INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE McARTHUR

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Cosmos Club, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

G: We'll just take off from there.

M: What do you want to cover today?

G: It occurred to me that you worked--

M: Do you want to recover some of those things that we did the other day just to make sure, or will--

G: We can. Some of these things I think are probably going to get recovered in the course of the way I phrased some of these questions. But I wanted to start off by asking you, if I figured it right, you worked for the AP [Associated Press] for twenty-one years, is that right?

M: Yes, twenty years.

G: That's a long time for a wire service. My impression of a wire service kind of a job was, you pick them young and talented, and you burn them out and you discard them.

M: Well, that was about the shape of it, I think. I went to work for the AP when I was about twenty-two, and I left when I was about forty-two, which I think was about the right time.

G: How does it differ working for a wire service and working for a daily like the *L.A. Times*?

M: Well, I've now worked for a wire service, and a daily, and a weekly magazine. And the deadlines can actually get rougher, in a certain way, because so long as you're young and able to do it, a deadline when you're working for a wire service doesn't mean anything in the world to you. You know you've got to have it in at one p.m., so you go and do something, and you hope it's right, and you do everything that you can to make sure that it's right, but you know that that deadline is there. You want to produce it as best you can, but let's face it, spot news for a wire service; the only quality in there is the integrity of the news itself.

They don't much care how it's written. It's got to be written legibly and this, that and the other, but so long as all of your facts are there. So there's no pressure on you. You've got a certain number of facts at one p.m.; you go to the telephone, and you disgorge those facts as of one p.m. You're not really concerned whether they're right or whether they're wrong, or this, that or the other. They were the best you could do at that time.

That's a totally different type of pressure from the daily newspaper, which is trying to produce a quality product, which cares as to how it's written, which is going to have to apologize to its readers if it's right or wrong, which wishes to avoid, certainly, the egregious errors and things of that nature. So you're under a little bit more pressure for a newspaper, because, well, you've got more time, and you're expected to do a better job. I'm not too sure I did a better job, as a matter of fact. With the wire service, the emphasis on getting your facts straight usually turned out--even though you had to have it in by one, two, three, four or five, the pressure on getting the facts straight was such that I don't really think that's

much different, between a daily and a wire service. With the newspaper you had to write it one hell of a lot better.

When I first started to work for the *Los Angeles Times*, I got sloppy, because I felt I had all the space in the world. Well, of course, my editors disabused me of that fairly quickly; I didn't have all the space. I had more space than I had before, but you can't write forever. But the point of--what I'm trying to say is that the discipline of a daily is different, but in its peculiar way, it's tighter than it is for a wire service.

Wire service is like being an infantryman. You just go out and shoot everything in sight and don't worry too much about it. You work for a daily newspaper, and you've sort of moved up in the command scale a little bit; you have more responsibility. You have to make more decisions on your own. In the field, there are no editors behind you, and that's that. And of course, you get onto a magazine, and the discipline is even greater. Your deadlines come Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, but your requirements for tight writing and that kind of. . . . And I found that of all those psychological burdens along the way, the psychological burden of working for a wire service, in its peculiar way, though it was day to day, was less intense than working for a daily and/or for a magazine. I enjoyed that "shoot-'em-up-bang" with the wire service. I couldn't have kept it going much longer, but I enjoyed it.

G: Is it appropriate to say that a wire service reporter more or less wipes the slate clean every day, and--

M: Well, he doesn't wipe the slate clean, because nobody permits you to do that. If you've made a bad error, you'd better go back and pick it up; what we call a rowback. And every wire service man--

G: What is a rowback?

M: A rowback means you write the second-day story to incorporate what you said the previous day but, quote, "put it in perspective," unquote. In other words, you had X division out X miles too far--it's usually a tactical-type thing of that nature, in a military context. In a political or the domestic context, you misspell the man's name; you had him declaring for office one day prior to the moment he declared. But the rowback is the second-day story which actually gets it right. That's known as the rowback.

G: How do you spell it?

M: Rowback, like rowing back in a rowboat. You're rowing back to shore, is the derivation of it.

G: Okay, I got it.

I hadn't known before our interview the other day that Mrs. McArthur had had that special job in the embassy. Did that have any bearing on your approach to a--not your approach to a story, but your access or the way you had to handle yourself when you were covering a story on the embassy?

