INTERVIEW II

DATE: November 2, 1985

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE JACOBSON

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Colonel Jacobson's residence, Reston, Virginia

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G: You just said that you would like to say some words about your friend, John Paul Vann.

J: Yes. I think that the record, if it's correct--and hopefully Neil Sheehan will give it to us chapter and verse; he's been working on a book about Vann for a considerable period of time. And hopefully that book will see the light of day sometime within the next twelve months. That will be the definitive story of John Paul Vann.

My own association with Vann occurred when he first came to Vietnam. I was in the MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] situation in charge of organization and training, a part of the army section. And it took all of ten minutes to find out that John Vann was a very special fellow. He was the senior adviser to the Seventh Division, which was in the Delta. And I suppose the best way I can let you know my thoughts about John Vann is to read to you a letter, dated 13 November 1962, to Major General William D. Yarbrough, who was the commanding general of the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center. He was the commandant, and also the commandant of the U.S.A. Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg. And I write: "Dear Bill: Congratulations on your new degree of infallibility. It is richly deserved." He was promoted into two stars for this job.

"You will recall your 6 September letter to me, which requested informal information on advisers here who had proved themselves to be truly outstanding, and who would be equally good in your shop. I cannot recommend too strongly that you take whatever action is required to get Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, Infantry. There is not the slightest doubt but that this officer is the best adviser at any level ever assigned to South Vietnam during my time here. For the past eight months, Vann has been our senior adviser with the Seventh Vietnamese Infantry Division. During this period, the Seventh has conducted more operations and killed more VC [Viet Cong] than the rest of the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] combined. This record must be attributed directly to John Vann's outstanding qualities of leadership, and his professional knowledge and competence. It is a safe bet that this officer, through personal experience, knows more about counterinsurgency operation at all levels from division down to squad than any officer in our army.

"Additionally, he is articulate, a first-class writer, a workhorse and jump qualified, and also most anxious to get on jump status. If he isn't awarded a Legion of Merit for his work here, there ain't no justice. Incidentally, he has completed all scholastic work necessary for his doctor's degree, but so far hasn't coughed up the necessary twelve hundred dollars to take the cloth officially.

"The above might sound like a poor man's variation of Antony's funeral oration, but those are the facts. According to the present forecasts, Vann will leave here in March 1963, which should give you sufficient time to wave those two stars in the right direction to get action. Warmest regards, signature."

Now, Vann's career, so far as I was concerned, from that time improved geometrically. He went back after he had service in Vietnam, and was very unhappy, in that he thought the army was not taking advantage of his experience and his potential, and after a few fits and starts and all that, he resigned from the army. He went to work for Martin Marietta Corporation until--again, I don't know the exact date--but he made up his mind that he was coming back to Vietnam, not as a soldier but as a civilian. So he went to work for the Agency for International Development, came to Vietnam and was assigned to Hau Nghia province, which is one of the toughest that we had out there.

At that time I was in--I think I--yes, I was in the AID picture myself at the national level, and therefore had a lot to do with the senior advisers of the AID picture that were in what we called in those days Rural Development. This was before OCO [Office of Civilian Operations?], before MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam], before CORDS [Civil Operations Revolutionary Development]. So he was working directly for the AID mission in Saigon.

Well, his performance there was equal or better to anything he'd done previously when he was with the military and with the Seventh Division. In time, I managed to pull him up into the Saigon level, where he stayed until OCO came along. At which time John was designated as--where did he go? IV Corps, originally, I guess. Then when MACV came into being and CORDS came into the picture, he stayed in IV Corps for a short time, then was assigned to the Third Military Region in Bien Hoa. He continued to perform magnificently. I thought that he was a cinch to be killed. He wasn't qualified to do it,

organizationally or bureaucratically, but he was probably the best helicopter pilot we had in Vietnam.

G: Where did he pick that up?

J: He just picked--on-the-job training. He spent half his time, at least, in the helicopter, and his pilot was one of the truly great pilots that we had out there, and Vann just learned the business. I think he was the best pilot I ever flew with, and I think there were other people who would have thought so, too.

He went into places with that chopper that nobody else went. Not using the chopper, but he used to drive out and spend more time in hamlets and villages overnight than anybody in the organization. And he just knew more about the situation than anybody else.

Then something occurred that was unique in military history. Creighton Abrams, who was the greatest military commander I have ever known, and one of the greatest human beings I have ever known, assigned John Paul Vann as the senior military adviser in Region II, which put him in command of all military personnel in the region. In other words, he had general officers under his command--he, a civilian! Nobody but Abrams, I believe, would have had the courage to make that assignment. I think other people would have said, "Yes, Vann is the best we have. But it's an unprecedented thing to put a civilian over the generals and the colonels and God knows what else, in a military situation."

Well, Vann continued to be the best there was, and he, with this chopper of his, and his courage and knowledge of the situation--he didn't go into these things blind, he knew what he was doing, but he was a man who would fly into isolated outposts and bring in

ammunition and water and rations, and God knows what else, in and out, all the time. I expected him to be killed for so many years, literally, that I finally decided that Vann was wrapped in a little pink cloud, and that nothing could ever happen to the man. And when he died, when he was killed, strangely enough he had spent that day at my house in Saigon, and had gone back to Nha Trang, where one of his headquarters was, then to Pleiku, where his primary military headquarters was located, and then that night he took off for Kontum, which was one of the outposts, really, in Military Region II. His chopper was hit by ground fire, apparently; nobody knows. But I happen to think--and there's never been any evidence to the contrary--that there was some mechanical thing that went wrong with his helicopter, and that he zeroed into the ground and was killed instantly.

I heard about this at midnight that night. General Abrams called me and said, "John Vann is dead." And I said, "General, that can't be possible. He was in my house all day, and he left here about--I think about five o'clock in the afternoon. Do they have positive identification?" And he said that they did, that there was no doubt at all that Vann was dead.

The next morning at six o'clock General Weyand and I went to Pleiku, where the body was located at that time. And he had massive head wounds and he was pretty beaten up. So that's the story of John Vann. I could tell stories about the man for hours, but I think there's no point in that, because soon we hope to have Neil's book, and that will outline Vann's involvement in everything from birth to death.

(Interruption)

One of the fairly interesting aspects, I think, of Vann's early tour, when he was with the Seventh Division in the Delta, was that Vann was insisting that the reporting on the Vietnamese forces be honest, and he was of the opinion that a lot of reporting to Saigon and from Saigon to Washington was not factual, was too optimistic, and he was not popular at MACV headquarters because of the things he would say and do.

For example--I'm just going to give one example of what he did--there was an operation at a place called Ap Bac, which I'm sure Neil in his book will cover with a lot of detail. After that was over, they got together a Delta-wide convocation of high-ranking officers, and I suppose that the original purpose of this convocation was to talk about lessons learned from Ap Bac. This was kind of interesting, because it was one of the first operations that involved tracked vehicles, armored personnel carriers and so forth, in the Delta. And it did not go well.

And when they called on Vann, his opening remarks went something like, "I'm going to tell you what the Vietnamese forces were like in this operation. I feel that I am qualified to do that because I am the only man in this room who has ever seen the ARVN fight." (Laughter) Well, this was not the best way to win friends and make people happy. And this was duly reported to Saigon, and it's just one of the incidents that caused General Harkins, who was in charge of MACV at the time, to look at Vann with something less than pure delight.

