INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 2, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT N. GINSBURGH

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General Ginsburgh's residence, Chevy Chase, Maryland

Tape 1 of 2

G: General Ginsburgh, would you begin by telling us how you came to be associated with the Policy Planning Council at [the] State [Department]?

RG: At the time that I was a student at the National War College, General Burchinal, Dave [David] Burchinal, who was at that time the deputy chief of staff for plans, programs, and operations of the air force, picked me to go to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City for a year. His thought was that when I finished that assignment that I would then stand a good chance to be accepted as a military member of the Policy Planning Council at the State Department. And that's the way it happened.

G: Well, that was long-range planning on his part.

RG: General Burchinal was a superb long-range planner.

G: He apparently set some store by having a first-rate man at Policy Planning.

RG: Yes, but it was understood that I was working for the Policy Planning Council and the State Department. I was not working for the Defense Department or the air force.

G: Who did you report to on the uniform side? Was there a [inaudible]?

RG: I did not report to anyone on the uniform side. My boss was Walt Rostow, period.

G: Do you know anything about how you were selected?

RG: Each of the services nominated an individual, and after interviewing those individuals, Walt Rostow made a selection, and at the time I was there an Admiral [Richard] Colbert, I guess he was a captain at the time, U.S. Navy, had already been there for about a year. I replaced an army colonel, later general, DeWitt Armstrong. When Colbert left, he in turn was replaced by another army colonel.

G: I see. What was a normal tour on that job?

RG: It was normally a two-year tour.

G: Can you give us some idea of what you did for the Policy Planning Council? What kind of duties were you assigned?

RG: I was involved in political-military studies. One of the things that I had was responsibility for the national policy paper on Portugal. I think I was given the job because none of the Foreign Service officers wanted to touch it; it was too tough. (Laughter) Because there were inner problems within the State Department, and it was a difficult thing for a career officer to undertake, a career Foreign Service officer.

G: Was it easy to get identified with a faction in the State Department, in this case?

RG: It was, and that's why the FSOs [Foreign Service officers] preferred not to tackle the job. That took a good bit of my time, and the policy paper wasn't finally resolved until a year after I went to the NSC [National Security Council] at the White House, and required resolution by Secretary [Dean] Rusk himself.

G: That does sound like a tough one. It's a good thing we didn't have to act on anything in the interim, I suppose. Did you have anything to do with Vietnam in those early years?

RG: Yes. Vietnam was the official responsibility, as I recall, of Bob [Robert] Johnson, and there was another fellow who was involved in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, but because there was a lot of military stuff going on, I was supposed to keep up to date with what went on, and at one point I got involved in the planning for Vietnam negotiations. So I got more and more into Vietnam as my time over there progressed. We had something called the Vietnam negotiating group, which had two levels. The senior level involved people like Walt Rostow and the assistant secretary of state, as I recall, for East Asia then, or Far East, whichever it was. And I was on the action planning group level; I was chairman of that group. It had people from the State Department and from the CIA involved. One of the consultants to the group turned out to be Henry Kissinger, who at that time I think was actually being paid on the agency payroll.

It was out of this working group that we came up with the so-called two-track negotiations, which was basically I think Walt Rostow's brainchild. Kissinger at that time came up with a three-track negotiation.

G: Naturally.

RG: It had to be a little different. But Walt Rostow and I couldn't see any difference between the two-track and the three-track; it was essentially the same concept, but you know in the bureaucracy I guess somebody has to have something specific to tie his name to.

G: Can you give us a time frame in which we're speaking? This would have been what, 1964?

RG: This would have been in 1964. Well, 1964, 1965 and 1966. My recollection is that it started--well, let's see. The bombing started in 1964, right?

G: No, sir--

RG: I mean the first retaliation.

G: The retaliation, yes.

RG: Tonkin Gulf.

G: Tonkin Gulf was August of 1964.

RG: So there had been some studies that fall, I believe, the fall of 1964, on a negotiating track. So it must have been very late 1964 or maybe as late as mid-1965 before this Vietnam negotiating group got started.

G: Is it possible to generalize about the parameters within which you focused your work? By that I mean what did we think we had to have in the field before we could negotiate? I know there's a lot of talk about negotiating from strength and not from weakness, and so forth.

RG: I don't know that I have a really relevant answer to that question.

G: All right. Who received the recommendations from the Policy Planning Council? Where did they go?

RG: Well, that could go a variety of ways. Walt Rostow's idea, as I understood it, was that in many cases long-range policy is most affected by an impact on shorter-range decisions. So we, in whoever we were talking to, we tried to bring a long-range viewpoint to bear on important policy decisions. We were trying to avoid the ivory tower syndrome of so many long-range planners, and we were more concerned with influencing the result rather than with getting our names on a paper. And one of the best ways of affecting a decision was to persuade somebody else that it was his idea. So I think that there are a number of things

that happened during that period which were importantly influenced by members of the Policy Planning Council, though they'll probably never receive appropriate credit for it.

G: Can you think of an example?

RG: Well, I might just give two examples. I think that I had an important impact on the State Department position on negotiations because of my chairmanship of the working group, but I don't think that it's really associated with the name Ginsburgh. Perhaps something even more dramatic, in my opinion, goes back to Portugal. When I went to--my first visit to Portugal, I uncovered a staff paper which had been written by one of the political and economic counselors there. It seemed to me to make an awful lot of good sense, so I dug it out and with their permission discussed it with then-Ambassador, former Admiral [George, Jr.] Anderson. He got interested in the idea, and it became the Anderson Plan, and became a fundamental part of our approach to the Portuguese. Unfortunately, it turned out not to be successful. It came within a hair's breadth of being successful. But here was this Anderson Plan, which came into existence because I resurrected it from Admiral Anderson's own staff and helped to translate it into the Anderson Plan.

G: That's interesting. Can you think of any regarding Vietnam?

RG: No, because really at that time Vietnam was not really my bailiwick other than this particular negotiating track.

G: Can you recall what was being said about the contingency bombing as a pressure to use against the North in those early days?

RG: Yes, I think that this is probably best stated in the things that Walt Rostow has written. One of the first memos that I saw when I came to the Policy Planning Council was a memo that

Walt had written either to the Secretary or to the President, referring back to the Rostow-Taylor mission and indicating that at some point the government would probably be faced with the decision: Should we bomb the North? Should we go to the source? Now when you get into the bombing, you know, there was so much controversy on it. Some people looked at the bombing strictly as a negotiating ploy, others looked at it as a means of bringing meaningful pressure against North Vietnam. Still others looked at it as a way of significantly affecting the military situation in the South by interdicting the flow of men, materiel, supplies and whatnot to the South. And so various people had some combination of these various thoughts in either opposing or supporting the bombing. And as a result, in my own view, the bombing campaign was never properly designed.

G: And you're speaking as a professional air force man, now.

RG: Well, I'm speaking as a professional air force man, but an individual who from mid-1964 until the end of the Johnson Administration was not serving in a military capacity, a time when I was really at least as much involved in Vietnam negotiations as I was in military aspects.

G: Were you asked on the Policy Planning Council, as an air force professional, what you thought the bombing could accomplish?

RG: Walt Rostow and I had a lot of conversations on that. I think that I may have felt that the bombing could accomplish somewhat more than Rostow thought, although I think we were pretty close in our thinking.

G: Of course, he had been picking targets a long time ago.

RG: That's right, going way back to World War II when he was on the targeting staff in Europe.

G: Do you recall what your own opinion on the best use of the bombing would be?

RG: I'm an air power enthusiast, and I believed from the beginning that if we had mounted a properly designed bombing campaign against North Vietnam in 1964, 1965, 1966, or really any time up until we finally bugged out, that it would have meant an end to the war. I think in the early days the proper kind of bombing campaign could have probably ended the war in thirty days. Maybe ninety, but six months at the latest. And in that connection later on it might have taken somewhat longer. However, if you look and see what the Linebacker campaign accomplished in those eleven days around Christmas and New Year's, it brought the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table, negotiating under conditions which they had said that they never in the world would have accepted. And I believe, in fact, that if the Linebacker campaign had continued for just three or four more days, it would have been evident world-wide how important and effective that campaign was. But since the campaign ended prematurely from a military standpoint, I think only the North Vietnamese, the United States Air Force, and some other military people had the full appreciation of how desperate they were to get negotiations started again before it became obvious to anyone that they had suffered a significant military defeat.

