INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 29, 1985

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE JACOBSON

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Colonel Jacobson's residence, Reston, Virginia

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G: All right, sir. Why don't we begin with 1954? How did you get selected for that duty in Vietnam?

J: Well, it was a rather interesting thing. When I got selected for it, I very nearly quit the army because I believed that Vietnam, which I had barely heard of, was certainly the end of the road so far as a military career was concerned. But I finally did decide to go, which, of course, turned out to be a very lucky thing for me because I had a long and extremely interesting career there. I don't have a lot to say about 1954 except that I was a lieutenant colonel working for [John W.] "Iron Mike" O'Daniel in a logistics setup with respect to the MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] that we had there then. But I was in Vietnam from 1954 to 1957. Then I came back to the United States. The Army insists that one go to school and so forth, and so I stayed in the United States until 1961, when I returned to Vietnam and stayed until 1964. At that time, I switched over from the military, wearing a soldier suit, to staying in the military but actually working for the State Department. I went back again in 1965 and was there until the very end of the

Vietnam involvement, which, of course, was 1975. So this has been my experience in Vietnam. I frankly don't know of anybody that put in as much time as I did. I know a lot of people who made much more of a contribution than I did, but I think timewise I've got it on them. So that's the background that I have, and you can ask any questions you want, and I'll do what I can with it.

G: You say you were working in a logistics capacity with General O'Daniel?

J: Everybody was. This was a MAAG wherein the French were actually in command in Indochina at that time, and the Americans were there solely to provide logistics support, and that's the way it was until the French moved out and the Vietnamese took over, at which time the Americans became involved in both logistics and training.

G: Right. Did you know Ed Lansdale when he came in?

J: Very well. Very well indeed. Beginning with my 1961 tour was when I knew Ed, and this was when President Ngo Dinh Diem was battling it out with the Binh Xuyen and the robber barons on the rivers and so forth. And Ed Lansdale, fresh from his successes in the Philippines, turned out to be Diem's--or one of Diem's principal advisers in conducting the war that was going on for control of the Delta area of Vietnam. Ed Lansdale was an extremely valuable fellow with the guts of a burglar. He was conducting clandestine meetings with the guerrilla bandits out in the boondocks, and he was a remarkable man and a very clever and capable one. He is in this area now. I presume you're going to see him.

G: Yes. We have seen him.

J: Oh.

G: In that connection, do you know anything about his dealings with Trinh Minh Thé? He was one of the sect generals down in the Delta.

J: Yes, I think the Hoa Hao. I'm not sure of that. I don't know enough about that to have anything substantive to tell you about it.

G: Right. Were you very conversant with what I guess then-Colonel Lansdale was up to in regards to the North? I know the evacuation was going on at that time.

J: Yes. No, I wasn't. I never got up to Hanoi. I got to Haiphong, [which] was as far up as I went, and did a very small role with respect to getting those refugees down to the South. My contribution in that regard was very small, and I know nothing about the inner workings of the thing.

G: Did you know Lou Conein?

J: Oh, very well. Very well. Everybody knows Lou.

G: Yes. I think he's in McLean now.

J: I think so.

G: Let's see, the MAAG chief in 1956 became General--

J: W illiams.

G: --Williams. [inaudible]

J: Sam [Samuel T.] Williams. "Hanging Sam" Williams. They were two beauties. First, "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, followed by "Hanging Sam" Williams, who, by the way, was probably the best diplomat that I ever worked for, and I worked for all of the top people that were out there. None were more capable in guiding President Diem in military matters, of course, but in other matters as well. Diem thought the world of Sam

Williams, as everybody did who really knew him. He was anything but a charging-forward, bloodthirsty soldier that didn't have any knowledge of anything else except killing the enemy. He was a very bright, personable, capable man. He was followed by Lionel C. McGarr, about which I can't say the same thing. And then of course the MAAG was taken over by General Charles Timmes, one of the great men that I have known in my life, and then of course MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] came into being with General [William] Westmoreland and then General [Paul D.] Harkins.

G: Well, it was the other way, wasn't it? Harkins and--

J: Yes, I'm sorry. You're absolutely right. Harkins and then Westmoreland, of course. What am I thinking of?

G: Yes. That's a pretty strong statement, that General Williams was such an able diplomat, and you compared him to some pretty high-powered people. What was his method of operation?

J: Well, one of the things that Ngo Dinh Diem valued, I am sure, was that Sam Williams was totally and absolutely honest in his recommendations to the president, in his judgment of what was wrong with the Diem regime as well as its good points, and Sam Williams had a personality that brought about confidence in the people that he was dealing with. He, of course, had many detractors because he certainly did not suffer fools easily, but he was a very worthwhile man. I think that because of O'Daniel's success in another way and then Williams' success, both of them having reputations in the military of being pretty hard-boiled commanders--I think somebody back here got the notion that

that sort of person should be the prototype for military men in Vietnam. So they sent General McGarr out there, who had generally the same reputation as far as the military was concerned, but frankly that's where his ability started and ended. He was not a successful MAAG commander in Vietnam.

G: Where did he run into trouble?

J: Everywhere. He ran into great trouble with Admiral [Harry] Felt, among others, who was CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific Command] at the time. General McGarr was a difficult man and just didn't have the capability that the others had. I understand that General McGarr was one of the great regimental commanders with the Third Division all through World War II, and in my opinion and for what it's worth, I think that his great service to his country was during that time. But I rather think that he was sent to Vietnam as chief of the MAAG because somebody back here said, "Well, we had O'Daniel, and we had Williams, and now we've got this other rough, tough sort of guy and we'll send him out." But there was no comparison between the three. Timmes took over from McGarr, and Timmes was great--and is.

G: Well, then General [Paul] Harkins came in, and he was rather a different type, was he not?

J: Yes. Yes. It's a difficult thing for me to talk about, but I think that General Harkins brought his rose-colored glasses along to an extent that--well, I'm sure there was no conscious misrepresentation of the facts in Vietnam. I believe that the reports emanating from MACV under General Harkins were overly optimistic. I might say that the same thing permeated down through the staff sections in MACV because everybody was so

intent on being successful that I think many people, and I think probably myself included, became overly optimistic and had the notion that we were doing probably better than we really were.

G: What exactly were your duties during the tenure of General Harkins?

J: I was--

(Interruption)

--a part of MACV's existence. I was in the MAAG under General Timmes and, as I recall, I was the assistant chief of staff for General Timmes. It wasn't long after that that I opted for a PASA assignment, which is a Participating Agency Service Agreement, which has to do with putting military people into civilian clothes and permitting them to work for civilian agencies of the government. In that arrangement, you are paid by the military; the time that you put in goes toward your military retirement, but you're not under the command of the military, and I accepted an offer of that kind from the Agency for International Development, which is a part of the State Department. So I was observing the MACV thing from quite another angle, really, and was not ever anything important at all in the military aspects of MACV.

G: What was AID doing in Vietnam in those days?

J: It was the biggest economic mission that's ever been put together on this planet. I don't remember how many people were involved, but it ran into the thousands, and the object of what AID was doing was to assist the Vietnamese government in the matter of supplies of all various kinds except military. We had teams that were out in the provinces. It started out--I don't have the dates in my head; my God, it's been so long!

But I was in charge of seven or eight different programs that the AID people were running. I started out, I guess you'd have to say, in something called the Chieu Hoi program, which had to do with getting defectors over on the government side. I did a study on that as my first move in this new role that I was playing, and then from then on it became something having to do with refugees, having to do with the civilian police force, things of that kind. The AID role throughout our involvement in Vietnam was absolutely tremendous and important and in many cases very well done. It was during that assignment that I finally went to work for [Henry] Cabot Lodge in the embassy as the mission coordinator and stayed there in that job, or one like it, throughout all the rest of the ambassadors, all of Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker's tour and all of Graham Martin's tour.