This sort of thing was part of the problem when he went back to Washington and was not received in the way that he thought proper, and I must say I agreed with him. Another thing that I recall, I believe they were going to assign him to the Industrial College

rather than to the War College, which he did not want, and which was part of the reason that he resigned from the military. And that's just a part of the John Vann story that I'm sure Neil will cover, chapter and verse.

G: What were press relations like in those early days, 1962, 1963 and so on? Let's start off with this: was there a policy for guidance of MACV personnel in dealing with the press?

J: Well, the press really entered the picture in a great big way before MACV came into being. The press was, almost to a man, anti-Diem to a very marked degree. Leading the group of first-class young investigative reporters were David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan. Brown--oh, there are so many others that I could talk about, but there wouldn't be any point. They reported things honestly as they saw them, and insisted on their right to do that. At times the American attitude toward their slant on the political situation was agreed with, and at points it was very much at variance with what we hoped would happen. The press continued to be a very important element in Vietnam all through the conflict, right up to the last day.

I think that as time went on, while the press--which naturally is in an adversary mode concerning the bureaucracy--while they continued that attitude, I think that as time went on they became, certainly not people who espoused the government's position totally, but I think they came around a bit from the early days in which they were almost totally negative in the whole operation.

I would say that several of them were--well, they were not totally on the side of what we were trying to do, as, let's say, Joe Alsop was. They were a little bit more understanding as to the U.S. position *vis-à-vis* the situation there than they previously were.

They were a tremendous influence, I'm sure, particularly with respect to the understanding of the people in the United States with respect to our operations in Vietnam. I am sure that they played a very big part in turning the public opinion in this country against what we were trying to do.

It's interesting to note how many of them, like Neil Sheehan, Peter Braestrup, and others, have come around almost full circle on our involvement in Vietnam, and are now engaged in rather straightening out the record. I suppose that's an excellent thing. I suppose it's very good to know that with their experience and their undoubted expertise in what happened, I think it's rather good to see the trend toward a more balanced picture of what went on. Those of us in any kind of a senior position spent an awful lot of time individually, one on one, with the press. MACV had a daily briefing that the reporters gleefully named the "Five O'Clock Follies," and frankly, it wasn't any better than that. It was a pretty unbalanced picture, with rose-colored glasses and body count and all the rest of it.

But they were very honest people. Of course, there were those reporters there that we just didn't see. I'll give you an example. David Butler; he's written a book, *The Fall of Saigon*, [it's] just come out not too long ago, very well done. [He] came to see me, and I agreed to see him and I asked him who he was with. And he said he was with *Playboy* magazine, and I said, "Well, David, there's absolutely no point in us talking at all. So we'll have a cup of coffee and then I'll bid you goodbye, because no matter what you wrote, if it wasn't absolutely opposed to everything we're trying to do, your magazine wouldn't publish it and you'd probably get fired. So let's just forget that whole thing."

Well, this happened more than once, because there were certain publications that you just knew couldn't, even if the reporter was totally convinced that we were doing what we were doing properly, that never would have seen any print. We knew that. As a matter of fact, the whole period, from 1966 to 1970, was a press event. I suppose some of the most scurrilous things that occurred were done by low-level television crews. There was more than one incident in which some reporter would get out to a fire base and pass out marijuana cigarettes, and then gleefully take pictures of the guys when they were in a good stoned position. I know of one instance where they paid a GI to be filmed cutting the ears off of a dead VC. This sort of journalism wasn't something that anybody can be proud of.

But all in all, I'd say that the press called the shots as their publishers saw them, and some were very good and some were very honest and good at the same time. There were things that happened out there that they took us to task for that they certainly should have. You can't run an operation of that size without having some foul balls and some bad things, and some of the things that we'd all like to forget. But all in all, the press was a very vital part of the overall situation, and on balance, it was far more opposed to what we were doing and the way we were doing it, than it was supportive of those same parameters.

So I am of course of the opinion that the war was lost unnecessarily; that it was lost here, not there, and that the press was a good part of that. The attitude here was--well, it was a situation where it was impossible to continue the kind of support that the Vietnamese would have needed to avoid the disaster that occurred. So I think the press has got its part in molding the public opinion here, and I think that some of them are honest enough to admit that they were a bit overbalanced on the other side, but that's just my opinion.

G: Let me throw a couple of names at you from the press from those days and see if they strike any recollections, or if you'd have anything to say about them and their reporting. You mentioned Joe Alsop, for example. How well did you know him?

J: Very well. (Laughter) Very well indeed. Joe used to come to my house for meals quite often. We were and are good friends.

G: What kind of reporting was he well known for?

J: Joe was well known for being supportive of our effort in Vietnam. Joe probably knew more about the true situation than almost anybody, because--and again, this is my personal opinion, based on nothing but that--Joe believed, as I did, that the key to pacification was defense, was the safety of the villager, a safety net where the military forces in the area could guarantee him safety, for him and his family. And Joe believed that if security could be provided, true and honest security, that the rest of the pacification picture would fall in place. And that's a very simplistic explanation of what Joe believed, but I agree with him that security was the number one problem in the countryside.

All in all, I think everybody would admit that Joe is a first-class reporter. I've since been interested to find out that he's probably a more capable scholar than he is a reporter. His work extends from biographies of presidents to Chinese art. So I think that my friend Joe Alsop is a hell of a guy.

G: François Sully.

J: Sully was, of course, very French-oriented, was prone to view everything as a comparison between what we were doing and the way the French did it or would have done it. I was not a great admirer of Sully.

G: Don Oberdorfer.

J: Oberdorfer, who came out with the first book about--to my knowledge, the first book that looked at the overall picture in Vietnam, and how the hell he did that research that he did in the time that he did it, I think it was truly remarkable. I thought then and I think now that Don Oberdorfer is top-flight in his profession. I think that his work for the *Post* to this day is very professional, and I admire Don Oberdorfer.

G: Peter Braestrup.

J: Braestrup is one of the very best, in my view. He was always as objective as a top-flight reporter could be, in those days. And everybody that I know of rather--it's not a question of like or dislike; it's a question of recognizing somebody's ability or the lack of it. I didn't know of anyone who thought that Braestrup was anything but among the best. And of course his book [*The Big Story*], which came out later, after the war, is quite a remarkable achievement, and quite correct, in my opinion.

G: Frank McCulloch.

J: I don't know him well enough to comment. I know him, but not--I didn't know him well.

G: Keyes Beech.

J: Well, of course I love Keyes Beech, I have for a long time. I think Keyes is a hell of a reporter. I think that he and George McArthur could take a piece of the action in Vietnam and write about it with a clarity and with a punch that almost nobody else could equal, in a rather short and pithy article. They both could write good, crunchy English prose, and while both of them took us to task, in some cases even viciously, for the most part when they did that they were right.

G: Do you recall any particularly bad pieces of reporting that galled you in the war? Undeserved criticism, or simply--?