G: I want to get to that when we talk about the study that you did in the 1970s. Was there an intelligence input to the Policy Planning Council, or did you simply read the SNIEs [Special National Intelligence Estimate] and so forth that everybody else had?

RG: Well, we worked closely and informally with all parts of the State Department, including INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research], intelligence and research, and whenever we got involved in any sort of interagency group the intelligency agencies were appropriately

represented. For example, on the Vietnam planning group we had, as I recall, not only inputs from the State Department INR, but also from the CIA. And when it got to Portuguese, for example, we had inputs from CIA and DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency], as well as INR. So that we had pretty good access, I think, to intelligence sources. Of course, you always know what you know, but sometimes you don't know what you don't know.

(Laughter)

G: Yes. And then you don't know what questions to ask.

RG: Right.

G: Can you recall any recommendation stirring controversy when it came out of the Policy Planning Council?

RG: Well, significant controversies on the Portugal policy paper, and of course everything on Vietnam was controversial. Should we have been in there in the first place, even after it was obvious that the decision had been made--remember, I'm talking about the period 1964-66--that we were in there--the question was how much of our effort should be political, how much should be military, how much should be economic. And there were still some people always saying, from the beginning and almost constantly, we shouldn't have been in there in the first place, we can't resolve the thing successfully, so let's get out.

G: Who were these people? Are you saying that there were hawks and doves that far back, and that they were that vociferous?

RG: There were hawks and doves before I joined the State Department in the summer of 1964, and--

(Interruption)

G: George Ball's name always comes up.

RG: --and many of those continued throughout the period. One of the problems that concerned me about the way government policy was formulated in I think both the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations was the issue of the input to policy decisions by people in the intelligence community. It sometimes seemed to me that after people from the intelligence community had been overruled in a policy decision, that some of the intelligence evaluations that came out after that time were designed either knowingly or unconsciously to prove that the intelligence people had been right in the first place. I don't have a good solution to that. Just because a man is in intelligence doesn't mean that he doesn't have good ideas on policy, but most human beings, if they have taken a position on a policy issue, find that it's difficult not to have that position influence their subsequent evaluation of events.

G: If I read you correctly, an example would be an analyst, let's say in CIA, who would make a recommendation and then who would spend--as you say, not necessarily consciously--spend a good deal of time supplying gloomy predictions because his advice had not been followed.

RG: Precisely.

G: Can you think of an example?

RG: Well, in general terms, it seems to me that by and large the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department and the people in CIA were opposed to the bombing of North Vietnam, and it seems to me that in many cases in reporting on the impact of the

bombing they did so in language which significantly degraded what I felt was the impact. Of course, I'm not pristine pure. I thought the bombing would do some good; I thought it was doing some good, and I felt that many of the intelligence evaluations didn't adequately assess the impact.

G: That's another thing I want to come back to when we talk about the evaluation of the bombing.

Were you aware of disagreements between the Joint Chiefs and the Policy Planning Council concerning Vietnam? I know that you said that you worked for the Policy Planning Council, but surely you must have had some insight into what the Joint Chiefs were thinking.

RG: The way things worked, there was no forum for disagreement. The JCS gave advice to the Defense Department, and occasionally to the White House. The Policy Planning Council gave advice to the Secretary of State. So I would suggest that there weren't disagreements between the JCS and the Policy Planning Council. There may have been disagreements between the Secretary of State and the JCS, or between the State Department and the Defense Department, but it wouldn't be proper or accurate to say that those are disagreements between the Policy Planning Council and the JCS.

G: Good. Now, that brings us to a fairly commonly-heard criticism of policy-making, which was that Secretary Rusk tended to give too much away to Secretary McNamara when it concerned Vietnam policy. Critics of the war generally hold that this was true.

RG: I don't think that's a fair comment. I think Secretary Rusk had some deeply-held strong views about Vietnam, and I don't think that McNamara ever budged Secretary Rusk very

much on those deeply-held views when it came to the prosecution of the war, the military aspects of it, it appeared to me--and of course I was viewing this second or third hand--that Rusk felt that that was the Defense Department's business, but I think in many respects that from time to time Secretary Rusk, if he had weighed in, would have been more hawkish than McNamara. But it is not very seemly for a secretary of state to be more hawkish than a secretary of defense. Now, my perception may not be correct, but that's one that I had.

G: Who replaced Mr. Rostow in the summer of 1966?

RG: When Rostow left the Policy Planning Council, his deputy, Henry Owen, took over, and I worked under Henry Owen for that period from the time Rostow left, in about April as I recall, until I left the Policy Planning Council in the summer, I guess we're talking the summer of 1966, when I went over to join Rostow at the White House.

G: I was going to ask, was this a result of your completing the normal tour, or was this because Rostow asked for you, or both?

RG: Interestingly, it was a result of my completing the normal tour. Rostow did not ask for me. A former student of mine at West Point, who was then a lieutenant colonel, Dick Bowman [Richard C.], had had this job in the NSC staff in which he worked both for the assistant to the president and the chairman of the JCS. The original individual in there was named Bill Smith [William Y.], and you'll find his name in some of these memos. Smith was succeeded by Bowman. Bowman's tour was coming to an end; he was up for reassignment. With a great deal of diffidence, he asked me, a full colonel, whether I would be interested in succeeding him as a lieutenant colonel--

G: I can imagine his diffidence.

RG: --in this particular job. And he was surprised and delighted that I said yes, I'd love to do it. Against the conventional wisdom of all the bureaucracies, my friends around saying, "Ginsburgh has really screwed it up this time. He's been away from the air force for a couple of years over at the State Department, and before that two other years away from the air force, and now he's going over to the White House and he's replacing a lieutenant colonel."

G: You were becoming entirely too political and taking smaller jobs instead of bigger ones.

RG: Right. So they were astonished when a year later I became the youngest brigadier general selectee in the air force. (Laughter)

G: Now, would you mind explaining how this came to be? How did you go into a lieutenant colonel's slot and upgrade it two grades?

RG: I've always felt that so many jobs, whether in business or in government, are what you make of them, and under Smith, Bowman, Ginsburgh, the job was each time a little bit different. And when I left this particular job, by that time it was clearly recognized as a flag officer's job and people were jumping to get into it. So actually at the time I left the White House I was replaced by an admiral and two colonels. And both of the two colonels later became generals, one a brigadier and one a four-star general [Al Haig--Mrs. Gail W. Ginsburgh].

G: That is interesting, because in the Johnson White House, things could go the other direction.

RG: Absolutely.

G: I think his military aide's position started off that way. He replaced a major general with a major.

RG: That's right. But then that major eventually became a brigadier general, and shortly after he was named for promotion, I was given the job of armed forces aide to the President in addition to my other duties.

G: You didn't have enough to do?

RG: I didn't have enough to do. So I was actually armed forces aide to the President for about a month, until I persuaded the President, or actually persuaded the administrative assistant to the President, a former marine, that there was no reason the marines couldn't promote my marine lieutenant colonel assistant to full colonel and he was eminently qualified for the job of armed forces aide, and that's what happened. And I went back to where I should have been concentrating in the first place, namely Vietnam, the Vietnam negotiations. Because by that time, negotiations were going on in Paris and at that time I was Rostow's staff man for the Paris negotiations. [This was during the time when Robert Kennedy was killed.--Mrs. Ginsburgh.]

G: Had negotiations or the possibility thereof been part of your bailiwick in the interim, before the Paris talks?

RG: Only peripherally, because at that time Rostow had on the NSC staff a man responsible for Southeast Asia, Bill [William J.] Jorden, who eventually became ambassador to Panama. So my concern with Vietnam during the early part of my time with the NSC was primarily on a military side, but I had to be aware of what Jorden and Rostow and others were doing on the negotiating side. But when Bill Jorden left the NSC staff to go to Paris, then I

inherited the negotiating side of his portfolio while somebody else inherited the other Southeast Asia portfolio.

If I can go back a minute, after Dick Bowman found that I would be interested in the job in the White House, he then asked Rostow if it would okay with Rostow, and Walt said, "Oh, of course, I'd love to have him." So Bowman then went to the chairman, [of] JCS, General [Earle] Wheeler, and said, "Why don't you ask for Ginsburgh? It would be acceptable to him, and Rostow would be delighted to have him."