G: I'm trying to remember the dates of your service in Vietnam. Were you there in 1963, during the coup?

J: Yes, I should say so.

G: What was your vantage point to observe the events of that year?

J: I was working for the MAAG at that time, and it was a very exciting period. The triumvirate, Big [Duong Van] Minh, Tran Van Don, and Le Van Kim, were the three top generals that took over. I had heard in the past of people dancing in the streets, but I had never seen it before. But I did see it when that coup was successful.

An amazing group of things happened. For example, there was a statue down on the waterfront, a tremendous bronze thing, very large, of a woman, and the populace believed that it was a statue of Madame Nhu. Ngo Dinh Nhu was Diem's brother and this

was his wife, a thoroughly hated woman by particularly the Vietnamese women in Vietnam. So one of the first things they did was to throw a rope around the head of this statue and hook it up to a tractor and pull it off. (Laughter) But there was great joy in Saigon, and I'm sure--I don't know about the rest of the country, but I would guess there too. Big Minh and Tran Van Don and Le Van Kim, in my view, had the opportunity to do an awful lot of good for the country during that period, but, for whatever reason, they didn't move. They didn't get things started. They couldn't get the act together to the point that they were making obvious progress, or indeed doing anything. And then there came, of course, a series of coups and counter-coups and problems along the line, and there really wasn't any stability in the government from then until Nguyen Van Thieu and General [Nguyen Cao] Ky came into the government.

But these three generals had a great opportunity, and they fluffed it. Everybody's got, I'm sure, their own notion as to why that was. My own--and this is purely a personal belief and it's not backed up by anything--I am sure that the best planning general that the Vietnamese ever had is Le Van Kim, but I think that his plans, in his mind, had to be so perfect that they never got off the ground. He was brilliant to the point that he could see every little thing that could conceivably go wrong anywhere along the line and, as a result, it just didn't happen. Nothing came of it. I suppose it goes back to the German saying which declares that there are several kinds of people in the military and elsewhere. One is the brilliant, industrious officer, who must be the staff officer. He must be the man to look behind the trees, and he's got brains to see, and he's got ambition and diligence to sort out these things and can advise the commander very intelligently. Then

there's the brilliant, lazy fellow, who's always the best commander because he's too lazy to get involved in the sordid details, but he's bright enough to see which route one should take, and then he moves. He gets the show on the road. Then they say there's the stupid, lazy fellow. There's a lot of room for him. You can dig ditches; you can carry ammunition; you can do a lot of things. And then there's the stupid, industrious fellow, who must be shot immediately--(Laughter)--because he can louse up things in twenty-four hours that can't be straightened out in seventy-two.

I'm joking about that, but I really think that the brilliance of Le Van Kim probably was one of the stumbling blocks in the fact that those men--they had an opportunity, in my view, where the Vietnamese people would have followed them anywhere, but the leadership just wasn't obviously there.

G: Tell me about the opinions within the MAAG, within the embassy, about what should be done about Diem.

J: Well, everybody has got their own opinion about that. I was there when Diem took power. I don't remember what year it was. It was 1956 or 1957, something like that.

G: I think it may have been as early as 1954.

J: Was it? Anyway, it was way back there. It was in 1954. Maybe it was, come to think of it, maybe it was. My chronology on this is all mixed up.

G: I think the fight with the sects, the Binh Xuyen fight, was 1955.

J: I think that was 1955.

G: Yes.

J: And I think probably it was 1955 that he took over. Now, everybody has got their own opinion about Ngo Dinh Diem. I knew him, as did anybody on the American side who wanted to know him, because he was an absolutely magnificent leader. He got out among the people; he ruled the people; he was popular with the people. There was nothing withdrawn about him, and in my view he was doing a fine job, and that's true up to the day I left in 1957. Then I came back in 1961, and he was absolutely a changed man in every sense of the word. He was withdrawn. He was suspicious. When he rode down the street in an armored vehicle the windows along the way had to be shuttered. He was not permitting anybody to give him any information except a few generals and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. And it was just obvious that the stupid things that he did--just as an example, firing on the Buddhists in Hue and causing all kinds of problems at the Xa Loi pagoda, things that could have been handled in a far, far better way than a mailed fist. And at that time, it was obvious to me--now again, I'm sounding very arrogant about this. I'm talking now about my opinion and recognizing that that's not terribly important, but I was of the absolute opinion that perhaps we could avoid losing with Diem, but to win with him there was absolutely impossible.

One of the memories that I shall always treasure--we had an ambassador there by the name of [Elbridge] Durbrow, and Ambassador Durbrow, as did most of us, believed that Diem had to make some radical changes in policy, had to get rid of his brother and his brother's wife, and had to be more amenable and available to many senior people in Vietnam that he wasn't seeing at all. So all of us throughout the whole American community would write papers about what Diem ought to do, and if he didn't--"We've

just got to withdraw support. We've got to make him see the light, because he's just going down the wrong path." Well, Durbrow had a file, I'll bet a foot thick, of these papers, and he was about to present this to President Diem when a fellow by the name of Lyndon Johnson, our vice president, came to town. The minute he got off the airplane, he proclaimed Ngo Dinh Diem as the Winston Churchill of Asia, and we could all of us just hear Durby tearing up those papers and throwing them in the wastebasket because we had been submarined by the most high. (Laughter)

This is not a very interesting sidelight, but I must say that Lyndon Johnson, who was as big a man as you'll see, got--arrived at Tan Son Nhut Airport early in the morning. However, the Vietnamese had arranged to have crowds along the street where his motorcade would come in on his way to his quarters or the palace or wherever the hell he went, and Johnson drove everybody crazy, particularly his security people, by stopping the motorcade, getting out of the car, walking through this mob of little people, shaking hands with them, and they were scared to death. This was not the way politics was conducted in Vietnam, Texas style! But I tell you, he made an impression. He started working at seven o'clock in the morning, and I was assigned to his staff as the military member. Whatever he wanted, anything that had to do with the military, he or his staff contacted me, and I saw to it that they got it. Well, this man worked without ceasing. He sent his last cable off to the President in Washington at four o'clock in the morning. Now he had been going steady, and I finally turned to one of his staffers and I said, "What the hell is this man trying to prove? Seven o'clock in the morning and at this pace until four

in the morning! What goes?" This guy says, "What are you talking about? He's always like this. This is not unusual at all."

Well, anyway, now we had to deal with the Winston Churchill of Asia--(Laughter)--which made things just a little bit more difficult. I might have my facts mixed up, but I think that Durbrow--no, there was a civilian. Marvelous guy. I can't remember his name. He left Vietnam after his ambassadorship and went to Paris. I think he was a banker or something.

G: Was it [Frederick] Reinhardt?

J: No. Not Reinhardt. Anyway, then came, I think, Maxwell Taylor for a short time, and then Lodge.

G: Well, let's see. Lodge was there when Diem fell.

J: That's right. (Laughter) He sure was. He sure was.

G: That laugh was charged with meaning. What are you thinking?

J: Well-- Lodge had several conversations with Diem the day of the coup. I'm sure he had conversations with him--in fact, I know he did. I just don't know what was said before that, when Lodge did everything he could to make Diem see the light of day and realize that the way he was going was the way toward disaster. But the day of the coup, he offered Diem safe passage to anywhere he wanted to go; he offered him all of the assistance that the Americans could provide with respect to his personal safety, but he certainly didn't offer any American assistance in case of a coup. That was a Vietnamese affair, and the Americans were having none of it. Then, of course, as you know, Diem got out of the palace and went into Cholon, and when he finally did decide to come out,

he and his brother were murdered, which is something that--I am positive that no American had any idea about it. I still don't know, and I don't think anybody does, about who actually ordered that to be done. I'm sure that somebody ordered it because it wasn't something that some junior fellow would take on himself, because Diem was an extremely powerful man and had been in power for so long that he was recognized by one and all as someone that you don't just shoot out of hand, regardless. But I have no notion who issued that order, and all of us were grieved to see that that had happened.