J: I'm sure that if I thought about it, I could dredge up a lot of that, but it was so common and so general, particularly among the has-beens [or, rather, the] never-was-ers, the young reporter who came out there not to report the news, but to create news, to find through investigative processes information to send back to his publisher. And I got so used to that that frankly, I didn't pay much attention to it. For the most part, they were not the name writers; they were not the people with very much clout back here. But the cumulative effect of all of this was devastating, no question about that.

G: Did you know Michael Herr?

J: No. Who was he with?

G: I think he was a wire service man. But he came out with a book later on which made quite a splash.

J: No, I don't know him.

G: Have I missed anybody?

J: Oh, God, you've missed an awful [inaudible]. (Laughter) Charley Mohr of the *New York Times* was one of our people who could be depended upon to spank us, but in a rather genteel *New York Times* fashion. But a good reporter. I could dredge up a lot of names out of memory, but at the moment--there was one particularly good reporter, from the *Wall Street Journal*, whose name escapes me. I can't think of it, but he was their man in Vietnam. He's the only one they had that I know about.

G: How about Daniel Sutherland?

J: Don't know him well enough to--

G: *Christian Science Monitor*.

J: Yes. I don't know anything bad about him, but I don't know him well enough to comment, like some of the rest of these types.

G: Did you know Ward Just?

J: Oh, very well, very well. And a good reporter, a good reporter; there's no question about it. First class. Johnny Apple, first class. These names come to me as I think about it. I haven't thought about this, you know, in a hell of a long time. I've been trying to forget it. (Laughter)

G: And here I am, making you dredge it all up again.

J: Well, those were fascinating days. If I can digress for just a moment--

G: Surely.

J: I think it was 1967, I'm not sure of the year. I came back here to attend to some business, and it was the time of the first great mass demonstration on the Ellipse, whatever the hell that date was. And I joined them; I joined the crowd, and I must say I learned a lot. The first thing I learned was that if I had been of that age, I'm sure I would have been there with them as one of the crowd. Not because I or they gave a *goddamn* about what was going on in Vietnam, but it was so much fun! If you were a fellow and you wanted a girl, for whatever purpose, go to bed, read Kafka, discuss fine food and wines, whatever the hell you wanted to do, you could find a girl there who wanted exactly the same thing. And you

just couldn't beat that for--and then there were big things, like Coretta King, and that bearded ass who is a poet, I can't say his name.

G: Not Allen Ginsberg?

J: That's right, Allen Ginsberg, of horrible memory. People like that were haranguing the crowd, you see. So you have celebrities there; I think Joan Baez was there, who was a person devastatingly opposed to what we were doing, and who has since recanted, I'm happy to say. But you had that celebrity aspect of all this. And there was a certain amount of danger that caused the blood to flow a little faster, and they'd tip over a car, and the pigs would come and there was a chance to get busted, as they called it. And it was, you know, just a little element of danger that made it so damned much fun.

So I could well understand why they had such a big mob of people. I don't think that very many of them had a whole lot on their minds except the fun they were having, but I'm not sure. This next may be very censorable, and you may censor any damned thing you want that I say, but after this demonstration was over I went up to Dupont Circle, where the more scruffy of the group were gathered, and had a chance to talk to small groups of these people to tell them how I thought and listen to what they had to say. (Laughter) And there was a sign that they were carrying, I've heard about it since, but this was the first time I ever ran into it. And you've got to kind of give them credit for a little originality: the sign said, "Fighting for Peace is Like Fucking for Chastity." (Laughter)

Another small thing that happened up on Dupont Circle: there was a young girl, I'd say about fifteen, not more, dressed in a filthy sweater; her hair was stringy. I don't suppose

she'd had a bath in a week. But when you looked into her eyes and looked at her face and forgot about the unwashed hair and the unkempt appearance, you could tell that this was a girl of quality. She came from a family that was anything but scruffy; you could be sure of that. She had that certain patrician look that some people have, and she had that. But she came up to me and she said, "Mr. Jacobson, how can you possibly defend a cause where a horrible word like 'kill' is perfectly acceptable, and a beautiful word like 'fuck' is not?"

(Interruption)

G: Let's talk about pacification, CORDS, Phoenix, and Bob Komer, and related topics. How did you get into the pacification business, let's say?

J: Well, I was in it due to my service with AID before I went to the embassy as the mission coordinator. I was a part of what was known as Rural Affairs, which had to do with AID personnel and programs throughout the countryside. So I was, number one, interested in it, and number two, had some experience with it.

Of course, when MACV came into being, the decision was very wisely made that all of the agencies in the field would be under the command and control--operationally, that is--of COMUSMACV [Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam]. When this really came about, in a great big way, was when Bob Komer was given the personal rank of ambassador and sent out as Westy's deputy for CORDS. I suppose that no other man that I know of, with the possible exception of McGeorge Bundy, could have done what Bob Komer did in Vietnam. By that I mean nobody else that I know of has got the combination of ability, brashness, forcefulness and guts to face up to the generals in Vietnam, and I'm speaking of American generals, and molding them the way he wanted

them to operate, in many cases, absolutely against what the senior people thought was best for everybody.

But Komer had a lot of brownie points on his side. First and foremost, everybody knew that he was Lyndon Johnson's man, that Lyndon Johnson had personally sent him out there, and that Bob Komer had a direct line to Lyndon Johnson in case he ever had to use it. I don't think he ever did. I don't know that, of course.

In addition to that, he was a man of great vision, great ability, and one of the most obstreperous men I have ever known in my life. It seemed to me that he used to purposely try to make people angry. Whether that was just his way of finding out what their true feelings were or not, I'm not sure that I know. But he's a hell of a man. I never worked for Bob Komer, but I had great admiration for him. So he's the guy that put CORDS on the map; he's the fellow that got the money and the people and set up many of the policies, and did a magnificent job.

I was sorry to see him leave. He left because he was offered the ambassadorship to Turkey, and I was among those who said, "Bob, you should not go, because--

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--ambassador, because the Democrats are going to be out, and so are you." And he said, "What are you saying? I'm not a Democrat or a Republican; I'm a professional!"

(Interruption)

G: It sounds like he was the sort of a man who would have made some enemies.

J: I'm sure he did, and I'm also sure that there wasn't anybody that I know of, whether they liked Komer or disliked him, I'm sure that there wasn't anyone that didn't have regard and

respect for the man's ability. He was a difficult man, but a brilliant one and a courageous one, and I think that nobody else could have done what he did, because he ran into a pretty entrenched bureaucracy, you know, when you take on the military at that level, you've got a job on your hands, and he did it and he prevailed.

G: You made an interesting comparison. You said nobody else but perhaps McGeorge Bundy could have done it.

J: Yes.

G: Why did you mention his name?

J: Because I think that McGeorge Bundy and his brother Bill, by the way, were two of the card-carrying geniuses that I have had an opportunity to meet in my lifetime. I just think that they were both loaded with brains and loaded with courage, and the ability to prevail. That's it.

G: What dealings did you have with McGeorge Bundy?

J: Damned little. He wouldn't remember me from a load of wood. But when he was the national security adviser, I happened to sit in on a briefing that he received, and I listened to the most penetrating questions, and probably the deepest understanding of a complicated subject, that I have ever known in my life.