G: You'll pardon me for observing that this lieutenant colonel sounds like a man who's going a long way.

RG: Well, he retired as a major general after many, many years' service, and a very competent guy. He also was a Harvard Ph.D.

G: I heard that you were a Princeton Ph.D.

RG: No.

G: My information's not correct?

RG: That's incorrect. Harvard.

G: That's not only incorrect, it's pernicious.

(Laughter)

When did you take that degree?

RG: I took that right after World War II, I was up at Harvard in 1946 to 1948.

G: And your field was . . .?

RG: Government and public administration. And immediately thereafter I went to teach economics and international relations at the military academy.

G: Now, that's a situation with which I'm not very familiar. Could you describe a little bit the nature of your duties on the NSC? It seems to me that you were wearing three hats: you are a liaison man, you work for the Joint Staff, and you work for the NSC. Is that more or less it?

RG: That's more or less it, with two minor variations. I did not work for the Joint Staff; I worked strictly for the chairman of the JCS. And as I indicated earlier, for a time I was wearing that fourth hat as armed forces aide. And at the time I was four-hatted, for example, I had the aide's office in the East Wing; I had an office in the Executive Office Building; I had an office in the Pentagon in the chairman's office, and I spent an awful lot of time in the White House Situation Room or in Rostow's office. Some things I did for General Wheeler, some things I did for Walt Rostow; some things I did for both of them at the same time. And they trusted me to keep the compartments straight, which I think I did. And there would be many occasions when Rostow would say to me, "Now I don't want this to get to Bus Wheeler," or General Wheeler would say, "Look, don't tell Walt this." And I respected that, obviously. On a number of occasions, however, sometime subsequently I'd go back in to General Wheeler and I'd say, "I know what you told me, but I think Walt ought to know about it now for these reasons." And he'd say, "Okay, go ahead and tell him." Or I'd do the same thing with Walt Rostow. And generally when I went back in the second time and said I think it's now time to let the other guy know, they agreed with me.

G: Can you think of an example? Were there policy divergences involved here?

RG: No, this was not so much a matter of policy diversions, but a policy situation was evolving and General Wheeler didn't want either his position or a JCS position to get to the White House prematurely. Or similarly, Walt would tell me something that he had had in confidence, let's say, from the President or from the Secretary of State which he didn't feel was yet appropriate for the Defense Department or the JCS or even General Wheeler to know about.

I might give you one example, which I thought was fairly dramatic. This was in the fall of 1968. My recollection is it was sometime mid- to late-September. The peace talks had been going on in Paris in very inconclusive fashion. They had finally settled the shape of the table and who was going to sit where, but there hadn't been much progress beyond that, when all of a sudden it looked as though the South Vietnamese were prepared to accept a bombing halt with a formula that looked as though it could be used to really bring some pressure on the North Vietnamese to really negotiate meaningfully. This was known to only a few people in Washington: the secretary of state, the assistant secretary of state, and I believe the deputy. Oh, and the head of the secretariat; I think there were about four people in the State Department who knew about it. And obviously President Johnson and Walt Rostow, and the people--this group was given instructions by the President that nobody else in Washington was to know about it, because the President, as I understood it, was very concerned that if this position leaked out prematurely among people within his administration who were opposed to the President's position, they would immediately be undercutting the position, negotiating within the administration rather than with the North Vietnamese, who should have been the object of the negotiation.

Late on a Friday afternoon, as I recall it, Walt Rostow got permission from the President to bring me in on the message traffic, because Walt felt he needed some help. During the course of that weekend, on Saturday and Sunday, there was quite an exchange of messages back and forth. President Johnson by this time was down at the Ranch, and it looked like things were moving very, very quickly. And as I recall, [the] first thing Sunday morning when I came in and looked at the traffic, I said to Walt, "You know, things are moving so fast it's conceivable that we could have a bombing halt within the next forty-eight hours. I think it's essential that the Defense Department be brought in on this. You know, it takes time to issue the orders; it takes time to make sure that the bombing ceases when it's supposed to." And somewhat reluctantly he agreed, and he got on the phone to President Johnson, asking for President Johnson's permission to bring in just Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler. The President said "No." A couple of hours later, when the thing looked like it was proceeding even more quickly, I went in to Walt again and said, "I think you've got to try again." He shook his head, he tried again, and he got an answer of "No." Late that afternoon I tried once again. I said, "Look, General Wheeler and the Secretary of Defense are due back at Andrews this evening. Why don't you get permission for me to go out, meet them there, and brief the two of them?" Walt said okay, he'd try once again. This time the President said, "Let's do it this way. Yes, it is time. Things are not quite as urgent as they looked an hour earlier. Have the Secretary of Defense and the chairman, JCS in the White House Situation Room either at seven-thirty or eight o'clock. You, Walt, and Ginsburgh brief them. Let them look at all the traffic. Let them know that this is for their eyes only. They can come over and look at the traffic any

time they want to; Ginsburgh can brief them orally, but no hard message copy is to go from the White House to the Defense Department. And I will meet, along with some other advisers, with the Secretary of Defense and chairman, JCS at either eight or nine o'clock."

So, that gives you a specific example of things that I was constrained from keeping from the chairman, JCS.

G: That's an interesting example, too, because apparently the word had already leaked. Anna Chennault knew about it.

RG: No, at that time.

G: This was September you're talking about, or October?

RG: Anna Chennault--the time I'm talking about was earlier. Anna Chennault did not become aware of it until I don't remember whether it was two weeks or four weeks after that.

G: Do you have any idea how she got her information?

RG: I'm trying to recall now. My recollection is that President Johnson must at some point have talked to the presidential and vice presidential candidates, both Republican and Democratic--

G: There was a conference call.

RG: --and my hunch would be that Anna probably learned it from the vice president-to-be.

G: From [Spiro] Agnew.

RG: Yes.

G: William Safire's book--

RG: That's strictly speculation. I do know that she knew about it.

G: Yes. He speculates that she learned from someone on the NSC staff. He doesn't name him, and he makes it clear that whoever he thinks was the source did not know where that word was going, that he thought he was talking in complete confidence to someone who could be trusted, and this person relayed it to Anna Chennault, who then used her links with the South Vietnamese Embassy to urge [Nguyen Van] Thieu to hold out.

RG: Safire is a great reporter. He could be right, but in this case I sincerely doubt it, because to the best of my recollection at that time the only people on the NSC staff who knew about it were Rostow, Brom Smith, and myself. And I can't conceive of any one of these three having done something like that.

G: I just thought I'd throw it out. I never know what kind of an answer I'll get to a question like that.

Can you talk for a little about how the JCS felt about the way President Johnson was conducting the war? Or is that too broad; should I be more specific?

RG: Well, to oversimplify it, basically the JCS felt that the war should have been prosecuted much more vigorously, and from an early date. There were some gradations of opinion within the JCS--and we're talking JCS, you know the people changed from time to time over this period--as to the amount of emphasis to be put on the war in the South, and how that war could be best waged, and the amount of emphasis to be put on the war in the North, and how that should be best waged. But I would say that basically the fundamental JCS position during this period was if you're going to get into a war, fight it the way it should be fought. That while insurgency is an important element in this war, and needs to be countered, it's by far from the only aspect of this war, and that increasingly, as time went

on, the war in the South, our forces were encountering main force units, and that required different techniques to counter than the typical counterinsurgency against the Viet Cong, and it didn't make much sense for us to be sending tens of thousands of American military people to fight a war in South Vietnam while we kept one hand tied behind our back and we refused to go after the source of that aggression in a meaningful fashion.

Now, some members of the JCS would have liked to have invaded the North. All were in favor of a more vigorous bombing campaign in the North.

G: What about the charges that were made, and I think the CIA is one source for these, that all of the military targets of any significance were already under attack in the North? How could the air war have been made more effective?

RG: Well, the CIA was thinking in terms of trucks with people moving down trails at night. I'd simply say, look at what was done in the Linebacker campaign when the war was many years old. We found enough targets of strategic quote "significance" that it brought the North Vietnamese to the table in prompt fashion. You know, petroleum is a good, significant military target. The North Vietnamese weren't simply walking into the South; they were going on trucks. Trucks have to use petroleum. It makes a lot more sense to destroy the petroleum storage in North Vietnam and prevent new petroleum supplies from coming in than it does to try and destroy the gas that's in a truck with a half a dozen men in it under canopy halfway down to South Vietnam.