I will say however that, knowing Diem, it was fortunate for him that he was killed, because had he gotten out of the country he wouldn't have rested until the day he died. He would have attempted to come back and save his country, and he would have continued that for the rest of his life. And it would have been painful for him as well as for everybody else. I think that it was a terrible thing but not an unfortunate one so far as he was concerned. You must remember that here was a man who had led a contemplative life all of his life. His family was rich, from the North; they were from Hue. He was a Catholic who was more Catholic than anybody. He went into this--was it the Maryknoll seminary?--where he contemplated his navel for so many years and then was taken from there into this cauldron of military and political controversy. And I am convinced personally--and again I have no background, no basis, to say this except I believe it--I believe that the difference in Ngo Dinh Diem in 1957, from 1955 or 1954, when he took over, until when I left--I think that between then and when I returned and saw him as a totally different man, I think that it was a mental problem due to overwork, because this man was a true patriot. Let there be no doubt about that. He did some very

foolish things, but he did them from what he believed was the best thing for his country. I think he was a totally honest man. I would be willing to bet that nobody will ever come up with any proof that this man stole five cents from the Vietnamese people or from the Vietnamese treasury. He was honest, he was dedicated, he was one hell of a man until something happened, and I happen to think that it was a matter of overwork, that his life had changed so much that the breaking point was reached, and that was it. Now, as I say, I don't think anybody else agrees with that, but that's what I think.

G: I think you were referring earlier to Ambassador Nolting.

J: Nolting is right. A fine man.

G: How would you contrast his style with Ambassador Lodge?

J: Well, Ambassador Lodge, of course, had the great plus of being able to get on the telephone and talk to the President anytime he thought it was a good idea. I never knew Lodge to sidestep the Secretary of State, but he could have had he wanted to, and he had clout in Washington that Nolting didn't have. But frankly their approach to things, in my view, was very much the same. I thought a lot of Ambassador Nolting, and of course I worked for Cabot Lodge for all that time, and I thought, and think, the world of him until he died a couple of years ago.

Nolting left Vietnam with Diem's promise that he was going to ease off his pressure on the Buddhists and was going to make some changes for the better. Nolting hadn't been in the air fifteen minutes before Diem ordered the attack on the Xa Loi pagoda, and I am told--and do not know because I didn't see it--that when Nolting got to Hawaii and found out that Diem had absolutely lied to him--and it had to have been a

premeditated lie, because that Xa Loi thing happened so soon after Nolting left--that Nolting sent Diem a burning communication. I don't know how he did it, whether by cable or by telegram on the civilian side or by letter or what, but I am told that he really told Diem what he thought of that sort of activity. No, I think everybody that was there thought Nolting was a good man, bright, able in every way.

G: Where were you the day that the coup began, physically?

J: Probably in the MAAG situation room. I'm not sure. I know that some of us, the minute we found out that it was on, went downtown to see what was cooking. There was no danger connected with that so far as we were concerned; we knew where the troops were, and we knew what was going on, so we couldn't get caught in the crossfire. So it was an interesting time. And finally the troops broke the gates down at the palace and it was over, and then the town went crazy. That's when I saw the dancing in the streets and all of that.

(Interruption)

G: All right, sir. You were describing the joy in the streets of Saigon when President Diem was overthrown, and you were saying that you had gone downtown because there wasn't any risk, you knew where the fighting was, and so on. Did you know that the coup was coming? Did you know that there was something in the wind?

J: Sure. Sure. What I did not know was exactly when it was going to occur. Admiral [Harry] Felt, who was CINCPAC at the time, flew in and wanted to see the government people while he was there, and Tran Van Don had the job of getting him the hell out of the country because this is the day the coup is going to occur. I think they jumped off at

something like one o'clock, and here it is ten o'clock in the morning, and Felt is still around. And Tran Van Don, as I understand it, finally did get him on his airplane and get him out, but that was a close call, too.

G: Yes, it was.

J: Is Felt still around?

G: I think he's on the West Coast. I think so. Admiral [U. S. Grant] Sharp is certainly out there on the West Coast.

J: Yes. Yes. Brilliant man, that Felt. Not easy to get along with but bright as hell. I don't know why he ever had a staff at all. He used to take a stack of material down on the beach and sit there with one yeoman and read what had to be acted upon and dictate the answer right now, and out it went. He didn't even proofread it. He just dictated the answer, and that was that. I bet that nobody was more surprised than his staff in many, many instances, because that's the way he used to handle things.

G: What about the Khanh coup? Now that comes in late January, I guess, of 1964. And you were in the MAAG, and there are all kinds of stories as to whether we knew that one was coming or not.

J: We did. I wish I had a chronology with me. I'm trying--oh, Jap [Jasper] Wilson was Khanh's friend and confidante, and Jap Wilson, in the best tradition of what an army officer should do, kept his American superiors informed as to what was going on, and Jap was--and I'm sure is--a terribly capable guy. I did not know that this was in the offing because I wasn't in that kind of a position at that point, but I am positive that the senior

people knew. I guess I shouldn't say that, because nobody ever told me that, but it just makes a lot of sense because I know Jap knew about it, and I know Jap. I think we knew.

G: You said to me off tape that Ambassador Lodge was a mentor of yours. Tell me about that. In what way did that work?

J: Well, while I was still in the military, I briefed the ambassador on the military situation, or some aspect of it; I don't remember what it was about. And he invited me to lunch. So we had lunch at his house. He had a terrible cook. The food was so bad that Joe Alsop threatened to stay elsewhere. (Laughter) I get wound up in these funny stories. Lodge told me that the worst part of the job of being an ambassador is "this goddamn State Department eating." He said, "If I could just take nourishment with a hypodermic needle, and never would have to sit down to a table again, that would be the way I'd like to go." Well, anyway. We got on rather well. He was a charming fellow, you know, truly a charming guy, and I was very honored to have been invited and all that. So later, when I came to the embassy as the mission coordinator, I was still in the--

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J: It became obvious to me that I was not going to become a general, so I had thought about retiring from the army and doing something in civilian life. I had no notion what it was going to be, but I knew that colonel was the best I was going to do, so that was that.

G: Are you saying that General Harkins blocked your--

J: I'm not going into that.

G: All right.

J: But it became known to me that I had had it, and--

G: How much service did you have at that time?

J: Twenty-some years, enough so that I could have retired had I wanted to. And so I'm working for Lodge, and I told him that I thought that I was going to retire and go back to the United States, and he said, "Well, how do you think you'd like to work for the Department of State?" And I said, "Well, I'd like it fine, but I know of no way that that can be done." So he said, "Well, let's see if it can be done." So he helped me to get on a permanent situation with the outfit that I had been working for, as a PASA person. So I can say that I owe my civilian career in government to Cabot Lodge.

G: I see. What does the mission coordinator do?

J: We had something in Vietnam called the mission council. In other countries, it's known as the country team. It consists of the ambassador, people at the embassy--the political counselor, the press counselor, the economic counselor. Then there's the CIA station chief; the military chief, whoever he is; the AID chief. And of course during this period they needed somebody to kind of set up the agendas for that sort of thing, and if a problem came up that involved more than one agency, they needed somebody to coordinate the action and honcho the thing along so that there would be a result of some kind in a fairly short time. That's the sort of thing that I was doing.

