in and chastised them?
- F: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That was one of these Sundays when I was duty officer. We'd just had another coup, and he was getting tired of it, and he called them in, and as the popular story goes, dressed them down

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like a bunch of West Point cadets. And I think that was probably pretty much what he did. I was ten feet away from where he was doing this. I was not in the room and quite properly not. He wanted to have it a meeting among equals or peers, but I was going in and out of the office, and I was sitting at a little desk right outside his office doing my command post function of being duty officer, keeping track of where which armored column was as of that moment sort of thing--we were getting reports, but nobody was systematically trying to keep us informed.

G: Yes, but you could overhear, more or less?

F: Well, yes, Taylor told me what had gone on, and I, of course, saw his written reports of the thing. I was generally very much up to speed on how he was conducting his mission, and again, I thought he did a first-rate job of it.

G: The Vietnamese did not react well or take this dressing down very well--

F: Well, they don't like it. They'd much prefer to have a soft boss rather than a tough boss, and if they had some gullible American who was very concerned about respecting their sovereignty and all, they'd rather have that than have a tough-minded partner. I wouldn't fault General Taylor at all for the way he handled that. I'm just glad he handled it the way he did.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II

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