G: Now, I'm playing devil's advocate a little bit here.

RG: Certainly.

G: I have no brief on any of this. A counterargument might be that the North Vietnamese use in absolute terms very little of such things as petroleum, so that it will be very hard to choke off the trickle that they need to keep them going.

RG: Well, that vastly understates the amount of support from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, and in some respects I would say [that] the intelligence people were talking out of both sides of their mouths. On the one hand, they'd say, you know, "There's not much stuff coming down." And then they'd turn right around and say, "The bombing hasn't had any impact because so much more is coming down than was before."

G: That's a good observation. Were these arguments made at the time?

RG: They sure were.

(Laughter)

G: Did anything get settled?

RG: No.

G: Nobody convinced anybody else?

RG: No. Occasionally--well, I might describe the way the bombing worked during the time that I was in the White House. Typically, the JCS would come up with a proposed bombing program for a three-week or a three-month period. And General Wheeler would then carry these recommendations over to the Tuesday luncheon group in the White House; the Tuesday luncheon group consisting of the President, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, [the] chairman [of the] JCS and Director of CIA, and beginning at some point, the President's press adviser.

G: Tom Johnson, I think.

RG: [George] Christian. I think Christian was before Johnson, and then since the precedent had been established, Johnson then sat in as Christian's replacement. Incidentally, at the time that I went to the White House, neither the chairman, JCS, nor the Director of the CIA were sitting in on these Tuesday luncheon meetings--

G: That's my reading, too.

RG: --even though significant military decisions were being made.

G: Do you have any insight as to how they came to be included?

RG: Yes. (Laughter) Brom Smith and I leaned on Walt Rostow a couple of times, and Walt Rostow went in and got the President's permission to include General Wheeler and I guess it was Dick Helms at that time, as normal members of the group, unless they were to be excluded from a particular session because matters were going to be discussed which didn't concern them. As it worked, to the best of my knowledge, neither ever was excluded from a session thereafter.

Typically, the recommended list of targets to be hit during a particular time frame would have listed not only the targets, but the number of aircraft to be used, and an estimate of the number of collateral civilian casualties. Now if the target, which as it frequently was, was not completely isolated from human habitation, typically the President would neither approve nor disapprove the recommendations. Instead, he would say, "You may hit target A, B, C, and D this week."

G: He would not approve a three-month package or campaign.

RG: No. No. So that typically, each Tuesday they'd go over the list of targets again, and they'd indicate those targets which were approved for the following week.

G: Did you get any feedback--?

RG: And in some cases, for example, when there were targets in the Hanoi area, such as a bridge or maybe a SAM [Surface to Air Missile] site, before the President would give approval he wanted to know how many aircraft, of what type, with what weapons, with what tactics, were going to be used before he'd give an approval.

G: Can we surmise the air force chafed somewhat at these restrictions?

RG: Oh, the whole military chafed.

G: How badly?

RG: Well, they'd say, "You know, we came up with a pretty good plan to begin with. We're cognizant of the President's desires." If the military were sufficiently persuasive, the President would say, "Okay, go ahead and do it." But it was so difficult to get each target approved, and it seemed to be so inefficient, but at least the military got something. They'd say, "Well, gee. Hey, look, maybe we've convinced the President. We got the most important targets this week. It's too bad he wouldn't have let us hit a half a dozen more, but we can go back next week." So the President just--

G: The President just strung them out.

RG: --strung them out.

G: And it never reached a point where somebody was ready to yank the stars off his shoulder and say, "I can't fight the war this way?"

RG: No. They thought of it, though.

G: Did they?

RG: They did.

G: Johnson never let it get to that point?

RG: Never let it get to that point.

G: You ascribe it to his skill as a--

RG: His political skill. You know, the JCS are babes in the woods when it comes to politics.

G: And Johnson was not.

RG: And Johnson was a consummate master.

G: Nobody ever resigned; nobody ever came to the crunch.

RG: You know, it's popular after the fact to talk about that, but typically the orientation of the American military is, you make the best case you can, and once you've made the case, if the decision goes against you, you loyally carry out your superior's decision, unless it's something you absolutely cannot live with. So a senior military man would say, "Well, can I live with this? It isn't what I wanted. It's better than nothing. And what would be the practical result if I turned in my suit? Historically, it would have no impact, and while I think my vice chief or General So-and-so would be a good successor to me, I don't think he can do any better a job than I, and at least I've made a little progress. I think I had a little impact last week, and I'm hoping for some more impact next week," so it never got to that crucial point.

G: You were always--

RG: Now I might give an example, which happened many years before, but might throw some insight onto it. This involved the time when General [Hoyt] Vandenberg was chief of staff of the air force, and he was having a significant problem in getting air force policies and recommendations accepted. And he heard a lot of grousing in the ranks, and at one point he

said, "Just a minute. I want you to know that anytime this staff is in agreement that it is in the best interest of the air force that I submit my resignation, I will do so." He never heard another word more.

G: Every staff officer was afraid that he might say the thing that would precipitate the resignation.

RG: That's right. And General Vandenberg, I'm confident, fully believed what he said. But I think it's easy now, many years after the fact, to say, "Well, why didn't anybody turn in his suit?" Well, there have been very few American military men who have ever turned in their suits. Sometimes General [Maxwell] Taylor is cited as an example, but--

G: He retired.

RG: That's right, he retired. Not only did he retire; it wasn't that he requested retirement, it was that his tour was up and he wasn't going to be reappointed.

G: A lot of people overlook that.

RG: That's right.

G: Did the chiefs ever try, through you, to get Mr. Rostow, let us say, to advise the President to relax a little bit on the bombing or to let them have their head more?

RG: Oh yes, yes. Every week before the Tuesday lunch meeting I would pre-brief Rostow on what General Wheeler's recommendations were, you know, with General Wheeler's permission, and urge Rostow to do what he could.

G: Did Rostow ever say, "Well now, Bob, what do you think?"

RG: He never had to ask me that; I always told him.

G: And you tended to favor a more rigorous prosecution of the bombing?

RG: Yes.

G: What about vice versa? Did Walt Rostow or the President ever say, "Colonel, General, I want you to keep those hawks on the Joint Chiefs a little quiet if you can."?

RG: Well, they were all staying on the reservation. Any recommendations that they made were on a confidential basis. They went either directly from General Wheeler to the President, or from General Wheeler through me to Rostow to the President. If the President--the President never felt it necessary; he always felt he could handle General Wheeler and the JCS.

G: There were rumblings, sometimes, in the press, from various sources, to the effect that the military was dissatisfied, or that Johnson was keeping too tight a rein on things. Did he ever suspect that somebody on the Joint Chiefs or on the Joint Staff might be leaking?

RG: Well, you know, you couldn't ask any military man about the way the war was being waged in Vietnam and get an answer that it was being waged exactly the way it should have been.

G: True, true.

RG: So it was not a matter of leaking. I think that you'll find that the military are much more disciplined, much more loyal to the chain of command than is the situation in the civil service or Foreign Service. And there's no question that during the Johnson Administration and other administrations since then [that] there have been people who have disagreed with the president's policy who have gone out of their way on a not-for-attribution background basis to try and undercut the president's policy. And I won't attempt to say that every military man is a thousand per cent pure, but by and large I think they're pretty good on it,

and I think many, but by no means all, many civilians just don't have that sort of a concept of loyalty, either to the bureaucracy or to a passing political administration.

G: I agree with you. I was thinking of the political problem Johnson might have faced if he believed that somebody might go public. Now maybe--let's look at--

RG: I'm sure that he must have been concerned with making sure that the JCS were not going to oppose him publicly by having somebody turn in his suit. I suspect that the President, because of his background, probably thought that there was a higher possibility than the chiefs themselves thought, or that most military people would have thought.

G: I think that that's a reasonable reading of it. Now in August of 1967 there was something of a furor over the testimony that was given by Secretary McNamara before, I believe it was, the [Senate] Armed Services Committee, in which--

RG: That's when, in my opinion, the President made the decision that McNamara had to go.

G: Why do you think that?

RG: Because I think that he was very unhappy with McNamara's testimony.

G: [Inaudible]

RG: As I recall, McNamara did not think that a) the bombing was especially effective or b) that there were any reasonable conditions under which it could become effective. Which was directly contrary to the position taken by the chiefs.

G: Who were also testifying.