Bill Bundy was in State, and he was an assistant secretary for the Far East at that point. And I rode in a car with him to--I'm not sure where we went, but he had a secretary in the car, and he dictated a memorandum that was going to go to the Secretary of State, and from there to the White House. And again, it was what I considered to be an exceedingly complex subject. Well, I listened to this business of dictating to the secretary,

and I later saw the piece of paper, and I know from my own knowledge that we went to this briefing; the secretary transcribed the notes, handed them to Bundy at the table where we were, he glanced through it and signed it, and that was it. And you know, that's not possible, but he did it. And apparently that's his way of operating; he's that good.

But Bill, in my view--probably I'm wrong--but it struck me that McGeorge Bundy was by far the more forceful of the two, probably the person that would be a rougher adversary, should it come to that. That's my--and I base this on experience that amounts to almost nothing, but I was terribly impressed with what I did see, and from what I've read and heard about these two men after that and before that would tend to make me think that what I've said is true, that McGeorge Bundy probably could and would have done the same thing that Bob Komer did. But I don't know of anybody else that could have done it, any other civilian.

G: One thing occurs to me that's not really connected with this: did I ask you about David Nes last time?

J: David Nes?

G: He was sent to Saigon in December of 1963 to be Lodge's deputy.

J: Yes, you asked me about him and I don't know.

G: That's right, okay. Let's just pass that one by.

J: How long was he there?

G: Six months.

J: So far as I'm concerned, Lodge's people were Mike Dunn and--oh, we talked about him.

G: Freddy Flott?

J: Freddy Flott. But this Nes, I never knew him.

G: Well, that's an insight in itself.

J: Was he an agency fellow?

G: No, he was State Department.

J: Funny, I don't know him.

G: I think that's a commentary in itself.

J: This Nes fellow, did he have any influence out there on anything?

G: That's one of the big questions. It's kind of a mystifying episode, and not too many people have shed a whole lot of light on it--

J: Well, I sure as hell--

G: --why he didn't last any longer than that.

J: I never met him, I don't think. I might have--you know, what the hell, I can't remember everybody I met. But he certainly was not one of the principal players.

G: Now, let's see. Komer left in the fall of 1968, I guess. Is that right?

J: I don't know.

G: I think that's right. And then have I got the succession right, then Colby took over CORDS?

J: That is correct. And at that point--and I think it was 1969 that I moved into MACV. Maybe it was late in 1968; I don't remember. I became the assistant chief of staff for CORDS, working for General Abrams, but also working for Bill Colby.

G: How does that work? How do you work for two bosses?

J: You don't, and I didn't, but I did. (Laughter)

The formation of the staff was the usual military situation. You had the COMUSMACV and the deputy COMUSMACV for overall items. Then you had a special deputy MACV for CORDS, which was a slot that was set up for and by Bob Komer. All staff officers who are in a command work for the commander, and the commander can certainly give you such guidance as he sees fit. But with this special arrangement, Bill Colby took on the commander's prerogatives and policy direction with respect to CORDS. Now, this was a situation that would not have worked had not the assistant chief of staff for CORDS, namely myself, gotten along exceedingly well in having the greatest regard and respect for Bill Colby. And I also had the same degree of admiration and personal enjoyment of Creighton Abrams; Freddy Weyand, too. So as far as I was concerned, the whole chain of command, up to and including Bunker, was absolutely without blemish. I had worked, of course--I went from mission coordinator in the embassy to the job in MACV at the behest to Bunker of Abrams and Colby. So I went there, but with the thorough understanding with Bunker that if I didn't like it I could come back at any time, and I also had direct access to the Ambassador, and both Colby and Abrams knew that and had no problem with it. Of course, never once did I go outside channels; it never was necessary, my God, and I knew it wouldn't be. Unlike when Komer was there; I wouldn't have worked for Komer, because he and I would have clashed. We did clash on more than one occasion during the mission council meetings, and at one point it got to be quite a shouting match. And my secretary was taking the minutes of the meeting; she was in the room when this brouhaha occurred. I got back to the office and there's Jane crying. I said, "Jane, what's the hell's the matter?" And she said, "Well, don't you know you can't talk to

an ambassador like that? He's going to see to it that you get sent out of the country! You just mark my words: you're through!" I said, "Jane, I'm going to make a bet with you. I'm going to bet you that in twenty minutes I'm going to get a telephone call from Bob Komer, and we are going to be best friends again." Well, in twenty minutes comes the call. Komer said, "Jake, goddamnit, you and I are the only two in the mission that can really communicate!" (Laughter)

Well, you know, you wouldn't like to have to go through that every day. But with Colby, there was no question, I was delighted to go out there, and it was a hell of an experience. CORDS was a kind of an interesting operation. I invite you to find, from someplace, Bill Colby's testimony before the House subcommittee on foreign operations on July 19, 1971. He gave at that point an overall picture of CORDS, a picture that is far better than anything I can do off the top of my head, because we worked on that report, his opening statement. And the same day, on the nineteenth of July 1971, Bill Colby gave the definitive explanation of what Phoenix was all about. I don't know whether you've got those papers or not. You have them? Well, I have nothing to add.

G: All right. That's a fair way to get it on the record.

J: Yes. Because this was a very complicated operation, in that--well, in 1969; I just happen to have a note in my notebook, 1969 was the top year. We had more people and more money in 1969. Then we started phasing back down; it was a planned phasedown, and nothing about it that was anything but planned and proper. But I had 6,360 military personnel in CORDS, and 996 civilians, from State, AID, and CIA and USIA [United States Information Agency]. We spent $647.4 million, 11,897,000 *piastres*, and we supported about 50 per

cent of the GVN [Government of Vietnam?] budget for pacification, which amounted to 64,923,000 *piastres*. So as you can see, this is a hell of an operation; it's very big. In the forty-four provinces of Vietnam, we had a team of advisers that could run anywhere from seventy to three hundred and fifty. In the more difficult problems security-wise, a military man was the province senior adviser, whose opposite number was the Vietnamese province chief. And in the more secure areas, we had a civilian in the top slot as the province senior adviser, and in each case, if a civilian was on top he had a military deputy, and if the military man was the province senior adviser he had a civilian deputy. And then in addition to that, they had all the rest of the people, the people that were involved with the various programs that we ran.

I think the unique part of this is that none of this money and none of this personnel allocation was handled in Washington. The money was not appropriated for CORDS by Congress. It was appropriated to the parent agencies in Vietnam: the military, USIS [United States Information Service], CIA, AID, State; those were the people that we drew our personnel from and our funds from. We had representation in Saigon, that is, CORDS was the opposite number to any number of--well, all of the GVN ministries. I always considered my opposite number--and saw him frequently--[to be] the prime minister, Prime Minister Khiem. But we had representation with the following ministers, as I recall: the Ministry of Ethnic Minorities, which primarily were the Montagnards, and Le Luyet was the minister; the minister of the Interior, minister of Rural Development, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Chieu Hoi, which was a returnee program that had to do with an escape valve, where people who were on the other side and wanted to come in

to the government [side?] could, and would not face any military or civilian retribution in the way of prison. They had to spend a certain amount of time in a Chieu Hoi center, where things were explained and programs were described to them and all the rest. We worked with the Joint Military Staff, with the National Police command, because we in the provinces, all of the provinces, were concerned with community development, urban development, social welfare, management and logistics, the National Police, the Chieu Hoi program, the refugee program, the Self-Defense Forces--there were the Regional Forces and Popular Forces. The RFs and PFs were about half a million men plus, about 550,000. And they were armed with our best weapons, the new weapons that we had. And the old ones that were turned in, about five hundred thousand, were given to something called the Self-Defense Forces, which were ordinary people who would accept a weapon and some ammunition to keep in their home or wherever the hell they wanted to keep it in order to protect their families.