M: Quite obviously. When I met Eva, it was through mutual friends, and I knew at that time that she was working [as] the secretary of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. *She* was well aware that she was working for Ellsworth, and I was in the AP, very shortly to go with the *L.A. Times*, but--I mean, I was conscious of her position at all times. But the point of all

this is that in our long relationship, Eva, being the person that she is, has never disclosed to me one damn thing that was really newsworthy, outside of what you might call office gossip, which I didn't follow up on in a very careful way.

But in my long association with that young lady, she has never been of any material help to me in what I would call a concrete or a significant story. And one reason for that was her own sense of loyalty to her employers. Even when she talks in her sleep, she mumbles. And too, my own conscious association with her was that we would discuss things, and there was the unwritten rule that anything that she said was between us, of course. But in addition, I simply wouldn't--you don't pop-quiz a girl while you're courting her, and I certainly didn't do that, and would not have done it later on.

And I knew Ellsworth Bunker, of course, before I began to court Eva. Our relationship was friendly and quite good. And when he became aware that we were in love with one another, his attitude didn't change; he was a marvelous man in that respect. Ellsworth Bunker regarded not only mine, but his and everybody else's personal life as their own business. He never once questioned Eva's relationship with me. Not one time did he ever raise it with Eva Kim, didn't say one word. He just considered that she was doing a capable job, which she was, of course. At that time she was named secretary of the year, as a matter of fact, in the whole State Department. But Ellsworth was--he simply wouldn't raise a question like that. He felt that you led your own personal life, and that was your business. And I had a tremendous amount of respect for him, because there was obviously a potential for all manner of difficulties there. And I had stories along the way, I don't really recall what they were, but Ellsworth and I, we had a testy relationship sometimes, a friendly

relationship others. I've told you, he would call me George when we were friends and Mr. McArthur when we were less than friends. That went on for the whole period that he was there. But not once in any of the stories that I ever wrote did he ever relate those to Eva, in any way. He just wouldn't do it. He was an old New England gentleman, a marvelous man.

G: Did anything change when Graham Martin came in?

M: Graham--I know from peripheral evidence, but not from direct evidence, that Ellsworth explained the situation of Eva and I to Graham, and told him, to the best of my knowledge, that he would be wise to not only accept it, but to ignore it, because it was not going to affect his job in any particular way. And it did not, as a matter of fact. Eva continued to work twelve and thirteen hours a day for Graham when things were difficult, and every evidence is that she had his total confidence.

But Graham, for reasons somewhat bizarre, which I went into otherwise, I did a story which enraged him, and he wouldn't see me for several months. I guess altogether he was there about six months before he would agree to see me. And then we became good friends, as I told you before. But I don't think that my relationship with Eva had much to do with that. He just didn't like me, period, paragraph. And then later on he changed his mind about that. But it was certainly not because of any distrust of Eva as his secretary that he felt the way he did. He entrusted her with things from beginning to end that he wouldn't entrust anybody else with, including all of the old papers in there. She had behind her office, in that peculiar embassy, she had two whole rooms which, in effect, were the embassy safe, the ambassador's safe. These were two large-size closets, and in those two large-size closets there was an infinite number of safes, five or six, ten or twelve, I don't

really know. So she had the keys to them, and she had the papers inside. But she was the only person in that embassy who had total access to every bit of paper that ever went across the ambassador's desk; was her. Ellsworth and Graham--that situation didn't alter a bit when he came in. [It] couldn't have; he couldn't have run the embassy without her, as far as that goes, and I think he realized that. But no matter, he hated my guts for the first six months.

G: You don't remember what kind of a story you wrote that made him so mad?

M: Oh, gosh, [inaudible]. I wrote a story before he ever got there, in which I made a reference to one of his sons. He had a genuine son--that is, I would say, a natural son, and an adopted son. His adopted son--he had three, now that I think back about it. One was killed in the war, the adopted son. His natural son he had given a sports car to as a graduation present from college, as I recall, and the kid--he killed himself on that night.

I can't recall the precise story, but I made some reference to those children which were--it was totally inoffensive, as I thought at the time. But Graham took that reference to the children, plus some other slightly critical things I had to say, and he felt that I was out to get him. This was before he ever arrived there. So he had cut me off of his social list before he ever set foot in Saigon, just on the basis of that one story, which--it was the type of a program story that--it was what we call a throwaway. You said, "Ambassador Graham Martin is arriving tomorrow, and these are the type [of] problems he's going to have," and you go on for a few hundred words to give a little biographical information about the Ambassador. Now that's where I fell into the trap. When I got into the bio of Graham, and at that point I wasn't too familiar with him, still am not. And [inaudible]--that's where I fell

into the trap. But he was paranoid about many things, and his family was one of the things he was paranoid about. He felt that I was, quote, "out to get him." He said so much, later on. Changed his mind, but no matter; that situation lasted for several months.