RG: Right, and in fact backed by the President's position. So that--

G: There were some attempts made to pay for that [inaudible]. McNamara said that he and the chiefs were not really in disagreement.

RG: The hell they weren't. (Laughter)

G: Did you have direct knowledge of the President's displeasure with McNamara over this incident?

RG: Yes. And my recollection was that I was aware of it because my recollection is I was sitting in Walt Rostow's office when the President spoke to him on the phone, and I was not eavesdropping, I was only hearing one end of the conversation, but it was apparent to me that the President was very unhappy. It did not occur to me by any means at the time that that's when the President made up his mind. I'm suggesting that in retrospect I believe that's when the President decided it was time for McNamara to move on. I think that the President thought that McNamara had served him well, that McNamara had done a good job, had been very loyal to him, unlike some other members of the administration, and so he I guess wanted to kick McNamara into a different job and one which McNamara would be delighted to accept. So it wasn't really being kicked upstairs or thrust out.

G: There was no bitterness in their relationship, then, was there?

RG: No, I think that--my source for this is basically Rostow, because I had very little to do with McNamara himself or with anything between the President and McNamara, so I guess the viewpoint that I'm expressing on McNamara's loyalty to the President is one that I got second hand from Rostow.

G: That's understandable. How would you describe the role of the National Security Council as you observed it during Johnson's tenure?

RG: You have to distinguish, I think, between the National Security Council and the National Security Council staff. In the Eisenhower days, the National Security Council, I think,

worked as a council. In the Kennedy days, I understand, and in the Johnson days, from second-hand observation, I would say that the council was just part of a tribal ceremony to put the formal stamp of approval on a decision that the President had already reached, and that the NSC staff, however, in effect, worked as a White House staff for the President through the NSC adviser.

G: And so policy--it's probably oversimplifying it, but policy was made by a process of consultation and so forth among the White House staff. The President would approve, disapprove or modify it and then present it to the National Security Council. Is that more or less correct?

RG: Well, you know, most of the key decisions didn't go to the National Security Council. Most of the key decisions were made in that Tuesday luncheon group. When the President felt that broader approval, acceptance was necessary, then he'd convene the National Security Council. I think it met very few times during President Johnson's tour.

G: What was the chairman's staff group? This was something you mentioned to me on the telephone.

RG: The chairman, JCS, had an immediate staff consisting of an executive officer, an assistant to the chairman, who was a three-star officer, and anywhere from three to six members of the chairman's staff group. They were staff assistants to the chairman, JCS. Each had a portfolio: one would have Europe, another one would have Asia, another one would have Africa and the Middle East, somebody would have arms control, someone would have nuclear weapons, *et cetera*, *et cetera*. Each member of the chairman's staff group would advise the chairman with respect to his portfolio of positions that the chairman should take

in a JCS meeting, or outside a JCS meeting. And they were working for the chairman, not for the JCS. Now the Joint Staff, headed by the director of the Joint Staff, these people all worked for the corporate body of the JCS. But each member of the JCS had his whole service behind him, and he had members from that service advising him on things that got to the JCS arena. So the chairman's staff group gave advice directly to the chairman on those matters.

G: Now, you were on the chairman's staff group.

RG: I was on the chairman's staff group, and so any liaison was between the White House, more specifically Rostow, and the chairman, JCS, as opposed to the JCS as a group. General Wheeler made it clear I was working for him and not for the JCS, although of course any time that he was absent an acting chairman took over. Then I would brief that acting chairman as appropriate, as though he were actually the chairman.

G: What was your portfolio on the chairman's staff group?

RG: My portfolio on the chairman's staff group was fairly limited, because the number-one portfolio was liaison with the White House. Other than that, I had arms control and war gaming, and I think one other minor matter.

G: Arms control. Did you have any connection with Eugene Rostow in that respect? He was the arms control specialist, wasn't he?

RG: Not at that time.

G: Not at that time, okay, that's right. He was still in the State Department in another capacity. That's correct.

RG: I guess probably the most important thing I did on arms control was to suggest to General Wheeler that when the strategic arms negotiations got started, that the JCS representative should be a former boss of mine named Roy [Royal] Allison.

G: Is it possible to characterize the White House national security staff in the way it dealt with Vietnam? That is, some people have more input than others. Who were the more influential members of the staff, would you say?

RG: I think the most influential was Bill Jorden, because he was the guy who had the responsibility. Now, to the extent that things happening in Vietnam affected other areas, why, other people would make their inputs from time to time, but I think they were basically peripheral. I would--

G: How about Bob Komer? Was he--?

RG: Well, okay. I'm talking now of Rostow's staff. Komer was in a separate organization, and yes, I think he had a lot of influence. He of course had access to the President directly, rather than through Rostow. I think they kept each other pretty well informed of their thinking. They agreed most of the time, and they had no problem in agreeing to disagree on certain items. I think Rostow gave great support to Komer when Komer went out to head the pacification effort. As I recall, we had something called the Vietnam Information Group.

G: Yes.

RG: And after Komer left I'm not too clear how much impact they had. I just don't know. Someone who did have an impact on Vietnam at varying times was General [Maxwell] Taylor, who communicated with the President both directly and through Rostow. General

Taylor was head of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. Any time a significant policy decision came up or a significant military milestone, at some point the President wanted to know what Max Taylor thought about it. But he was not an integral member of the White House staff *per se*.

G: One hears arguments even today concerning whether Vietnam was in fact important to our national security. Was there divided opinion on this on the White House staff? Was it pretty much taken as a given that Vietnam was vital to our security?

RG: It was always a question of what you mean by vital. In my view, *vital* is an absolute, and yet obviously Vietnam was not vital to the extent that the state of Massachusetts is vital. Important, yes. I think it assumed added importance once we had committed ourselves to the support of Vietnam. I think that if we had made a decision earlier on to get disengaged, the consequences would have been much more short-lived than they were after we got engaged for an extended period of time and then bugged out. And the longer the term of our commitment, the more important I think it became to us in terms of the perceptions of other nations. I do believe that while the domino theory may have been overstated, I do believe that the stand that we took in Vietnam had important repercussions in our favor in Thailand, in Malaysia, in Indonesia, in Taiwan, Korea and the Philippines.

G: Some people say that we bought time for these Third World nations to consolidate themselves.

RG: We bought the time, and by our stance if not encouraging, didn't discourage a revolution from taking place in Indonesia. And from Thailand and Malaysia staying out of the communist sphere.

G: Of course, this gets us very rapidly into the what-might-have-beens, and these are imponderable things.

RG: And more speculatively, maybe it gave the Soviet Union and the Red Chinese more of a chance to look at each other and decide that after all, maybe they were strange bedfellows.

G: Do you have any insights you can share concerning the current controversy between CBS and General Westmoreland over the order of battle?

RG: Not very specifically.

G: Let me ask a couple of specific questions, and we'll see if we can do it this way.

RG: Okay.

G: Were you aware of when Mr. Rostow became interested in the controversy in the intelligence community over the order of battle?

RG: Yes. I don't remember the exact time it was, but--oh, yes, I do. This really went back to the Policy Planning Council days.

G: That far?

RG: Where you'd have an estimate of--in those days, we weren't following it, at least Walt and I weren't following it in that minute detail. It seemed that whenever you bombed, the net result according to the intelligence people was that the enemy had more people after the bombing than they had before. And so it just didn't make sense. And some time after I got to the White House, what would it be? I don't remember now whether it was 1966 or 1967, probably later rather than earlier. Maybe 1967 or even 1968. But you ought to be able to find this in the record, because Rostow arranged to get a group together, of the intelligence community, saying, "Look, let's see if we can't make some logical sense out of this."

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

G: The conference that I have seen referred to took place in Honolulu, I think it was.

RG: Well, the couple of meetings that I recall attending were in the White House Situation Room, but obviously the issues couldn't be resolved just sitting in Washington, and it would seem entirely appropriate to me that there ought to have been conferences in Hawaii, perhaps out in Vietnam or whatnot. But I don't recall getting involved or knowing any of the details of that. I think the most useful thing I might do is try and give you my perspective of the issues that arose with respect to order of battle.

Basically, since this was not a conventional war, you didn't have a front line moving forward and backward to indicate what sort of military progress you were making on the ground. This led to in one case an overemphasis on statistics, including the nefarious body counts. And so many of these statistics got exaggerated all out of order in terms of their accuracy or importance.