Now, I don't think this shows in the record anywhere, but the fact that the Vietnamese government was willing to put five hundred thousand weapons and ammunition in the hands of anybody who would accept them, throughout the country, indicated to me that the government of Vietnam had confidence in the people of Vietnam, and confidence that they would not use those weapons to turn the wrong way. I thought that was a hell of a telling point. When we suggested this to the government, they accepted with alacrity, and I can tell you that not one of those weapons was ever turned the wrong way. This is a hell of a thing.

Now, the RFs and PFs--well, the Regional Forces were more or less at the command--they were at the command of the province chief, and the Popular Forces were under the command, really, of the village chiefs. And these are all just ordinary goddamn Vietnamese throughout the country, and when you put that many weapons in the hands of this group, plus another half million weapons [of] the older type--M-1s and that sort of thing, but still quite an engine of destruction--when a government is willing to take a chance, and you've got to say that it is taking a chance, of arming that many of their citizens, they've got to be pretty damned sure that they've got basic loyalty on their side, and they did have, and it worked.

I supported and was the opposite number of the Ministry of Social Welfare, that had to do with the lame and the halt and the blind, and the orphans and the old folks' homes, and all those things where you'd go to make your inspection and then have tears as big as footballs run down your face, and kind of be out of action for twenty-four hours because [of] the awfulness of the situation. When you've got three men in a hospital bed, all of them in traction, and the family around them to do their cooking and take care of them and all of that, and those orphanages and the old folks--Christ, you know, that was--one of the most difficult things I had to do was to go and visit those places, and try to maintain a sensible attitude after that kind of emotional handwringing.

And we were in charge--I don't mean that. We assisted and provided a lot of money for such things as roads. A very important aspect of pacification was to be able to get from one place to another. As I've said, there's no question but the first thing you've got to worry about in pacification is security, because you can't do anything without that. You learned

some interesting things by being involved in a thing like this. For example, we would build schools. We would provide the money and in some cases hire contractors to build the school. And sometimes the RF or PF would use the top floor of the school as observation posts to see what was going on in, let's say, the flat lands of the Delta. And the VC would think nothing at all of coming in and blowing up that schoolhouse, on the basis of, "This is an American schoolhouse. What the hell do you care about this? We don't want them looking at us from the top window, and it's an American school, and so we're going to blow it up." They got no kick from that at all; no bad vibes from the villagers.

So then we--it took us a long time, I guess--we got a lot more intelligent, and we gave the villagers the wherewithal, the materials, to build their own schoolhouse. And this was another story for the VC, because when they come in and they wanted to blow up that school, the villagers got mad as hell, because they had worked like dogs to construct the thing, and it was not an American school; it was their school. This is a homely example of the kind of thing that you get into.

We helped arrange for the election of village and hamlet chiefs in Vietnam, something that had never been done. The province chief was never elected; he was appointed by the president of Vietnam. But the elections were held, and we had a group of very distinguished Americans, many of whose names escape me--Whitney Young was one that I remember very well; he was the head of the Urban League at that time. He stayed with me in my house.

And there were senators; I think one of them was [Dewey] Bartlett from Oklahoma, and I think [Edmund] Muskie from Maine; about twenty of the most distinguished

Americans that we had came out here to observe these elections. And I asked Whitney Young what he'd seen and what he thought about the elections. He said, "Well, I didn't see any irregularities. I can damn sure tell you it's more honest than any one I've ever seen in Alabama." (Laughter)

Of course, he had his own axes to grind. But generally speaking, that's what CORDS was all about. We advised the Vietnamese at all levels throughout the country. The Phoenix program, very briefly, was a program in which we set up information centers and command posts, command centers, at the village and province and national levels, and into this command center went all of the intelligence, all of the information that they could possibly gather about the VC in their area. This was set up to provide an opportunity for military operations against specific targets of VC [Viet Cong]. The numbers of the people that were involved is explained in Colby's presentation, but the thrust of the thing was that it was an opportunity to arrest and put before the courts any VC, particularly those in leadership positions, and send them, to the appropriate amount of time that their activities would recommend, to the Con Son Island prison.

Now, there were a lot of deaths involved in the Phoenix program, but for the most part these occurred in the military operations that had to do with going in to try to surgically remove one or two or three or four or five of these people, and then the fighting--the thing was developing and did develop into a normal firefight, in which case people get hurt. Of course, we were accused of a lot of evildoing, and poor judgment, and all of the rest, and I have no doubt at all but that there were instances where mistakes were made, where probably some personal recriminations were manifested in people that

were picked up, and all that. But again, on balance this thing that was called the "An Tri" procedures, a judicial thing--that again is explained thoroughly in Colby's presentation to the Congress. And for myself, I am absolutely convinced in my heart of hearts that the Phoenix program was a good thing for the country, that in any kind of an operation like that there's going to be abuses, no question about it, but I think that those abuses were far fewer in number than we were given credit for, shall we say.

G: What are we to make of some of the charges that are made, and criticisms--I'm not sure if you're familiar with the book by a man named [Ralph W.] McGehee?

J: No.

G: [It's] called *Deadly Deceits*, I think is the name of it [*Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA*].

J: No, I'm not.

G: Okay. He was a CIA official who worked on the intelligence side, I think, of the Phoenix program. But in any case--

J: He was in Vietnam?

G: Yes, according to his account.

J: Jesus. He might have been there in the very early days. He had no position of any consequence while I was there.

G: Okay. His name is McGehee; he was one of that famous Notre Dame backfield that won a national championship in 1950 or 1951 or whatever. In any case, I'll send you a copy of the book.

J: Well, you see, I so intimately knew all of the agency people that were--Christ, I can't imagine what he was doing. I never heard of him.

G: You'll be interested in seeing the book. I'll send it to you.

J: Yes. What does he charge?

G: Oh, that the intelligence collection program was very flawed and faulty--

J: True.

G: --and all kinds of innocent people were getting picked up, and guilty people were being let go, and--

J: I'm sure there was some of that.

G: --personal grudges were being, as you alluded to--

J: I'm sure there was some of that.

G: On balance, his judgment is that the program was no good.

J: Aha. That's where I disagree with him. I agree that there have been and that there was the kind of abuses that he talks about, but I certainly am of the opinion that in the overall, the program was exceedingly successful and proper, and quite well done. I call to your attention again, as I have talked to you before, when the final settlement came, and the defeat of the Government of Vietnam occurred, the VC, the people that the Phoenix program was targeted against, had absolutely no part in the final victory of the North Vietnamese. It was totally and absolutely a division-level, conventional war, in which the VC played absolutely--they didn't have a thing to do with it! Now, much of the reason for that, of course, was the debacle that occurred, as far as they were concerned, in Tet of 1968, because so far as I know, there were no North Vietnamese involved in Tet of 1968. It was

all southern VC, with--I suppose there were some returnees, people who were from the South and were sent to the North for education and training, and then came back to the South to take on the duties that were assigned to them. But, generally speaking, it was a VC operation, and thousands of these guys surfaced for the first time. And after Tet of 1968 was over, and the situation contained in every way, there were an awful lot of fairly high-ranking VC that were picked up through the Phoenix mechanism, and spent their time out on Con Son, where they were not able to do their thing.