However, you run into some very odd things. For example, Mrs. Cabot Lodge did not--the wives were not permitted to stay in Saigon during that time, so she lived in Bangkok. Every day that she left to go to Bangkok, Lodge would walk from his office into mine and he would say, "I'm sure you're doing something very important, but it's not nearly as important as staying on the line to Bangkok and letting me know the instant

Emily hits the ground." So that's the kind of things that--in other words, for all of those years, I sharpened pencils and emptied wastebaskets for some of the most distinguished Americans we've ever had.

And I was very lucky in that regard. I finally left the embassy--this was during the Bunker regime--and took over a pacification job with MACV and had the marvelous opportunity of working for Bill Colby, and there's never been a better man in government, in my view, from then until now. This man is a magnificent public servant. There's controversy about it, of course, but I'm of the opinion that he's the one that saved the agency, because if he hadn't been as forthcoming as he was before the congressional committees during his tenure, I think that the enemies of the intelligence community would have managed to wreck it even further than it was wrecked at that time. Of course, Colby was roundly criticized by many people for being too forthcoming with his relations with the Congress, but as I say, I believe that he did exactly the right thing, that he had the courage to do it, and that he saved the agency by acting just exactly as he did. And then, of course, when he left because of the sickness of one of his children--the girl later died--I went to work for Creighton Abrams, and after that Fred Weyand, and then I went to the embassy and back to my old job as mission coordinator for Ambassador Bunker and then stayed on in that job during the Martin regime. All of them fascinating.

I am a thousand-per-cent backer of one of the controversial fellows out there, Graham Martin. I believe that had Graham Martin done what he was urged, and indeed ordered, to do during the last days, we would have panicked Vietnam like we panicked Da Nang, and instead of getting every American out that wanted to get out, including the

thousands of Vietnamese--many of them the wrong kind, I understand that; I was in charge of that, for God's sake. I still live with that. We got out an awful lot of bar girls, and we left an awful lot of people who deserved to be taken out at all costs. But Martin has--well, he has to carry his balls around in a wheelbarrow. He is just a courageous man, and I think that he did very well, and he was a terribly sick man at the end. He never let anyone know that, but you couldn't see him as often as I did without knowing that he was in really a bad way, and since then he has come out of all of his problems. He had [an operation] for lung cancer, of all things, and came out of that, and he's still down in Carolina. I don't think he's doing anything, but I tell you if he ever went back into public service and needed somebody to go with him, I would go in an instant. That's what I think of Graham Martin. A lot of people disagree. I understand that.

G: That's a good characterization. I wonder if you would characterize some of our other ambassadors that you had the opportunity to observe. How about General [Maxwell] Taylor, or then-Ambassador Taylor?

J: Well, as everybody knows that knows him, he's a super intellect. He's just so bright that it scares you. He's been first in everything since he graduated as valedictorian of his kindergarten class. Marvelous linguist, incisive, brilliant; in those days a cold, calculating man. Very little warmth, unlike now, when he is a charming fellow. But in those days, he was very cold. For example, he played tennis almost every day. I never heard him say a word to anybody that he was playing with. When it was over, he would walk off the court. If he ever told anybody, "Nice game, thanks a lot," I never heard him say that. And probably he treated the Vietnamese generals with less respect than they

would like to have been treated. I think that his success was absolute with respect to his relationship with Washington; his reports, I am sure, were well done. But his relations with the Vietnamese were not what an ambassador would like to see. I am sure of that.

Cabot Lodge: a brilliant man. Great writer, a very good writer. He was accused of being lazy. I think that started when he was [Richard] Nixon's vice-presidential choice, and apparently he didn't open as many supermarkets as they thought he ought to have. He might have been lazy in doing stupid things, but when it came to something important he was anything but lazy; he was a dynamo. I've seen him work around the clock many times. First-class man, no question about it.

Ellsworth Bunker. If there ever was a true patrician and yet a man who had as much of the common touch as anybody I've ever worked for in my life--I would dare say that of all the people I have worked for, certainly all of the civilians that I've worked for, I think you would find it extremely difficult to find anybody who had anything but the best to say about Ellsworth Bunker. That's the kind of a man he was. He was a flint-like man when it came to something important, but he was a charming gentleman under all circumstances. He is a truly remarkable man and one that the country can be very proud of. He was a political appointee when Harry Truman appointed him to be our ambassador in the Argentine, and I guess from then on his service was as distinguished as anybody that we've ever had. He was in the same mold as David Bruce and Governor [Averell] Harriman, that kind of man. He became--going from a political appointee to a professional's professional and was recognized in the Department of State by everybody as being the best there was, and he was.

Graham Martin. I think the world of him, but he's not the easiest man in the world to work for. He has a well-developed ego, very well-developed. Now he's got a lot to be egotistical about, I'll admit that. But he rather, in my view, overdoes it a bit. But maybe that's the kind of confidence one would have to have to do what he did in the last days. You see, what we were afraid of was panicking Saigon. And the other great, great worry, when it became obvious that we were going to have to leave: what would the attitude of the Vietnamese forces be? Would they be willing to let us go and they stay, or would they say, "Look, you can go, but only if we can go with you, and our families," which would have been an absolute impossibility. We moved out a lot of senior people and some that weren't so senior, but to move out, let's say, the airborne division and the marine division, which were in Saigon at the time . . . So he had his problems, and if he had done what they wanted him to do--for example, we had a few big ships in the Saigon harbor. We could have taken out ten thousand people in one of them, [although] they'd have been stacked up like cordwood. But we knew that if we did that, and those people came down the Saigon River out toward the [South] China Sea, that all hell was going to break loose, and we probably wouldn't get anybody out. So we were dancing on this thin line of how do you handle this, and I don't know how the other ambassadors that I worked for would have handled it. I don't know. But I'm just as glad that it was Martin that was there, because he was up to it, in my view. So that's the general sketch.

Now, I've talked about Colby and what I think about him. I hope you speak to him; he's a magnificent guy. He's got a law firm here now.

I suppose for personal affection and belief that--in his own sphere of activity, the greatest man that I have known was Creighton Abrams. He was the first man, for example, to come to the conclusion that the only possibility of winning that war was to train the Vietnamese to fight their own battles. He came in as General Westmoreland's deputy, and he carved out a niche for himself that had to do almost exclusively with upgrading the military forces of the Vietnamese. He fought the battles to get them better weapons, better training; [he] did so much in building their morale, in personally doing the things that people can do if they're able to motivate other people. Creighton Abrams had no peer in that regard. I can't say enough about the magnificence of that man.

Freddie Weyand. Another absolutely first-class man. Freddie was not a West Pointer, but then again neither was George Marshall, so I guess that isn't the only ticket to success in the military. But Fred Weyand had tremendous ability and probably the most scintillating personality of anybody I know. He's also the best briefing officer that I ever saw in my whole life. I've spent a lot of time trying to do that myself, so I can recognize the absolute excellence of this man. Let me give you an example.

It's during Tet in 1968, and Saigon is burning; I mean, it's on fire, and our troops are the ones that really torched it up because we've got the wherewithal to do it. So Ambassador Bunker said to General Westmoreland at a mission council meeting, "I want to talk to the man that's in charge of the troops around here. Here's Saigon on fire. I want to know what goes on, and I want to be briefed on the military aspects of this." So they brought in Freddie Weyand, who was the III Corps commander, in charge, therefore, of Saigon and all of the areas around it. General Weyand came in in field uniform--dirty,

smoked-up face. He had a beat-up old map that he carried around to place his forces where he wanted, and he started to talk. Twenty minutes later, I can tell you that everybody in that mission council, Bunker included, had made up his mind that the greatest thing in the world was to put Saigon on fire! There was just nothing else that could do the same good that that did. And as we walked out the door together I said, "General Weyand, you've got a lot to answer for." (Laughter) He was the most convincing man that I have ever known. I would have loved to have heard his testimony before any of the Senate or House committees. I'll just bet that he was received with respect and with great admiration. You couldn't read his testimony and have it give the same impression that it would if he gave it in person, because he's got something in his presentation that is absolutely magnificent. He was quite a guy.