G: Was this known at the time?

RG: Well, it was feared that the body counts were being exaggerated. In many cases, though, when spot checks were made it turned out that I guess [in] a lot of the specific instances investigated they didn't seem to have been exaggerated [but] in some cases understated. But I didn't get that much involved with the body count other than to note it was rather strange that the numbers [that] were being reported in the body counts and the order of battle was increasing. So even if the body counts were exaggerated, something wasn't hanging together. We were, because of a lack of front line, overly dependent on order of battle estimates as a measure of progress or lack of progress. I think in many ways as the

war progressed, the intelligence communities may well have been getting more accurate information. On the other hand, frequently it appeared to me that what they were doing--

(Interruption)

--problem it seemed to me was that frequently when people came out with a new order of battle, they would include as part of the base things that hadn't been included in the previous base. Therefore, if you took the old estimate and the new estimate, it showed a significant increase, whereas it would have been much more useful in terms of measuring progress or lack of progress to have the same base for both. So that if you were going to use the new base, at least you ought to go back and try retroactively and construct the previous base, if you were going to use the two for comparative purposes, and that's what I wanted the intelligence community to do, and I think that's what Rostow wanted the community to do. I'm not sure that they ever succeeded in doing that.

G: Did you know Sam Adams, the CIA's protagonist in this?

RG: To the best of my knowledge, I did not, unless I met him on one of my trips to Vietnam.

G: As I have read the story, one of the occasions which lent a certain urgency to this order of battle resolution was that there was supposed to be a Special National Intelligence Estimate on Vietnam prepared in May of 1967. It was going to be very difficult to write if they couldn't get together on what kind of an enemy was on the other side of the fence, and that it took until November to iron this out. Was your shop involved at all in any of this, or did you perceive the reverberations?

RG: No, I was not specifically involved, to the best of my recollection, in the SNIE. I can recall always wanting better, more logically consistent intelligence estimates from the time I first

became involved in the Vietnam thing. As an aside, I might indicate that one of the things that attracted Rostow's attention were the captured documents, which we felt were not being sufficiently exploited by the intelligence community, [and which] led at one point to our getting the raw documents in to the White House, our going over them, which led us to conclude that the North Vietnamese were serious about attempting to conduct a winter-spring offensive, Rostow briefing the President on this prospect in, as I recall, mid-December, so that I think the President was not at all surprised by that campaign that later became known as the Tet campaign or Tet offensive. We'd been looking for it.

G: Someone has said that the National Security staff, of all agencies in Washington, if we can call it an agency, was less shaken by the Tet offensive than any other, including CIA and the Pentagon.

RG: Precisely, because of the conclusions that we had drawn from looking over those captured documents. We did not, in retrospect, anticipate that it would be as effective as it was. I don't recall that we pinpointed that it would kick off during Tet. No, but other than that, hey, this is what we've been waiting for. The first twenty-four hours: hey, maybe they've got a little more going than we thought they had capability. On the other hand, it became obvious to us much earlier than to most of the rest of the government that the North Vietnamese had really shot their wad and that their Viet Cong allies had been absolutely decimated by this so-called uprising in the cities. But one of the great frustrations at the time was we didn't seem to be able to persuade anybody else around to share our perceptions until sometime after the fact, and by that time in many respects it was, quote, "too late."

G: I'm trying to think of who said this. It may have been Chester Cooper, speaking of the Pentagon civilians, that Tet, like a lightning flash, revealed all the doubters to each other.

RG: Yes.

G: Were there doubters who were revealed to each other on the National Security staff?

RG: No, because they weren't involved in Vietnam. I mean, the people involved in Vietnam were Bill Jorden, Rostow, Brom Smith, and myself.

G: Okay. And you were more or less prepared for what was coming, compared with other people. Now, to put this in context, something that always bothers me a little bit: in November President Johnson had brought Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker and General [William] Westmoreland back to the United States for what was largely interpreted as a progress report or offensive, even. In light of what you learned in December, did that make you uneasy about the optimism that Westmoreland and Bunker had radiated just a month before?

RG: No. Because we did not expect the winter-spring campaign to be effective militarily. It was somewhat more effective than we thought it was going to be; on the other hand, our evaluation after the fact was [that] the North Vietnamese had really shot their wad.

G: We didn't do a good job of getting that word out. Now you have said that it was frustrating--

RG: It wasn't because of lack of trying.

G: What should we have done, do you think, that we didn't do by way of telling the story of Tet?

RG: I don't know how we could have done better. We wracked our brains at the time; we knew that we were not getting our perception out. We were talking to everybody that we could, but it was obvious that we were not getting it out.

G: Okay.

RG: We just weren't up to the--by this time people were so damned tired and scared that so many people just wanted out. They didn't want to listen. And the people, the doubters, some of whom had been silent before, now seized on this as a way of influencing administration policy.

G: Right. This brings us to an interesting episode, and this concerns General Wheeler's trip to Vietnam in February. I think you mention on your cover memo to your NSC history of the Tet offensive--the March 31 File, it's now called--that you were unable to find out why it was General Wheeler who went, because apparently it was originally thought that Mr. [Cyrus] Vance was going to go.

RG: Well, the reason that General Wheeler went, basically, was that if anyone was going to go, he was the proper one to go. I think this gets back to President Johnson's method of operation, which I mentioned earlier as being a sort of a tribal dance or tribal ceremony. Whenever an important issue was raised, an important circumstance with respect to Vietnam, President Johnson wanted to try and develop a consensus. And I mentioned before that he would use the National Security Council meeting as sort of waving holy water over a consensus that he had been trying to create for maybe days or weeks before. So part of his method of operation was that whenever an important point was reached, he wanted the chairman [of] JCS to have met with General Westmoreland and for the two of

them to present a line of action to the President's liking, either to support something that the President had decided on, or to come up with a line of action which the President could buy off on. So this was why the President wanted someone to visit Westmoreland, sort of to bring back the message from Garcia that this is now what we ought to do.

Early in the Tet campaign, it seemed to me the President was feeling very belligerent. He was anxious to get on with a more vigorous prosecution of the war, and he wanted to do it in a hurry. My recollection is that either Vance or Taylor was somewhere over in the Far East at the time.

G: Vance was in Korea, I think.

RG: And Vance having been in the Defense Department--or was he then? Previously in the Defense Department, as I recall--The President said, "Hey, let's send him down." Presumably, Vance could talk with Westmoreland and then come back and maybe General Wheeler wouldn't have to go. Well, that didn't make much sense, in my opinion. Nor did it make much sense to send General Taylor. The responsible guy was General Wheeler. If there was going to be any conference, if that was felt to be necessary, then it really ought to be Wheeler and Westmoreland. But my question in that summary was, I wasn't able to put in chronology when the President thought this, when he changed his mind, what if anything caused it. I'm just expressing my thoughts as to how the thing should have taken place. Okay, at some point then it was agreed that--

(Interruption)

G: --the decision to send General Wheeler.

RG: Okay, and General Wheeler was going to leave almost immediately, but it turned out that Secretary McNamara had to testify on Capitol Hill, and it may have been in connection with the Tonkin Gulf history, or something like that. It was something that wasn't really current. And, as I recall, the President didn't feel it would be fair to McNamara to be testifying if he weren't backed up by General Wheeler. As a result, General Wheeler's trip to visit General Westmoreland was delayed by either a week or two weeks or more. And during that period of time, a completely different complexion was put on the whole policy issues with respect to Vietnam, and it's still not entirely clear to me all of the important things that caused that change.

For example, early in February the President, as I say, appeared to be feeling quite hawkish, and Harry McPherson and I were to collaborate on a speech for the President to give in the immediate future which would call for increased military measures against Vietnam. Ironically, it was that speech--the first draft was written [in] early February--which I did not participate in subsequent drafts of, which eventually became the March 31 speech, at least six weeks later. I believe that General Wheeler went to Vietnam with the understanding that the President would be receptive to a larger rather than a smaller request for increased military measures, including additional troops. So I think in some ways General Wheeler got sandbagged by events. I think he came back with as large a request as he did because--yes, he felt it would be useful, but he also felt it would be politically acceptable to the President, and one of the major concerns that General Wheeler had at that time is that we were putting so much of our military effort into Vietnam that he was being concerned about weakening in other areas of the world. So that that particular

troop request in General Wheeler's mind was more than just to increase the military pressure in Vietnam.