G: Was this at the time when you were doing some stories, I think it was on a black market in scrap metal, brass?

M: Brass. I had a colleague at that time named Jacques Leslie. And he was out doing a lot of stories, and got into one pretty good story about scrap brass, and the fact that the Vietnamese, of course, throughout the war, had been collecting brass and selling it on the black market. This story was a little bit bigger than usual; we had an American ship called the *SS Beauregard* involved in it. It was taking brass shipments out of Danang into Hong Kong far in excess of any--in fact, there was nothing on the ship's manifest at all. So we had chapter and verse. In terms of proving anything, I don't think that the story proved anything at all, except that scrap brass was being collected and sold out there. I remember going down into the Mekong Delta with General [Creighton] Abrams one time, and we had one of these usual divisional parties and--I've forgotten; it was the Vietnamese 2nd Division--and they were celebrating. And the divisional commander had sent up to Saigon and had distributed as favors for everybody in the party--there were about twenty-five of us at this luncheon--they were brass ash trays made out of scrap brass and distributed to them all. There were half a dozen newspaper types there; General Abrams was there. Well, there was embarrassment around and about, because the Vietnamese weren't supposed to have that kind of thing. Of course, everybody knew they were. . . .

I knew of another situation whereby this Vietnamese colonel had buried a vast amount of scrap brass and was hoping for the price to go up, and a South Vietnamese military headquarters of some sort had come in and set right down on top of his buried brass. And so he was unable to get to it, and he couldn't pull enough strings to get to headquarters, whatever it was, for them to. . . . Well, there's a big stack of brass buried back in South Vietnam--those kind of stories. But anyhow, I was doing brass, and it was embarrassing to Graham at the time. No big deal, but any corruption story, it was embarrassing to him to see that; he didn't like it.

I had mixed feelings about corruption in Vietnam, and I think we blew the story out of proportion, but I'm not too precisely sure what the proportions were to put it in.

G: Did you try to cover the drug stories that came out later?

M: Yes.

G: What were you able to find out about that, about Vietnamese involvements at high levels? That was always rumored.

M: There is no question that the Vietnamese were involved in drugs. Had been invol[ved]--I say the Vietnamese; the Vietnamese high command--had been involved in drugs. It started with the opium and the relations with Laos and Thailand, and it was, through 1968, thereabouts, sort of an accepted revenue measure for those who were in charge of aircraft, which meant the generals. It extended up to Cao Van Vien, who was the commander-in-chief. The focus of drugs at that time, up until 1968, was opium, and the money it was made in supplying primarily the Chinese community, in Saigon and elsewhere in South Vietnam, all the major cities, Danang, but primarily Saigon. There was a tidy amount of

money to be made, not a vast amount, in supplying opium to those people who smoked opium. And the opium trade affected the ordinary soldier, American or otherwise, not at all. Because smoking opium is a rather complicated procedure and it's not something you can do in five seconds; you can't shoot it and this, that and the other.

It was not until heroin--well, let me backtrack a little bit. There was also a certain amount of money--this was made at the lower level--on marijuana out there. But that too, marijuana--you can grow it so easily that there was never such a thing as organized crime, in that sense. A farmer would grow a certain amount of marijuana. If he sold it within that military district, he would have to pay off a local captain, who, in turn, would pay off his colonel, and it was all more or less retained in that local district, because there was no nation-wide--marijuana was so widespread, and the price was so cheap, that you had no nation-wide network.

So when we went to Vietnam, that was the situation that we faced: marijuana and opium. Well, the ordinary soldier out in the field--opium was never any problem. From the very beginning, the American soldier was smoking marijuana. He would do it on leave, this, that and the other. Presumably he did it occasionally on duty, whenever he took the notion. But it was never a serious problem. In fact, it was *never* a serious problem, period, paragraph. I'll say that.

But finally the American authorities turned their attention to heroin when it became a problem. They succeeded in solving, or beginning to solve--and [inaudible] solving the heroin problem by ignoring marijuana. They reverted back to our original position in 1968: marijuana is not a problem and it never was.