For example, he wouldn't play golf in Vietnam, and he certainly wouldn't play with anybody that came out from Washington, because he was so damn good that people who didn't know would think all he did was play golf. That's how good he was. He went out every year and won the tournament, whatever the hell it was. He would just win it, of course.

He was a great tennis player. I asked him where he played tennis, and I think it was UCLA. He said, "But I never made the team. There were five on the team, and I was number six." And I said, "Well, who was number one?" And he said, "Don Budge." (Laughter) Well, you know, if you're kept off the team because of Don Budge, you're not doing bad. But he was a marvelous athlete, marvelous military mind, civilian. You can't beat Freddie Weyand. He's got a very good job now in Hawaii. He works as vice-

president of a bank, I think, and he's always known he was going to retire there. He had the--I think it was the Twenty-ninth Division there and then brought it over to Vietnam.

G: Was it the Twenty-fifth?

J: I don't know. Yes. Maybe it was the Twenty-fifth. I guess Twenty-fifth. Yes. The Twenty-ninth wasn't over--I don't know. Anyway, the division that came from Hawaii, he brought it over, and then it wasn't long before he was promoted and became the III Corps commander.

G: Right.

J: And then he moved up to General Abrams' deputy, and then he took over when General Abrams became army chief of staff.

Those are the characters I worked for, and I loved them all. You know, I've been very lucky. I have never worked--well, I can't say that. With the exception of one, I have never worked for a man that I didn't admire and one that I recognized fully was a better man than I, and that's an excellent thing, because--I've just been terribly fortunate in that regard. All of these fellows were absolutely first-class. You couldn't beat them.

G: Let me ask you a question about a specific incident. You were in Vietnam--you say you came back in 1961. Is that right? What time of the year?

J: I think it was January, but I wouldn't--very early. Very early.

G: What are your recollections of the [Maxwell?] Taylor-[Walt?] Rostow visitation which descended on the embassy in--I guess it was the spring of that year?

J: My recollection is that they were there and that I was not in a sufficiently senior position so that I had anything to do with them. I didn't attend any of the briefings, and I don't know anything about it. I just wasn't in that kind of a spot.

G: Yes. Sure. Did Ed Lansdale come and see you at that time, that you recall?

J: He didn't come with them, that I know of. He brought his own group out. He had Dan Ellsberg.

G: Yes.

J: And--

G: Wait a minute. This is when he came later, wasn't it? In 1965?

J: Yes. Well, I didn't know that Ed came with Taylor.

G: Yes. Okay.

J: If he did, I didn't see him at that time, or I've forgotten it. I don't know.

G: Well, let's talk about the 1965 return, then, of Ed Lansdale, because there is not a whole lot known about what he was supposed to do and how he went about doing it.

J: Well, I've got to go on the confidential routine on this one because I admire Ed Lansdale for what he did in the earlier days, but Ed's later advent was fraught with disaster. He didn't do anything. It was a very unsuccessful mission. In the first place, too many people expected too much. They expected Ed to move in there and in three weeks turn the whole thing around and have everything in apple-pie order--the troops come home; the bands will play. I don't remember the names of a lot of those people. I knew them all very well. They had a fellow by the name of Bohannon who I remember. They had a Filipino, a colonel, Valeriano was his name. They had an economist whose name I just

can't remember, and I wish I could because he was the goddamnedest four-flusher I have ever known in my life. When he talked about Jack, you knew he meant Kennedy. When he talked about his conversation with Dean, you knew it was Rusk. When he talked about anybody in any position at all, he used nicknames and first names, and I think he had the chief justice of the Supreme Court that came out to Virginia someplace to attend his wedding or marry him, maybe. I don't remember. Anyway, just ridiculous stuff. But when this group first got there, you know, they came with an aura of grandeur, and at cocktail parties somebody would ask one of these guys, "Well, what are you doing here?" They'd say, "Well, I'm with the Lansdale group." And they'd say, "Oh! Well! Fascinating!" In a month, the same question would be asked, "Who are you with out here?" And they'd--"I'm with the Lansdale group." "Oh, yeah, well--so much for that."

It was just a terribly unsuccessful operation, and one of the reasons for this--and this is the main reason for absolutely insisting on confidentiality--Phil Habib, who is as great a guy as has ever been in the area of diplomacy--do you know Phil?--he thought Lansdale was a zero with the rim knocked off, and he communicated this to everybody in authority, namely Henry Cabot Lodge. And Henry Cabot Lodge was smart enough to recognize not only the fact that Phil was probably right, because nothing was happening, but also the fact that Phil said it meant a lot to Lodge because Lodge had all the confidence in Phil Habib that he should have had, because Phil was that good.

The first hour of every day at the embassy, there were three of us: Cabot Lodge behind his desk, Phil Habib in one chair in front of the desk, and myself in the other. So I had an opportunity to watch Phil Habib, who was political counselor at the time at the

embassy. I saw the way that man's penetrating mind worked, and in those days if Phil Habib decided that you weren't the greatest, you weren't the greatest, and that's all there was to it.

But he was right. The Lansdale group did nothing. They couldn't! You see, Lansdale came out there with no organizational background. He didn't have the unlimited funds that he was used to having when he was with the Agency. It was unfair as hell to expect Lansdale to do what some people thought he was going to do. Now I personally think his choice of assistants was a bad choice. The only truly brilliant man he had was Dan Ellsberg. During that time I was chairman of a roles and missions group, which was--I had one guy from each agency in town, and we wrote a paper for Lodge outlining the roles and missions of every agency in town and being very critical, too, and one of my ace performers was Dan Ellsberg. As a matter of fact, it was kind of interesting. Dan Ellsberg was the greatest hawk that I have ever seen in Vietnam. He is the only man that I ever heard seriously contemplate using nuclear weapons against Hanoi. Then of course he turned around and went the other way. But Dan Ellsberg is a brilliant--

G: Do you know what turned him around?

J: I think I do, but it doesn't make any sense. So I hesitate saying it, but I've been saying a lot of other things that didn't make any sense either, so why not? Ellsberg was absolutely convinced that the only person that could save Vietnam was General Ky, Nguyen Cao Ky, and in the Thieu-Ky controversy, Dan was adamant that "If Ky doesn't come out on

top, everything is lost!" Well, then it turned out that Thieu came out on top and Ky was relegated to flying a helicopter around and wearing fancy uniforms, and that started Dan's slide toward the other aspect of the situation. In other words, he had talked himself into, I think, being so convinced that if Ky didn't get it we were in grave trouble; we were in deep kimchi. And then when it turned out that he didn't get it, this was a blow that Dan had great trouble living with, I think. Then there were other pressures that were on him, and I understand that he has now become kind of a professional protester, or whatever the current thing is. But make no mistake about it, Dan Ellsberg has got a remarkable brain.

But the Lansdale group was a total failure. They didn't do a thing that was meaningful, but they couldn't. They expected Lansdale to do the impossible, and, strangely enough, he couldn't do it because it was impossible.

G: There's another controversy that you might be able to shed some light on, and that has to do with the case of David Nes, who came out about December of 1963, I think, to be Ambassador Lodge's deputy chief of mission and was only there about six months. Do you know anything about that?

J: No. Not a thing. Not a thing. No.

G: You didn't know him at all then?

J: No. No, I didn't.