I think a couple of things also happened which had an influence on the process there. One, the President insisted that General Wheeler send an advance copy of his report to Washington, and General Wheeler sent it in either from the Philippines or, I think, Hawaii. Whereas General Wheeler would have preferred to have brought the report with him for the top-level meeting, which as I recall was scheduled for a Monday morning when he returned. Instead, the message came in a day or two early, so the doubters were fully armed and had their counterpositions well under way before General Wheeler had the opportunity to make his case to the President. So by the time General Wheeler got to the meeting, he was already calling from jail, as it were.

The other thing that happened about the same time, as I recall, was a meeting of--I may be wrong on the exact chronology, but somewhere during that period, another meeting of the Wise Men.

G: Would this still have been in February, then?

RG: This was probably in March. It was probably later on. At the first meeting of the Wise Men, General Wheeler had briefed the military situation, and Rostow had had a part in the briefing. I don't remember exactly what he covered. When the second meeting of the Wise Men was scheduled, it was supposed to follow the same format, that both General Wheeler was going to make a presentation and Walt Rostow was going to make a presentation, and as part of the tribal ceremony, Lyndon Johnson, I'm sure, fully expected the Wise Men to endorse his policy as they had on the previous occasion. However, as it worked out,

General Wheeler was out of the country, and so his part of the briefing, as I recall, was given by General [William E.] DePuy, and part of the area that Rostow would have covered was given by CIA man in charge of--

G: Carver? George Carver?

RG: Carver. And while both are highly competent people, they're not General Wheeler or Walt Rostow and the result was, apparently, that the advisory committee, the Wise Men, was shocked to the point that when they came in and talked to the President, the President couldn't believe that they had been given the same information that he had been given. And as I recall, he then wanted to call both of them in and be given directly what it was that had been given to the Wise Men. Not having been actually present at either meeting, I think it was a matter of personality, the way you express yourself, the give and take. I think the result was significantly different than would have been the case if General Wheeler and Rostow had been at that meeting.

G: Do you have any insight into a widely reported part of that briefing which Mr. Justice [Arthur] Goldberg called the numbers that were being briefed into question. He more or less said, "Wait a minute. You had so many fighting; the body count is so much; we know we must have wounded so many. Who's left? Who are we fighting?" Because the numbers simply didn't seem to make sense.

RG: No, I don't recall anything about that, but essentially it's the same question that Rostow and I had been asking for three years.

G: Partly as a result of the Tet surprise, insofar as it was a surprise, General Taylor, I think, had a special mission assigned to evaluate the performance of intelligence just before and during the Tet attacks. Do you recall any of that?

RG: Not at all.

G: All right.

RG: You know, I should have been aware of it, and if there was such an evaluation, I probably was aware of it, but I don't recall it. I just draw a blank on it.

G: How soon was it before you were able to get a fairly coherent picture of what was really happening in those first days of the Tet attacks?

RG: My guess is three or four days, but I'm not sure. I'm really rather--

G: It was confusing in the early part, I guess.

RG: Well, not so much that it was confusing as so much happened in such a short period of time that I just don't remember the elapsed time or the chronology. You recall at that time, we were not only concerned about the uprising in the cities, but we were also worried about Khe Sanh, and we were worried about the *Pueblo*, and whether or not there was any tie-in among all these things.

G: Did you ever satisfy yourself on that, whether there was a tie-in with the *Pueblo* and the Tet business?

RG: I don't think there was.

G: No hard evidence, at least.

RG: No, I don't think so. I don't think that the North Koreans knew that the *Pueblo* was going to be there at that time. If they had, they'd have probably had some knowledge of what the

North Vietnamese were thinking of. I think it was just a congruence of events rather than any kind of a deliberate master plan. However, it may well be that the North Vietnamese [Koreans?] were encouraged to be intransigent because of what was going on in Vietnam at the time, but I think that was probably more of a taking advantage of an apparent U.S. weakness rather than something deliberately planned ahead of time. In retrospect though, I think we should, as we did, say, "Is there any tie-in between the two?"

G: Do you recall the circumstances under which you heard the March 31 speech, where you were, who you were with, what you reaction was?

RG: I was sitting with my wife watching television, I think just the two of us, and all of a sudden I recall being absolutely shocked. I said to Gail, "He's going to resign." And this was perhaps a paragraph or two before the final paragraph.

G: Oh, you divined it before he made the actual announcement.

RG: Yes. I suppose if I were to look at the speech again, I could say, "Hey, that's the sentence when I said this to Gail." [Actually the situation was rather more dramatic than Bob describes here. Part way through Bob jumped to his feet and shouted, “Oh, my God, he’s going to resign.” He said it several times. After the speech was over he said, with his head nodding, “He is brilliant at political impact.”--Mrs. Ginsburgh]

G: You had no inkling that this was coming?

RG: None whatsoever.

G: What did you think, what was your reaction? What impact was this going to have on the war? What did you think about that?

RG: My initial reaction was, "Hey, this is a brilliant stroke. It shows that the President has gone beyond the last mile to satisfy all of the doubters." I thought the chances were significantly better than fifty-fifty that the North Vietnamese would reject this out of hand, and that this would then give the President a freer hand in prosecuting the war more vigorously, which I still thought ought to be done, because I thought that the Viet Cong had really been decimated and the North Vietnamese were hanging on the ropes.

G: Yes.

RG: No question in my mind that it looked like a sincere effort and a meaningful effort to get negotiations started, but I really didn't expect as forthcoming a response from the North Vietnamese as rather quickly took place.

G: Three or four days, I think.

RG: Yes.

G: What did you make of that cryptic remark--maybe you didn't make anything of it--in a news conference, I think in February, Johnson said some words to the effect, "If Ho Chi Minh knew what I knew, he'd negotiate now."

RG: Well, I believed that this was based on two things. One, President Johnson's feeling that a) the North Vietnamese and VC had really shot their wad, and were virtually on their knees, and this gave him the opportunity to prosecute the war really vigorously and bring the thing to a close. That's what I think was behind it. As I say, I've never been completely sure as to why he went through that kind of transformation that he did in the succeeding seven weeks. I suspect that two of the things that probably shook him were the reaction of the Wise Men and the reaction of his new secretary of defense. I believe that President

Johnson thought that he was hiring a hawk and it turned out to be a dove in hawk's clothing, who rapidly shed his hawk feathers.

G: That took a lot of people by surprise, didn't it; Secretary [Clark] Clifford's attitude?

RG: It sure took me by surprise. I think it took Walt Rostow and the President by surprise. I was surprised to see that subsequently Clifford indicated, I think it was in a *Foreign Affairs* article, that his metamorphosis had actually taken place the previous August, when he'd been out on a visit to the Far East. I can only say this, that if the metamorphosis had taken place, I don't believe that he had communicated that fact to the President. And I know he hadn't communicated it to Rostow and me. And I thought, actually, that Clifford's metamorphosis probably began with a memorandum that Townsend Hoopes wrote to Clifford. Townsend Hoopes at that time was undersecretary of the air force. He had known Clifford, oh, years and years before, when they had both been on some study groups together, and both been in Washington at the same time, Hoopes on the Hill and then on the NSC office in the Defense Department, and of course Clifford had been around forever. And Hoopes took the occasion of the announcement of Clifford's appointment to send him a memo expressing Hoopes' position as a serious doubter.

G: Yes. "Hoop-eez" I think, as LBJ called him.

RG: That's the way that--right.

G: What about the Walter Cronkite special on Vietnam? Do you remember that?

RG: I don't. No, I've heard it referred to in a historical sense since that time, but I don't remember it at the time. I just have no reaction to it.

G: Let's talk about the bombing. Now, your experience as an evaluator, as--I don't know if post-mortem is the right term, but anyway, an evaluation of the bombing campaign. You supervised an air force study on this matter, and I don't intend to try to get you to into anything classified at all, but can you at all give an outline of what the air force found as a result of that study?

RG: It's really a voluminous study, and it had not been completed at the time I left Maxwell [Air Force Base]. It continued after that, and I participated in some of the top-level review meetings, but I don't believe that it ever really addressed the issue.

G: Really?