Anyhow, after 1968 when heroin began to rear its ugly head--and there's a question as to whether heroin was introduced into Vietnam by the Americans, or the Americans introduced heroin to the Americans, because the kids coming over from the United States were the ones that were looking for heroin, not in large measure, but they had--most of them who had tried heroin in the United States in that early period were looking for it. A market was there. Well, our good friends out in Thailand and whatnot--between the period of, I would say, 1967 to 1969--they began to supply that market, and then that market began to grow. And heroin, I would say by 1969, 1970, heroin literally did mushroom within a period of about two years.

We didn't focus on it properly--I say we, the Americans, didn't focus on it properly, because once again, we approached it as an across-the-board drug problem. And the varying directives went out from MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] to suppress opium and suppress marijuana and suppress the PSP [PCP?] and the pills, and suppress this, that and the other. The enemy from the very beginning was heroin. And General Abrams, bless his heart, about 1969--don't pin me down on the date--came to that conclusion and said, "We're going to go after heroin." At the same time what was taking place in Vietnamese society, the kids of the Vietnamese generals were being hooked on heroin, which was so cheap on the streets in Saigon, I mean literally you could turn around and buy it from anybody, a GP [?] driver and what have you. You could get--and this was not just American heroin. This was *pure* heroin out there, and a lot of people were dying, and this, that and the other.

A lot of people became aware of heroin at about the same time, the Vietnamese, the Americans. Some strange things happened out there among the black soldiers, who had their own leadership. And I've been into a half a dozen barracks out there, when the blacks realized themselves--and they didn't trust the quote, "white," unquote, drug program, you know, amnesty and all that. Well, no GI was ever gonna believe in total amnesty; that goes against the grain of the PFC [Private First Class] out there. The blacks would take care of their own people, and on many, many occasions I've gone--say half a dozen times I've been into a barracks, and you'd find a blanket down over in one corner of the barracks, and there was some black guy going through withdrawal back there, with two or three of his soul brothers taking care of him. Because they didn't trust the amnesty program. The white commanders were well aware that that's what the blacks were doing. They said, "Fine. If that's the way you handle it, and you can do it yourself, fine." And it would usually be a senior NCO [non-commissioned officer], some respected member of that black outfit, and in large measure they took care of their own. In significant measure, they took care of their own.

All this, as I say, took place about 1969. And between 1969 and 1971, with the Vietnamese themselves aware of what was going on, we had--meaning the United States--the heroin problem under control. It was largely educational. The GIs out there, too, realized that this was a one-way trip. And we instituted urine programs, and varying things. So it mushroomed from, say, 1969 until 1971, and from there on it was on the decline. And military programs were largely responsible for that.

But now the Vietnamese mix-up. When heroin came into it, there is no question that the Vietnamese military was involved through its old opium connection, and turned its back. Starting, once again, about 1970--don't pin me down--when the Vietnamese themselves saw what a threat this was to their own society, from that point forward they largely cleaned up their act. Nguyen Cao Ky had been involved, for example, in my opinion--getting proof is impossible. He had been involved in the old opium trade; he'd smoked opium himself. He'd been around opium all of his life. He didn't see it as a threat, and he was getting a certain amount of money out of it. He cut himself off totally because he was smart enough to see that this led nowhere. Cao Van Vien was another who was in opium up to here, in opium and vice and everything else. He too cut himself off, to the best of my knowledge.

The fact that there were lower-level people profiting, I don't think there's any question about that. How widespread it was--it was pretty widespread at one time. By 1972, I think that it had been pretty much turned around. And at the end I don't think drugs were a problem at all, in that sense of the word, except that in any society drugs nowadays are going to be a continuing problem.

G: You mentioned that a key, in the opium trade and later in the heroin trade, was the control of the aircraft, and of course Ky had a lot of aircraft.

M: That's right.

G: And someone has pointed out, or tried to make a case, that the CIA was turning its back, in the early days, because a lot of Air America and CAT [Civil Air Transport] aircraft were involved. Do you know anything about that?

M: Yes. This was primarily Laos, not in South Vietnam, where the opium trade was going on. Air America, which in effect was interchangeable with the CIA at that time, they were flying the old [Pilatus] Porters. They would occasionally get a twin-engined aircraft up there, not very often. But they were primarily Porters. The pilot on that Porter is not going to get out and frisk his passengers when he comes in there. He's told to land at a certain strip, pick up so many people and deliver them to X, Y and Z. That's what he did. He didn't give a tinker's damn what they had back there. So the old Lao farmer--frequently the Lao farmer was a collaborator of ours. He could even have been quite powerful in the military hierarchy of Vang Pao or the Hmong or somebody like that. He gets aboard with this little ball of opium, and he did.