G: Did you ever go to Con Son?

J: Oh, sure.

G: What about all those stories of--

J: Tiger cages? Oh, for Christ's sake.

G: --tiger cages?

J: Actually, those were excellent opportunities for our enemies to use a true buzzword: Tiger cages--by God, you know, that sounds like it's right out of the zoo, doesn't it? Well, what these things were, they were blocks made out of cement, and because they didn't have a window at each one of these, there was an opening on top, on the top of the cell, and it had iron bars on it. It was not open all the way, so that the sun beat into those cells all the time when the sun was up, nor was--there were places where you moved to the side of the cell, where you got out of the rain if it was raining. It was just a--the main thing was that the name, "the tiger cages," became a most popular phrase for the Jane Fondas of this world. And who was the fellow that--Luce. What was his first name?

G: The bishop, you're talking about?

J: No, no, no. The fellow who went with a congressman out there, and saw these--he was the interpreter. Oh, Christ, I--maybe the name is wrong altogether. But anyway, yes, I've been in Con Son many, many times, and I can assure you that--now, I've not been out in the Lorton jail or the D.C. jails, but from what I hear about them, Con Son was a picnic compared to the kind of overcrowding and hellraising that goes on in those places. I shouldn't make that comparison, because I haven't been in these D.C. places either as an inmate or a guest, but I read about them, and from what I read, I'll take Con Son.

G: Okay. How did you come to succeed Mr. Colby then?

J: Colby had a death in his family, or a very great sickness, and when he left, I moved up into his chair, and a fellow by the name of Norman Sweet, who was a guy that worked for me when I was ACSCORDS, became assistant chief of staff for CORDS. And we continued to march.

G: Who picked you--who decided that you would step in?

J: Abrams. And Colby.

G: So you were in that capacity for how long? All the way to the end, or--?

J: No. No, when MACV dissolved, I dissolved. In other words, we took the people out of the field, and the Defense attaché's office took over such military logistics things as were necessary. Had a marvelous guy at the head of it: John--God, I don't know whether I've got Alzheimer's disease or just plain stupid, but these names that I haven't thought of in so long are difficult, and I can't--anyway, at that time I went back to the embassy, and became the ambassador's representative with respect to the new situation in the field, which had to do with four consuls general. They had a consul general in each of the military regions, and

they had people, all civilian, in the provinces. And at that point I became the senior assistant to the ambassador for field operations, SAAFO. Special assistant, I guess it was. Anyway, I was his voice in the operation of the field elements of the consuls general in the field. We had some damned good men, too.

G: Do you remember Paul Popple?

J: Oh, sure.

G: He'd been a White House aide, I think, at one time.

J: Oh, had he?

G: Or at least there was a Paul Popple in the White House in LBJ's time. But he was up at Da Nang, or someplace.

J: Yes, that's right. He was there, as I recall, during the OCO days. He was not a consul general. The consul general in MR I was Al Francis. The consul general in MR II was Monty Spear, who lives in Bethesda. Number III was Dick--well, I've got to get off this name kick, because I can't remember the names.

G: Let me ask you about a name that just flashed through my mind: Aubrey Boozer.

J: I know the name, but I don't know the man. What did he do?

G: I don't know, except that he was in the embassy. I don't really know. He's the husband of Yolanda Boozer, who was one of LBJ's secretaries. He volunteered.

J: What in the hell did he do in the embassy? Christ, I thought I knew everybody.

G: I think we went through the last days pretty thoroughly in the first interview, so I'm certainly not going to ask you to rehash that. What did you do when you came back to the States?

J: I turned down sixteen jobs, one after the other, because they all were related in some way toward Vietnam. I was not clinically depressed, but I was ashamed of being an American, as I think I've told you before; I lied to every senior Vietnamese, including the President. I didn't mean to, but a combination of Watergate and the congressional attitude back here necessitated that the things that I had told the Vietnamese, the things that I believed would happen, when the other side failed to agree with the provisions of the Paris Accords, I thought we were going to take certain actions involving the B-52s and the Seventh Fleet, and none of that happened.

So I was really unwilling to even go to a cocktail party where there were Vietnamese present. I was ashamed and I felt badly, and I thought, "Why should I further punish myself by looking at the people that I betrayed?" And I didn't win any popularity contests by refusing these jobs, either. Bunker's wife, Carol Laise, was the director general of the State Department, therefore in charge of all personnel, and she and I were good friends. She's a hell of a girl. She clawed her way up from the bottom in the State Department in the days when it was not an advantage to be a woman, quite the contrary. So she's a terribly capable person. And she did her best to manufacture jobs that I would like, and nothing happened.

So I spent a year as an inspector abroad, and then I said, "I don't want any of this," and then I retired. When I first got back, Ellsworth Bunker was involved with the Panama Canal thing, and of course I went to see him and we went, on many days, to lunch at his favorite haunt, which is the F Street Club, natch. And he told me, "You know, I understand you're having some problems finding a worthwhile assignment. I can tell you from much

experience that you're never going to find the kind of a satisfying job that you had in Vietnam. So take it from there, but don't expect that you're ever going to find anything like that. I never have, and neither will anybody else." And it's a strange thing. You talk to people who have served all over the world. If they spent as much as a year in Vietnam, they will tell you that that was the most interesting, fascinating, rewarding assignment of their life. I've never found anybody that would say anything else. And it's--

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--kind of nice to come back here now and look at the record that these Oriental kids are making in the schools in Washington and northern Virginia, is where I'm most familiar. They're now high school people; some of them graduating last year and this year, and their scholastic record is absolutely first-class. Nice. They came here, many of them not knowing a goddamned word of English--

(Interruption)

G: All right, sir, go ahead.

J: My whole point is that I think as a group the Vietnamese that came in, and as we've talked before, there's a lot of them that we could do without, but for the most part I don't think that we've ever had a group of immigrants who have done better than these people have done and will continue to do. Of course, all Orientals are very education-oriented. They recognize that this is a stepping stone to success. As a matter of fact, one of the greatest problems in El Salvador is the fact that there is no opportunity for kids from the countryside to get an education that would be meaningful and that would permit them to compete in the country. It's a tragic thing that the kids from the families of the people who are working on

a coffee plantation will sit out by the side of the road and watch the *patrón*'s Mercedes go by with his kids in it on the way to the swimming pool, and those kids know that their kids, when the time comes, will be sitting by the same roadside, watching the *patrón*'s kid come down the street in the Mercedes, and there is no setup whereby they can break this routine, such as is possible here. It just isn't available. How the hell did I get off on El Salvador, for God's sake?