RG: I think it got more involved in evaluating the operational effectiveness rather than getting into the gut issues which we had originally hoped would get discussed. But I saw nothing in it to in any way change my views that if the bombing of North Vietnam had been properly conducted, it would have won the war without bringing in the Chinese, and without the necessity of a land invasion of North Vietnam. And I think that if we had followed the original ninety-four target program of the JCS which was recommended when the campaign first started, I think at that point that could have terminated the war within maybe six weeks or less. I'm sure that as you bombed those ninety-four targets, additional targets would have been created, but I think they would have been a lot more manageable than they were later on, and yet--you know, I think that Linebacker campaign was especially effective, and that was the proper way to conduct an air campaign.

G: Could the bombing have been directed in such a fashion against the infiltration targets as to choke them off?

RG: No, not any more effectively than it was. For an interdiction campaign to be successful, you should have two other elements, and in a traditional military situation you've got a front line, and the front line is keeping pressure on the enemy so that he suffers as his supplies are being interdicted, and in addition, you're whopping him back at the source, strategically. Well, we were really trying to just go after the interdiction and not bringing adequate power to bear on either the source or on the front line because there wasn't a front line.

G: You're saying, if I read you right, that interdiction would have been effective only if we had been able to keep enough pressure on the regular North Vietnamese units in order to make them expend their capital.

RG: That's right.

G: As long as they can keep--

RG: And/or making it difficult for Hanoi to simply replace any interdicted supplies with new supplies. It's a very inefficient system of waging war to take a couple of million-dollar airplanes and try and knock out an individual truck worth ten thousand bucks with a half a dozen men on it, at night, travelling a couple of hundred yards apart. That same expenditure of effort would be vastly more effective if you'd gone back and hit that truck in a truck park before it got started South. Or hit the petroleum storage, gone after some of the personnel training bases. We never did that over there.

G: Do you know a pilot named Newt Whatley, by any chance?

RG: I don't recall his name.

G: It's not important.

RG: Oh, I think we did a fantastic job with these smart bombs, and hitting targets at night, using infrared and low light-level TV. There are some spectacular photographs which really show rather spectacular technological achievements, but in terms of cost effectiveness, not a very cost effective way of waging warfare.

G: The Thanh Hoa bridge may be a classic example of that. I don't how how many sorties were expended against that bridge during Johnson's time, but when the smart bombs came, one flight of F-4s and that was the end of it.

RG: Doumer, yes. And the same thing with the Hanoi bridge.

G: The Paul Doumer Bridge, is that the Doumer Bridge?

RG: Yes. And believe me, the President looked at that one very, very closely before he gave an okay on that.

G: What are the lessons, if you have to sum up, General? Everybody is talking about the lessons of Vietnam and how they are to be applied. What are your views on that?

RG: Better not to get into a war unless you are determined to win it.

G: Well, we had a good many, as I recall, members of the never-again club who had been saying that right along.

RG: If you want to make a stand, remember that once you've made a commitment, especially if you're the United States, it's awfully tough to gracefully get out. And so the tendency is to keep on increasing the level of commitment. Fighting a war with emphasis on not using excessive force can easily lead to using inadequate force, and too great an interest in trying to minimize casualties can lead to greater casualties in the long run. For example, I think when I say we should have prosecuted the bombing campaign more seriously, we'd have

done less damage to North Vietnam than we eventually did, with fewer casualties on both sides, but compressed into such a short period of time, that success would have been achieved, in my view, with far fewer casualties on both sides. I should say all sides, North Vietnamese, VC, and the U.S. and allies as well as the South Vietnamese.

G: How would you describe the impact of Vietnam on the air force as an institution?

RG: It increased its professional competence. It led to greatly increased emphasis on tactical warfare. By and large, it did not shape but if anything reinforced the air force's view that air power properly utilized in many cases will be the decisive factor in a military engagement.

G: What about morale among the troops that were having to do the fighting? Were pilots' morale shaken by what they might have regarded as wasteful tactics?

RG: I don't believe that their morale was shaken. I think that they probably reflected the kind of thing I suggested earlier: this is one hell of a way to fight a war. Damned inefficient, but we can do whatever we're told to do; salute smartly and say, "Yes, sir." But you know, they didn't have to undergo the really debilitating kinds of experiences that an individual on the ground did, trying to fight an enemy he couldn't find, under in many cases intolerable living conditions. The bulk of the air war against the North was conducted from bases in Thailand and from carriers. Living conditions were reasonably good, not like being back in the United States, but not like being in the mud in the front lines. And the air bases within South Vietnam for conducting the air war within the South, again, by comparison with their army counterparts, the air force people, especially pilots lived quite well. There was no reason for them not to.

G: Any final comments, sir? Anything you want to say to put yourself on the record here?

RG: Well, there was one question that--"Did the chiefs ever use you as a pipeline into Mr. Rostow's operation or vice versa?" (Laughter)

G: After I had written that, I was a little taken aback with myself at the language that was used. But--

RG: If you substitute "chairman, JCS," yes. In fact, that was what a large part of my job was, was to make Mr. Rostow aware of what General Wheeler wanted him to be aware of, and vice versa.

G: Do you recall any particularly interesting or revealing incidents in which you performed this task in either direction?

RG: It was just a routine thing that went on every day. I would spend anywhere from one to three hours a day with Rostow, and with General Wheeler anywhere from an hour to three a week. And in addition to reading lots of documents so that--I can't think of anything dramatic at all, but just the normal course of business. So that I was horrified by some of the press write-up in which my successor was accused of spying on the White House for the JCS. He wasn't spying; that's what he was supposed to do, and the White House knew it and the chairman, JCS knew it. It was a two-way street.

G: Somebody has to tell the chairman what the White House is doing, after all.

RG: Right.

G: Could we go back just for a second--I want to make sure that we finish this up properly--to the two hundred thousand or two hundred and six thousand-man troop request? The way you told the story, it was your impression that it was General Wheeler who saw the

opportunity to have a call-up to reconstitute a healthy military posture. Why didn't he just tell the President that? Why did he go to Vietnam and have the request come from there?

RG: Because the President sent him to Vietnam. General Wheeler didn't want to go to Vietnam. He didn't think he needed to go to Vietnam. He could have done the thing either by wire or by secure telephone with Westy. He went because it was part of the President's way of doing business.

G: I see. Okay.

RG: Which had worked successfully in the past.

G: But the request for troops came from General Westmoreland.

RG: Yes, but General Wheeler went out there, and I'm sure, said, "Hey, I've gotten the word from the White House. Let's ask for the max. It would be well received." Whereas if General Wheeler had felt that the President wasn't in an aggressive mood, and [had] gone to General Westmoreland and said, "Hey, look. The President doesn't want things to go down the drain here. He's prepared to give you whatever you need, but for God's sake, Westy, don't ask for one more soldier than is absolutely goddamned necessary." I think if General Wheeler had gone out with that, my guess is that the troop request would have come back as something between zero and fifty thousand. But that's speculation.

G: Understood, okay. The exchange of cables is rather interesting in this episode, the ones that I have seen, because the cable from General Wheeler back to Westmoreland saying, "Well, what we're going to send you is this, and it's not going to be any two hundred thousand." And at the other end, General Westmoreland then sends a rather testy cable back to General Wheeler, if you know to read between the lines, saying, "Well, now, wait a minute, Bus.

You told me this is what to ask for and now you're telling me I can't have it. What's going on?"

RG: Well, you know, this lends credence to the point that I was just making, that Westy was encouraged to ask for the maximum that he could possibly use.

G: And of course he was thinking in terms of a Laos incursion, I think he had a plan on the shelf for that.

RG: There are always all sorts of plans around. I don't recall at that time whether that was--yes, I guess maybe it was. I had forgotten, being quite seriously considered as a way of more effectively stopping that infiltration.

G: Or at least make the North Vietnamese fight a big battle to keep the trails open.

RG: That would be one way of keeping front line pressure on, on a relatively narrow front, but I still think, and this is the difference, I guess, between an army and an air force point of view: It would have been better to take the same amount of military effort and put it in in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, stopping stuff from coming into North Vietnam, and then hitting it as soon as it did get in.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

ROBERT N. GINSBURGH

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Gail Winslow Ginsburgh, of Naples, Florida, widow of Robert N. Ginsburgh, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the transcript and the tape recording of the personal interview conducted with Robert N. Ginsburgh on June 2, 1983 in Chevy Chase, Maryland, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) A copy of the tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Gail Winslow Ginsburgh May 1, '00
Donor Date

John W. Carlin 5-31-00
Archivist of the United States Date