The idea that Air America was transporting opium, that's patently obvious. Anybody, who's ever flown with them, you could smell the goddamned stuff when the guy sat down by you. So sure, they were carrying opium. And if they'd started to frisk their passengers, it would have created all manner of difficulties for them in Laos. And to the best of my knowledge, despite their cleanup campaigns and this, that and the other, they never made a real effort to disbar the ordinary Lao from his opium supply. And if he happened to be a passenger on that aircraft, fine. The CIA was well aware that that opium was not the opium that was involved in the heroin trade.

To the best of my knowledge, the CIA was never tainted with heroin in any way, but the CIA was ill equipped, unable, to clean up the opium situation in the Iron Triangle. Still is, to this day. Even the communists can't clean up the opium in the Iron Triangle. The CIA never really made an effort. And I think that was quite wise. To their operation, it was

totally irrelevant, the opium that was involved in their little transportation back and forth. Which is not to say that the occasional Air America pilot might not have been involved in other things on his own, and I know of a couple of instances in which that took place, in which rather large shipments of opium--in one case it was an Air America plane that I know of; in one case it was a United States Air Force plane, and these guys both got access to a C-47, flew out to Vientiane, picked up large amounts of opium and flew them back to Saigon. Those are two incidents I encountered in ten years. But the CIA--opium yes, heroin no.

G: There are a couple of things I want to ask you about Tet. We talked extensively about Tet, but a couple of things we didn't bring up--one of the things that is a recurring issue once again involves numbers. MACV claimed that the Viet Cong took horrendous casualties at Tet. I think General [William] Westmoreland is quoted as saying forty thousand, something on that order--forty thousand killed, of which we don't know how many were bystanders or civilians or whatever. What is your personal feeling, what was then your personal feeling on the order of magnitude of the casualties at Tet?

M: Insofar as I was able to see it personally, I would credit Westmoreland's figures as being reasonably accurate, and I think most of the press corps out there--whereas it had become traditional at that moment to deride MACV and Westmoreland and the military command for exaggeration, and he was criticized at Tet for exaggerating. [But] I think most of the newspaper guys who actually saw just rows upon rows of bodies after varying operations would agree that the total casualty figure for Tet was reasonably accurate. When you say reasonably accurate, within five thousand, even ten thousand. So thirty thousand were

killed. What was patently obvious to anybody who had studied the war over a long period of time--and this didn't really become apparent for a long time.

Well, it won in the short range. When I went down in the Delta after Tet, after I left Hue, you could travel from one end of the Delta to the other by jeep in that period immediately after Tet, and nobody was going to molest you. It was obvious that the Viet Cong/NVA [North Vietnamese Army], for varying reasons, was not there. So that was visible evidence that they had been hurt. In later years as intelligence cropped up, it became evident that the Tet offensive had wiped out most of the Viet Cong regulars, a vast number of the Viet Cong infrastructure, and I think most historians now agree that the Viet Cong never recovered. The NVA from that point took over the war.

All right. Well, you have your varying estimates of the Viet Cong strength, what it might or might not have been--I don't trust any of those figures. But when you wipe out the whole southern structure of an army, you've inflicted some fairly serious casualties. And with very few exceptions, that was--in the Mekong Delta, it was patently obvious the Viet Cong had disappeared. In the Saigon area, the Viet Cong as a force--it was two years before they came back in any significant way, either politically and/or militarily. They were wiped out. Not wiped out, but decimated. So I'm inclined to credit Westmoreland's figures, but who knows?

G: But people were not too inclined to credit him at the time.

M: No, at the time they were not, because, of course, it was being presented as a great victory back here. But at the same time it was being presented as a victory back here, you've got to remember that the varying correspondents who were down there in Saigon at the time, up in

Danang, wherever you wanted to go, you could go out and see Viet Cong bodies lined up in the hundreds. It wasn't a question of MACV's body count; it was going out there and smelling all those rotten corpses. And in almost any provincial capital that had been attacked, the city of Saigon itself, Hue, Danang, about which I'm more aware, the number of dead VC/NVA was astounding. I'm not around there with my computer counting them, but outside of a few occasions in Korea earlier in my life, I've never seen so many dead folks. And they were all theirs, not ours. And a lot of correspondents had to have had similar experiences. The dead folks was all over the joint, and they were primarily VC/NVA.