G: Okay. Of course, a famous story is your experience at Tet, and I'm not necessarily going to ask you to rehash that, except to ask you if the things that have appeared in print are more or less what did happen, like, for instance, in Don Oberdorfer's book on Tet [*Tet!: The Turning Point in the Vietnam War*].

J: Yes. Don Oberdorfer's book had it straight. There's been a lot of nonsense about it, the written--but Oberdorfer--his book is quite remarkable not only in the small part that I played in it, but his book is quite a remarkable job of research and reporting, I must say.

I had a personal experience that was kind of fun in that book. His book starts out with my experience with the shooting it out with this VC, and I got on an airplane on one of my frequent trips back and forth from the United States to Saigon, and there were a couple of people on it that were sitting right in back of me that--I think they were going to Japan or someplace; they weren't going to Vietnam. But they had bought this book, this *Tet!*. And one of them said to the other one, he said, "Do you see this? They're talking about this guy Jacobson." He says, "Well, I've got a nephew that works for him, and he says he's the most miserable son-of-a-bitch to work for in the whole bureaucracy!" And I just thought it would be great fun to go back and introduce myself, but I didn't. (Laughter)

G: What an opportunity.

J: Yes. Yes.

G: So you don't think there's anything that needs correcting in his account of your experience at Tet?

J: No. No. It was an enervating experience; I mean, it wasn't any fun at all. It was just a hell of a night. There's no question about it. The funniest thing--I could talk to Washington but I couldn't talk to the embassy, which was a hundred feet away. That was a lot of luck, but, you know, frankly, the thing that saved me was my military training about, of all things, village fighting, which we did a lot of. I was in a reconnaissance

outfit in World War II, and that's a good kind of an outfit to be in. You're way out in front where there's no inspectors, and when you get into the town, you've got looting privileges, of course. (Laughter) But you do learn something about close combat, about how to handle things when somebody is going to shoot you, and so this worked out all right. It was something that I don't want to do any more of, but it was a fascinating thing.

It was interesting--General Westmoreland's comment to the newspaper people [was] that this was a sound military defeat of the other side, and, of course, the news guys hooted at that, but it was true. As a matter of fact, from that moment on, the VC [Viet Cong], the southern communist supporters, were really of no consequence from that time on, and there were no North Vietnamese involved in that, you know. It was all southerners, which meant that all of the hard-core cadre surfaced and became known and were either killed or later identified and thrown into Con Son by the suspect Phoenix program. So this Tet of 1968 was one of the turning points of the war. Of course, this is what sank Lyndon Johnson. There's no question about that. I'll tell you a story about that.

The mission council met--well, I think it was a Monday. I'm not sure whatever day it was [March 31, 1968]. You'll be able to tell me because you'll know when I finish the story. We had it at an hour where we could listen to Lyndon Johnson's speech; he was making a speech. And at the end of the speech was when he told us, told the world, that he was not going to stand for re-election. Well now, there was a bombshell for us. I am positive that Ellsworth Bunker had no notion that Johnson was going to say that. I think that the least surprised man in the room was General Westmoreland, because when

General Westmoreland was back in Washington, I think that Lyndon Johnson--whether to sound out Westy or whatever, I think he intimated to Westy that he probably was not going to run. But for the rest of us, we were truly surprised.

G: Can you describe that setting when you were all sitting there watching?

J: Oh, yes. We had this room, and we had a great table, and all of us were sitting around the room and we were listening to the speech. And the speech was a boilerplate sort of thing all the way through, nothing that we didn't expect, except when he made that final sentence. I don't think I've ever seen a group of senior people so absolutely shocked, surprised totally. There was silence. Everybody was thinking in their own mind, "Did he really say what I think I heard him say?" And then we started, of course, talking about it, and you know, it was one of the few times in the history of the world where a man willingly gives up power. When you look at the power structure of the ages--look at old fellows like [Konrad] Adenauer, like [Charles] de Gaulle, like [Winston] Churchill, like [Franklin] Roosevelt. People do not give up power willingly or easily, and Lyndon Johnson had to be very convinced that he could not be re-elected; otherwise, in my view, he never would have done that. I am no great fan of Lyndon Johnson. I think he was a gross, un-housebroken human being, and I thank God I never had to work for the man. Vicious, he was, I thought. His professional capability, of course, is undoubted. He got more legislation passed in sixty days than JFK had in any of the time he was in there or any of the time he might ever have been in there. And so Johnson's capability is not in question. He was just a boorish man, in my view. (Inaudible) I must say I don't think he

liked me very much, either. I'm joking about that, because he doesn't know me from a load of wood and never did.

An interesting thing: He had a sense of humor, which I wouldn't have believed, but he had these--this was when he was president now, not vice president. A Secret Service man who travels with the president is a fellow who is perfectly willing to give up a hundred years of diplomatic success in order to make goddamned sure that he gets his man back to Washington safe. They couldn't care less what they louse up. Well, they were doing a good--

Tape 2 of 2

G: All right, sir. You were talking about the visit of LBJ.

J: Yes, talking about the Secret Service and the fact that they were fudging the schedule and making all the Vietnamese look bad and making us look bad. So I got Ambassador Bunker to one side and I said, "Mr. Ambassador, this schedule-fuzzing is not accidental, and these Secret Service types are doing that as a matter of safety for the President, and God Almighty, if he isn't safe enough with this many American troops around, we're really in trouble. Maybe you could speak to the President and tell him that we're going to have great trouble with the Vietnamese if this continues." So Bunker did. He went to LBJ, and he said, "You know, your Secret Service guys are mixing the schedule around, and we have President Thieu standing on the tarmac waiting for you for fifteen minutes longer than he was supposed to wait, and he's not happy about that." Johnson put his arm around Bunker, and he said, "Ellsworth, let me tell you about the Secret Service." He says, "There are few cum laudes among 'em." (Laughter)

Then we went up to Cam Ranh Bay, and it was time to go now, time to leave. So one of the lieutenants whose job it was to shepherd the President around as to where he ought to go--he said, "Mr. President, that's your chopper right there." Johnson put his arm around the kid, and he says, "Son, they're all my choppers." (Laughter) Oh, great! This guy was honest-to-God--

G: Did you go to Cam Ranh Bay on that trip when he passed out all the awards?

J: Yes.

G: If you'll remind me, I'll tell you something I heard about that one you'll appreciate, but it doesn't belong on the tape.

J: I don't think anything I've said belongs on the tape!

G: Oh, yes, it does, too. Now, back to that March 31 speech business. After the announcement was made and the TV was turned off, was there a meeting of the mission council then, or what happened, do you recall?

J: Well, the agenda went out the window. I think all we talked about was the repercussions of this and what it would mean, and I don't think--as I recall, there wasn't any meeting that day. The meeting was supposed to be--first we listen to the President, then we get on our agenda, what the hell ever it was we had in mind for that day. But as I recall, there weren't any agenda items at all. That was it. We were really very shocked and very surprised.

G: What did you think the repercussions were going to be among the Vietmanese? You'd been with the Vietnamese longer than anybody else.

J: It didn't have much of an effect at all. At least in my recollection, I don't remember that there was even very much conversation about it with the Vietnamese. They were more or less of the opinion that the American president was going to support them no matter who the American president was, and I don't think that they thought that was a big moment in their lives.

G: We thought more about it than they did?

J: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, there's no question about that.

Well, it was an experience because, like him or not, Johnson was a very strong man and a very determined one and obviously a capable one. But it just happened that the Jane Fondas of this world, who, of course, were in charge of our foreign policy in those days, defeated him--made him believe, and probably rightfully so, that he couldn't win. I have never really believed that. I thought maybe that--if that's the reason that he didn't run, and I can think of no other reason.