No, the French, generally speaking, I think have got a lot of right answers pertaining to education. Every place they have ever been, when they leave they leave French teachers in the schools, they have seen to it that the second language is always French, and this gives them a hell of a lift, a leg up on many things. For example, one of the inspections that I did was across the northern tier of Africa, starting in Morocco and Algeria and Tunisia, and so forth. And every one of the ministers that we dealt with during this inspection and report had doctor's degrees from a French university, and French was their language, not their own language, it was French. And we have always really cut back on our education people in AID, and we do not go into English-language teaching to the extent that--to anything like the way the French do it.

And there's something about being able to say a few words in another language that makes the people involved with that language closer to you, in some way. In fact, it's a little bit disgusting, in this country, because everybody can say, "*La plume est sur le table*." And therefore the goddamned cows in the kitchen in Normandy isn't a filthy, disgusting habit, it's quaint. And those miserable goddamned taxi drivers in Paris, the

most obstreperous, crooked bunch of types in the whole world--they're not that, they're local color. It kind of disgusts you, you know?

But part of that is because they can say, "*La plume est sur le table*!" That's about all they remember from those two years in high school, but--

G: Let me ask you about this culture business. How big a factor was that in Vietnam? How hard was it for an adviser to be a good adviser, because he didn't understand the Oriental milieu?

J: I think that the story about Americans not understanding the Vietnamese culture is more or less a myth. It is true that we had, relatively speaking, few Vietnamese-speakers, few people who spoke it, and if they did speak it, the ones that could speak it well enough so that they really understood--in fact, Jean Sauvageot, whom you know, is one of the few who ever achieved that degree of truly understanding the Vietnamese language and being able to get into the shades of gray and the nuances in both languages. There were very few like that.

But these advisers that came over, our people in CORDS, generally speaking were very high-type, intelligent men. And they studied a little bit of Vietnamese, the language, but they read extensively on Vietnamese culture and Vietnamese habits, and what is it that will make an adviser acceptable to his counterpart and what will be counterproductive in that regard. And there were some very close working relationships, even to the point of friendships, that have lasted through the years. People are still communicating with each other.

Now, we had our share of people who were not housebroken, and people who were bulls in china closets, and boorish and unable to cope with the Vietnamese. But on the other hand, there were a lot of Vietnamese like that, too. So I would say that, generally speaking, our people had good rapport with their counterparts, generally speaking. Almost all of the Vietnamese--I can't remember offhand a single province chief, for example, that didn't speak pretty damn good English. And I had no counterparts in Saigon that didn't speak good English. I went over there determined to speak Vietnamese, and while I'm not a good linguist, during my lifetime I've had to--I was the military governor of Dachau for four years, and had to learn some German. I've had to learn some French, but I don't speak either language well, and languages for me are very difficult. I don't have that *Fingerspitzengefühl* [German for instinct or flair] for languages. And so when I first went over there and started my halting fourth-rate Vietnamese, these ministers said, "Look, let's not do that. Let's speak English, shall we?" (Laughter) And so I never improved one damned bit, and I can't say, "Come to Jesus" in Vietnamese to this day, because none of my associates would put up with me in that sense. (Laughter) So I don't think that was a big problem.

G: Okay. That's an interesting--

J: But it's another one of those things that the social anthropologists--we had a--I don't know whether I told you about this. I was always very interested in the Montagnards. They're a Stone Age kind of people the French called *Moi* [a shortened form of the Vietnamese term *mọi rợ'*], which means savage. What the Montagnards called the Vietnamese is a hell of a lot worse than that. But I had a good friend, Gerry Hickey is his name, he was with Rand,

and he was a social anthropologist. And I was bound and determined to put the Vietnamese language in every school in the Highlands, on the basis that if these people were ever going to compete in that country, they'd have to learn the goddamn language! Well, Gerry and his people were absolutely outraged that I was trying to make Vietnamese out of these marvelously interesting people. They had quaint native ways, and they had gong ceremonies, where--and these people were absolutely charmed with this. And I'd tell them to take their goddamn gongs and shove them you know where, and we just never did agree on that, and I did get Vietnamese in the schools, but never long enough. The end came, and I don't know how much Vietnamese anybody learned. But it was an interesting thing.

The Montagnards are a story in themselves. The CIDG, the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups that CIA and the special forces were involved in--marvelous. There was an outpost called Bu Prang. Did you ever hear the story of Bu Prang?

G: I know where the place is, but I don't remember a story.

J: Well, I think it's quite a story. The people were all Montagnards except a contingent on the other side of Bu Prang--it's the same camp, the same outpost, but a very definite delineation of the Vietnamese and the Cambodians. But they're both advised by the special forces, and they're doing just one hell of job, particularly the Vietnamese side. God, they had repelled any number of attacks that they should have had real problems with, but they were honestly tigers, and they had the greatest reputation you can imagine. When all of a sudden, the morale in Bu Prang on the Vietnamese side went from 100 per cent to minus six. Well! We've got to find out why that was. And we did find out. The Vietnamese had found and

had revered a particularly large and shiny python, big rascal. And they looked upon that as their god of good fortune. And they revered this snake.

Then the Cambodians saw it, and they killed it and ate it. Well, figure out what happened to the morale in Bu Prang. So the special forces went to the head of the CIDG group and they said, "Now, what can we do to restore the morale of the people here?" "Well," they say, and shake their heads, "we don't really think that anything could be done. However, if you could provide a white buffalo for us to sacrifice, this probably would fill the bill." So Jesus, out go the special forces all over the Highlands, looking for an albino buffalo. And they finally found one, and they found it somewhere near, I think, Pleiku.

So they're going to take it now to the landing strip in Bu Prang. And I can't remember the designation of the army cargo ship; it's very well known. You'd know it, too, and I can't say it. Anyway, it was a rear-loader, and so the special forces are starting to put this buffalo, which was of no small size, into the cargo area of this airplane, whereupon the pilot took one look back there, and lowered off down the goddamned landing strip, and said, "You can take that damned bull and walk him to Bu Prang, so far as I'm concerned. He's not getting into my airplane!"

Well, the special forces were not nonplussed for long. They got a helicopter, the kind that we used to move artillery pieces, and they put a sling on the buffalo, and they start moving him to Bu Prang. Well, when they had put the sling on the buffalo, somebody had neglected to care for the bull's very prominent genitals, and in agony, this bull twisted to the point that he broke his neck. And they landed the bull in Bu Prang, dead.

Well. If you think the morale was bad before that, now it is *really* bad. So the special forces go to the heads of the CIDG, and said, "Now, we realize that that was bad, but what can we do now? We've got to do something to get the morale back where it ought to be." They said, "Well, we think it's not possible now. But perhaps if we got three hundred pure white chickens to sacrifice, that might possibly have some effect." So Jesus, out go the special forces all over the Highlands. If you think ARVN ever stole chickens, you've got no notion as to what these special forces types did. (Laughter)

So they got three hundred chickens and put them in sacks, and they had an extra seventy-five or a hundred stashed over to one side so that they could hand these things out one at a time, and they had some spares in case some of them had suffocated or whatever.

So they finally got the three hundred white chickens out, which the Montagnards tortured to death, and the morale, while it never again achieved the peak that it had while they had the snake, Bu Prang was saved and all's well that ends well. Christ, how can you deal with somebody like that, you know? (Laughter)

G: Do you know Colonel Ray Call?

J: Yes.

G: Did he have anything to do with that story?

J: I don't know.

G: Okay. That's funny.