G: Well, some people have cited his health as a consideration.

J: I don't believe it for a minute. I don't believe it for a minute. I think if he was on his deathbed he would have run if he thought he was going to win. No, I think he believed that he would lose. I think that. Who the--I don't know; my God, how would I know? But you know, now Jane Fonda has given up on the foreign policy; she's now in charge of our nuclear policy. So as long as we follow her lead, we're certain to come out in second place.

G: What vibrations did you get there in Saigon about what has come to be known as the Madame Chennault affair in the fall of 1968, in which it is alleged that she was advising

Thieu to withhold his agreement to the treaty because he could get a better deal from Nixon than he would from Humphrey?

J: I don't know anything about it. She is alleged to have told Thieu to--what treaty are you talking about?

G: Well, the cease-fire agreement, I should say, in the fall of 1968, with the complete cessation of bombing and so on that LBJ was working on.

J: I have no knowledge of that. I have no knowledge. I have no reason at all to think about Madame Chennault one way or the other. I have no knowledge.

G: Not too many people knew about it. I just wasn't sure whether you were one of them.

J: No, I have absolutely no knowledge of it.

G: Tell me about CORDS [Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support]. You came to take over CORDS. How did that take place?

J: Well, I was asked by General Abrams to take it over, and it was a delightful experience; I enjoyed it a lot. We had teams in every one of the provinces, and we had all of the programs that had to do with pacification, each and every one. I was fortunate in that I was working for two fine men, Colby and Abrams, and with that kind of backing--and then I had access to Bunker whenever I wanted him or needed him, because he was the one that agreed to let me go out there, and he was the one that brought me back when the party was over out there. But it was a routine managerial job. I had about I'd guess maybe ten thousand people, most of them military, of course; probably not over twelve to fifteen hundred civilians, but that's quite a few civilians, too. But it was an opportunity to

do a lot of traveling, see a lot of Vietnam at the village and hamlet level as well as the province level, of course.

I am able to say unequivocally that CORDS won its war. At the end, the VC had absolutely nothing to do with the final result. They were finished. They just weren't a force at all. We were defeated by conventional forces of division size, which were either in South Vietnam or came down from the North at the time that the final party was held. It's kind of interesting about that because in the days of Sam Williams, the big cry by the civilian generals back here in Washington was "What in the world are you doing forming divisions, for God's sake? What you should do is have nothing bigger than a battalion, and even companies are far better for this kind of warfare. You're trying to drive a tack with a sledgehammer. You can't do that! These big, unwieldy organizations are just the height of stupidity." Well, our position was--and I agreed with the whole thing at that time, and I was in the military at that time--that a division is a first-class organization with which you can do anything that you want, and you can still have the logistical and technical backup at division level that you're going to need no matter what. You're going to have to have communications, you're going to have to have engineers, you're going to have artillery, you're going to have to have quartermasters, and how do you handle this if you only organize your combat forces at a battalion level? It made no sense to us that with a division you could do whatever the hell you wanted, and you still had the basic building block that armies are traditionally made of and that has been proven successful for so long. So for me it was interesting that the final debacle occurred with purely conventional forces of division size in purely standard, textbook battles that the

Vietnamese, for a variety of reasons that you're aware of, such as morale, such as shortage of ammunition and gasoline and all the rest, due to the cutoff in United States aid--it was the divisions that defeated us. And at that time the VC were finished. So we at CORDS say, "We won our war." And I believe that, and I will always believe that.

But that was a terrible time; that was a terrible time. It was the Watergate thing. And for some of us it was particularly difficult because any sensible person who had even scanned the Paris accords and recognized that the situation in the United States was as it was--I can't tell you how many times I talked to Prime Minister Khiem and all of his ministers and everybody else, telling them, "You must realize that the political situation in America is such that we've got to get our prisoners back and we've got to get our troops out of here, and if that can't be done, and isn't done, then you can forget the whole thing because you're not going to get five cents of aid from the United States, because those are the political imperatives in the United States. We recognize that it is a very, very tragic thing that we are leaving in your back yard the number of North Vietnamese troops that we are leaving. We recognize that that is a very bad thing to have to do, but that's part of the price that has to be paid. However, the other side is a signatory to this agreement too, and they know that if they break the rules of these accords, that we have got our B-52s stationed at Utapao and in Guam, that we've got the Seventh Fleet in the [South] China Sea, and if the other side doesn't abide by these agreements, President Nixon will loose those forces, and you know his reputation for doing exactly that, and he will."

Well, then came Watergate. Nixon is out and [Gerald] Ford is in, and the political imperatives in the United States now change. In other words, the doves have won the day, and the aid is cut off or reduced to a mere trickle where it was just obvious to the Vietnamese that we were not interested in their survival. Everybody has their own way of knowing when the chips were finished, when the poker game was over. I don't remember the date, but it was the day that the other side took Song Be in Phuoc Long province, a province capital, and we didn't do a goddamned thing about it. In fact, nobody in Washington even mentioned it in a mild sort of speech or a news conference or anything. Now that, of course, gave the other side the green light, knowing that Ford was not going to use the B-52s or the Seventh Fleet or anything else. And while the loss of military hardware, like ammunition and spare parts and tanks and replacement trucks and POL [petroleum, oil, and lubricants?] and all the rest--while this was a big thing, the biggest thing of all was the drop in morale in the Vietnamese forces, because the last private knew that we were finished, that they were on their own, and "whatever happens, we regret, but that's the way it's going to be." And I personally had told so many Vietnamese, "Don't worry. This is a strong president and he's not going to permit this to happen." I don't blame Ford. I'm no great admirer of Ford; I don't know anything about him really, and I don't care. But I was goddamned near clinically depressed over the way the end came, and--did you happen to see my comments in *Newsweek* that I did in their Vietnam issue?

G: Yes.

J: Well, I explained in there that when I got back here I turned down sixteen jobs in the State Department because it had something to do with Vietnam, and I just didn't want any of it. And the fact that for a year, more than that, I avoided all Vietnamese like the plague because I was so goddamned ashamed of being an American, if you can imagine that. I thought that we had acted so badly and had deceived them so tragically that I, for one, couldn't look them in the eye and didn't want to. I'm not over that yet.

But it was a hell of an experience, let me tell you, to see this whole thing crumble. And at the very end, as you probably know, I was in charge of this evacuation. It was my ball game, and I can tell you that I have been heartbroken ever since about the number of people that we should have gotten out and couldn't. I'm positive that any number of them were just lined up and shot. I'm sure of that, and I'm very ashamed of this. By God, it wasn't that we didn't give it a whirl. It was just that it came so fast, and the house of cards tumbled so quickly and so completely that we couldn't get to these people. We couldn't get where they were to get them to an exit point. It just couldn't be done.

I'll give you an example. Can you imagine what happened to those civilian judges that sent that number of people to Con Son Island? Can you imagine what happened to them? To the best of my knowledge, I didn't get one out. There were about nine of them. I couldn't do it, and there were other equally deserving people that we didn't get out. I am, of course, proud of the fact that there was not a single American, not one, who presented himself for evacuation, no matter where he was, that we didn't get out.

While we're on that subject and while I'm mad at Washington, I'll tell you something else that these clowns didn't seem to understand. They would send screaming telegrams to Graham Martin saying, "You're not getting the American community out fast enough. Now move them out!" Apparently nobody thought that, number one, an American ambassador has got the power of God himself over all *official* Americans. That's military, civilians working for the government, any bureaucrat no matter where he is or what he's doing. If the ambassador says, "Jump," they jump. But we had thousands of contractors out there, RMK guys or whatever--I guess that was what it was. Anyway, I don't know how many civilian contracting firms were out there. Now many of these guys had been there for ten years, and they had developed liaisons with Vietnamese women. They had families. Some of them were married according to the Buddhist tradition, and many of them weren't, but that didn't make any difference. They were not going to leave their families, by God, and the ambassador could wail and scream and do whatever he wanted to, but he had no authority over those people. This was never understood back here. So it just took a long time.