J: I'm not sure who the special forces commander was at that point. I don't know. It could have been Fred Ladd.

G: He came later, I think, didn't he?

J: I think so, too. It could have been Pancho Kelly. Francis Kelly.

G: Bob Rheault.

J: Oho, ho.

G: Did I strike a spark with that name?

J: Oh, Christ.

(Interruption)

G: You were going to tell me--

J: Now I've got to have another name, and you can help me with this: the grossly fat man who was the head of the Hudson Institute, a world-renowned thinker and--turn it off for a minute 'til I think of it. I've got to have--

(Interruption)

G: Herm an Kahn.

J: Herman Kahn was his name. Well, Herman was about--I would estimate conservatively--two hundred and fifty pounds overweight. I would say that was a conservative estimate. And he was invited to Abrams' house one evening for dinner, and some of the rest of us were invited to dinner. And Herman had to sit in a chair rather up front, so that this tremendous belly could hang over, and it really, literally, rested on the floor. That's the kind of a build this guy had.

And an evening with Herman Kahn is a Herman Kahn evening; he is one of those. So he's holding forth on Vietnam, and saying things with a germ of truth to them, like "Nobody gives a damn about this war. If the Russians wanted to win it, they'd give the VC Redeye, and if America wanted to win it, they'd come off of this stupid one-year tour," and

kept on and on. And he said, "By the way, General," and Abrams at this point was about three martinis ahead of himself, "I'm going to tell you something, General Abrams. If you'll follow my advice, I'll make you look good." Jesus. I was sitting right where I could watch the red move up in Abrams'--the back of his head, and it kept going up. And he started literally screaming at Kahn, saying, "If you think I give a damn about what I look like in anybody's eyes! I'm here to win this war, I'm"--and went on and on. And Herman's belly starts to contract. And when Abrams got through, I'm not saying that Herman looked svelte, but I am saying that he really will never forget Abrams' diatribe about wanting him to look good. (Laughter) Ah, this was a hell of a man, this Abrams. Did you know Herman Kahn? Well, of course he was a very sharp fellow, and very bright. He had some fantastic IQ; I don't remember what it was, but it was reputed to be in the double genius range. Where were we?

(Interruption)

G: Raymond Burr, you said, came out.

J: Yes. Well, the story I started to tell was about the time that Jimmy Stewart and his wife came to Vietnam, but then I digressed on certain people who came there repeatedly at their own expense, permitting no publicity at all, and not doing it so that they would get a television show out of it, as Bob Hope did, for example. I don't denigrate the contributions that Hope made, but he did commercialize it and I've got no quarrel with that, but I'm saying that these other people did not.

Burr must have come out there fifteen or twenty times. And you know, he doesn't sing or dance or tell funny jokes, but he'd go out to those fire bases, and he's a tremendous

man; God, he's big. So he'd go up to those kids and put his arm around them and say, "I'm Perry Mason, son. You got any legal problems?" (Laughter)

And then he'd just visit with them for the night, and then we'd pick him up again in the morning. And he would get the names and addresses and telephone numbers of all those kids, and when he got back home he would call every one of the parents, and would say, "This is Raymond Burr; you might know me as Perry Mason. I just came back from Vietnam, and I was talking with John. And John is fine, and sends his love," and that's that.

It got so that the enlisted men in that area revered this guy; he was just one of their people. And I don't think it's too well known, but Burr is a very committed Catholic, and has an altar with a cross in his basement in his home. And these soldiers used to select one of their number and take up a collection, and send somebody to Bangkok or to Burma or to someplace, to buy a sackful of semiprecious stones to give to Raymond Burr to put on his altar, on his cross in his basement. So that's the story on Raymond Burr. But he's a hell of a man, and the GIs loved him.

But when Jimmy Stewart and his wife came out, for some reason they wanted to go to Da Nang. I don't know why; it doesn't matter. They did go to Da Nang. And comes time for the evening meal, they go to the officers' club, and Mrs. Stewart is dressed in a very tasteful fashion in a pants suit. So some lunkheaded warrant officer goes up to her and says, "Ma'am, we don't allow women in pants in the mess for dinner. I'm sorry." And she said, "Well, all right." So they went back to their quarters, wherever it was, and she changed into a dress. And they came back, and they sat down and they're having their dinner, when in comes four or five army nurses, wearing pants. Well, now Mrs. Stewart

did not mind being sent back to the hotel to change into an appropriate dress, but she did not really appreciate the fact that it depends on who you are as to whether you can wear pants or not.

Well, somebody with some brains, I don't know who it was and I never did know, called General Abrams' aide in Saigon and explained this whole thing. Well, the Stewarts were coming to dinner at General Abrams' quarters the very next night. So of course they had received their invitation and were told how they were going to be transported to Abrams' quarters and all that, but Abrams sent them a reminder of the fact that they were going to come. And then he added in his own hand, "By the way, I would be most pleased if Mrs. Stewart wore a pants suit." (Laughter) You know, that's typical Abrams, typical Abrams. [He was] just an amazing man.

When he first took over as COMUSMACV, every staff officer and certainly himself had beautiful office furniture, beautiful wood, lovely stuff. And all of the staff officers had them. He got into his office and took one look, and he didn't say a word to anybody. He just had all of that stuff moved out into the hall, and he put in his office a GI table and GI chairs, and a GI conference table with chairs around it and filing cabinets that were strictly GI, and said nothing. And one by one, all of the staff officers, except me, moved their stuff out into the hall and got this uncomfortable goddamned government-issue furniture. And I had the best looking office you've ever seen in your life, because I said, "What the hell; I'm a civilian!" (Laughter) "I don't have to put up with that."

Oh, this guy, he was something. Westy had a big car, and he had outriders; he had a motorcycle escort wherever he went. And the first thing Abrams did was fire the whole

crew of them. He refused to move into the house that Westy had, and moved into a very, very plain, ordinary house close to Tan Son Nhut, and lived there very happily until—the security people were going crazy, so they built a house for him--a "house"--quarters for him right on the base, right on Tan Son Nhut. And that's where he lived.

And just to show you what kind of a man he was, he was a great admirer of classical music, and he had a library that was truly extensive. And there was one record that he wanted, and he wrote to this company that he'd done business with for years and asked them to send a copy of this record, and put it on his account. They sent word back that they were sold out of this and they didn't have any more, and they were sorry; they didn't think they were going to get any more.

So General Abrams told me about that, and I said, "Well, of course it's no problem to get a copy of that record, and then you can put it on tape." He only played records once; he put everything on tapes. I said, "We'll find out from your company the name of anybody that's got a copy of that, and then we'll send them a letter asking if they would permit you to be sent their copy of the record, and you'd make a tape and then send it right back." He said, "Oh, they wouldn't do that." I said, "What do you mean, they wouldn't do that? We'll just write a letter on your four-star letterhead, and see whether they will or not."

Well, they picked some doctor; I don't know who the hell he was. Well, he just damned near did everything but bring it over himself. But Abrams was so reticent about himself and his reputation that he honestly didn't see any reason why, just because he sent somebody a letter, they would particularly be interested in doing a favor for him. That's the

kind of a man he was. Well, I can't say enough about the man, but the whole record will show that. So that's enough of that.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview 2

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GEORGE D. JACOBSON

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