For example, when we first started the evacuation there was one man in the Ministry of the Interior, one man who had one stamp, and before you could exit Vietnam legally, you needed that stamp. Well, naturally we went to the Minister of Interior. And finally the Vietnamese agreed to give up their sovereignty, literally, because what is more evidence of that than giving us the ability to decide what Vietnamese will go and then taking them out, which is what the Vietnamese let us do at the end? I'm sure we would have done it anyway, but they did give us that authority. But it was never understood

back here. It couldn't have been--the cables that came out directing us to "cut down faster. Got to get these men out! Load up those ships down in that harbor and send them out!" And Martin just hung tough and just wouldn't do it. I'm convinced that if he had, we'd have panicked Saigon, and we wouldn't have gotten anybody out in comparison to the numbers that we did get out.

But that's my story, and as I said in the *Newsweek* article--Ha! The only great thing about that is that my funny comments are sandwiched between Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger. (Laughter) I thought that was good planning. Anyway, let's wind this up by letting me tell you, as I told *Newsweek*, the three things in the sixteen or seventeen--I don't know how many years I was there, but an awful lot of them--I learned only three things, and they are as follows: First, never under any circumstances get yourself into what is called a limited war, because the other side in all probability will not have the same understanding that you do with respect to the parameters of a limited war. In other words, we were never permitted to go north of the 17th parallel with ground troops, certainly not to Hanoi. But the other side had no qualms about making for Saigon. That's what I mean by a difference of opinion with respect to what a term means. So no "limited" wars.

The next thing is, the fleeting fraction of a split second when you find out that your country is not in back of what you are doing in war, cut your losses and get the hell out as soon as you can, because you're going to lose anyway, and the sooner you get out, the less loss you're going to take, both the loss of men and the loss of face. That's the second thing.

And the third thing is, I am absolutely convinced that if we had had no censorship and if we had had unlimited television, we would have lost World War II. I am absolutely convinced of that. You can't serve up blood on color television every night for dinner and expect the mamas of America to continue to support you. So those are the Jacobson laws. (Laughter)

G: Frank Snepp's book, *Decent Interval* [*Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam*]--well, let me ask you by asking if you knew Frank Snepp. I presume you knew who he was.

J: I knew him very well. Let me tell you about Frank.

G: Go ahead.

J: Frank Snepp is an exceedingly bright and able young man. I personally regret that he got himself into a box where his usefulness in government probably is not very high, because he is a capable man. Now I say that regardless of the fact that he spent a lot of his book taking me to task for almost everything. However, the main criticism that he had of me, and he had a lot of it, was that I was absolutely loyal to Graham Martin, and in this he is absolutely right. So while I rather regret that Frank took some of the dirty holds that he took--and I mean particularly with respect to Tom Polgar, who considered Frank as a son--I thought that Frank did an amazing job of getting a book out in the time that he got it out in. This was not an easy book to write. Now, I don't agree with very much of what Frank says, but I think he says it well, and I know for a certainty that Frank is a particularly bright young man, and I hold no grudges at all.

I had a bit of fun. When I came back--you know, all your friends will send you copies of books where somebody has given you the worst of it. I've got a series of them downstairs, you know. But I met Frank at a party, and I didn't know he was coming, and he didn't know I was coming, so I said, "Hello, Frank." And I said, "I heard you wrote a book. I've been trying to get a hold of it. I go to bookstores, and they don't have it. What's the matter? Have they got [inaudible] hard on for you or something?" Well, he knew goddamned well that it was in every bookstore in the place, but I got a kind of a kick. But Frank is quite a guy. You know him?

G: Yes.

J: Well, Frank is well worth talking to.

G: Do you know where he is?

J: No. No. I don't know where Kenny Morefield is, either.

G: Oh, yes. He's mentioned quite a bit in the book.

J: Christ almighty! I'm sure that Frank thinks he should have been secretary of state. (Laughter)

G: What do you think we did wrong, if anything, in the last days? What should we have done differently in ways of evacuating people or so forth?

J: I should have gotten more valuable people out quicker. Now, this is going to sound awfully goddamned self-serving, and maybe it is, but recognizing the enormity of the problem, recognizing the fact that we were terribly concerned about such things as the Vietnamese military reaction to our departure, recognizing that we were not getting out very many of our own Vietnamese employees, recognizing that it would have been nice

to have been able to load up one of those boats with a shipload of Montagnards and send them someplace in the South Pacific where there were mountains and where their life could continue and be more fruitful and a better situation for them, recognizing that truly crucial intelligence personnel that you can be sure didn't survive because we left them there, but we did leave many there--that is the sort of thing that one has to live with if one was in charge of something that didn't work out the way you wished it had.

However, as I said before, there wasn't a single American who offered himself up for transportation out that didn't get out. We had thirteen points in Saigon where we were landing helicopters, Air America helicopters, on rooftops, taking people out either to Tan Son Nhut for departure in fixed-wing aircraft or straight out to the China Sea on ships out there. And we managed to do that without one accident where anybody was hurt.

Now, we had some luck. For example, we had no opposition from the North Vietnamese, none. You'll hear some war stories about people who are supposed to have gone out in helicopters, and the shot and shell were flying fast and furiously all over their choppers, and all that. I don't believe a word of it. I don't believe a word of it. I know that as far as our chopper was concerned, I watched like a hawk, and there wasn't one single shot fired. Not one. The other side just decided to let us get the hell out and the sooner the better, for which we can be eternally grateful because they could have done a lot of things that would have made it difficult, because there were absolutely no South Vietnamese defenses at that point. Not any.

So I have to say, on balance, recognizing the difficulties and also admitting the shortcomings, there is no single error that I think we made except the failures in mission

of not getting the right people out in many cases. I've got nothing against bar girls and prostitutes, but we could have left a few of those there, I think, without destroying the whole fabric of subterranean culture. And if we could have substituted some of these more productive people for some of those, it would have been nice. But as I say, all in all, I have gotten--I can't lay my finger on any one tactical mistake that we made, or strategic mistake, if you will. And let me tell you, there were lots of balls in the air around there. In other words, I can't brag, but it doesn't do any good to complain, so what the hell are you going to do then? (Laughter) Well, that's about that. What else have you got?

G: Did you know Pham Ngoc Thao?

J: What was his job?

G: He was a province chief at one time.

J: Yes. I knew all the province chiefs.

G: Well, early he was a province chief, I guess, and then he ran the strategic hamlet program for a while when that was under Diem, back in about 1962 or so.

J: Yes, well, that was the time that we--I was not heavily involved in that. Sir Robert Thompson was one of the fellows that was in that deeply. We made some errors in that strategic hamlet program, the principal [error] being [that] they started it off in probably the most difficult area of Vietnam, the most heavily saturated with VC, and that just isn't the way, I think, to start that kind of thing. I believe that you should get your feet wet and get your ducks in a row and learn about what you are trying to do, and prove it to be successful in an area that is not heavily infested, number one, so that people get

confidence in what you're doing, and, number two, so that you can learn about your mistakes and still be able to come back and make changes and learn and do better. And then, of course, on the other side of the fence, Ngo Dinh Nhu was in charge of this from the Vietnamese side, and he lied through his teeth about the degree of success and all of that, and too many people knew that it was a lie. So it just didn't work, and for my money the reasons that it didn't were that out in that Cu Chi area--God almighty, that's one of the toughest areas to the very end, and I think that they started it at the wrong time. Shut it off for a minute, will you?

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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