G: So the security situation in the countryside then was pretty measurably affected by this transaction.

M: The real criticism that was made, very lightly, and should have been made much stronger, and some of the professional officers within the American military made it: had the South Vietnamese army and the Americans moved out vigorously after Tet and into the countryside, they would have wiped out a lot more remnants of the VC that were willing to come in. The Americans and the South Vietnamese were--this was one of the victories that the NVA did achieve--we were in a state of shock. It is true, as Westmoreland says, that we won a victory. In military terms, I think he's absolutely correct. But Westmoreland used to also say that you reinforce success, and he failed miserably to reinforce success at that moment, because had we moved out of the provincial capitals, we could--as I say, I traveled the Mekong Delta, places that I wouldn't have traveled three months before.

You went along in a jeep, and you went along in a jeep in perfect security, and you went along with Vietnamese. I wasn't traveling with Americans, because there were no

Americans in the Delta, outside of advisors. I had my own jeep; I had a Vietnamese interpreter, traveling on my own [inaudible] with a Vietnamese army officer: fuel, give a guy a lift here, give a guy a lift there, the old piggyback [inaudible] down the road. I drove from My Tho over to Can Tho, and what is that? About a hundred and fifty miles. Didn't encounter any sign of any opposition in that countryside. And once you get out of those provincial capitals down there, as you well know, you're in the countryside. The VC presence simply was not there, and didn't return for months.

G: As long as we're on the subject of numbers, do you have a considered opinion on this CBS-Westmoreland controversy over the numbers? Was there a sensitivity on MACV's part to the new order of battle figures at that time that you remember?

M: Well, let's put this thing in some kind of perspective. The Westy-CBS figures all are concerned with a period of time prior to Tet, which is 1968. Ted Shackley, who was the CIA station chief out there, was much concerned with this type thing. I used to talk to him periodically. He told me that the CIA, the intelligence community, never really began to get a decent handle on enemy strength figures until well into 1969. And even then they were suspicious of them. I had spoken to, during that period, from 1965 right up until 1968, countless intelligence officers, General [Phillip] Davidson among others, some of whose names and faces I no longer recall.

But it was not difficult to go out to MACV at that time, as a newspaperman for a reputable wire service in the AP, you would get your standard briefing. Sometimes it would be from a press type, sometimes they would take you in to the G-2, the G-3. Sometimes it would be an underling. You'd get the standard briefing; he would give you what were

considered to be the VC/NVA figures. Invariably, the briefing officer would give the caveat, "We don't have a very good handle for these. You may use them if you like," these briefings being background and seldom for direct. So, "you can use them as you like or as you judge. But we don't have any faith in these figures. They're the best we could come up with for varying reasons, but so what? There they are, and we don't fight the war on the basis of these figures." That was the MACV perspective, and I never attended a briefing out there in which that caveat was not appended to NVA figures.

Now what the bureaucrats were fighting in the back room as to how many angels you could get on the head of a pin, it was totally irrelevant to the tactical commanders out there, who had their own immediate tactical sources of information. I got the impression it was largely irrelevant to Westmoreland and MACV itself, except that they had certain reporting channels that had to be satisfied, and people in Washington--this I know--were absolutely demanding figures. It was not a question of Westmoreland volunteering these figures. He was absolutely required by military regulations to furnish these figures on a month-to-month basis. And that requirement went down the line, so the figures were naturally produced. But nobody in the military command had the slightest faith in those figures, or in the CIA shop down at the embassy. They didn't have any faith in those figures. They'd mull them over; they did the best they could.

But I mean, you'd then go out in the countryside, where the guy is actually faced with quote, "enemy," unquote. And you'd go into his little CP [command post?], and he'd tell you, "Well, I got a company over here," speaking of the VC, "and a company over there. I got a runner in last week that said there may be a division eight miles back up in the hills."

That was the information he was operating on, and compared to what was available down in Saigon, that was reasonably accurate stuff. They relied far more on their local intelligence than they did [on] some grandiose idea from MACV as to what might or might not be transpiring. And the tactical order of battle that we arrayed about the VC at any given moment was reasonably accurate. You knew where the units were. You had a pretty good idea of the strength of those units, how frequently they'd been engaged and this, that and the other. Battlefield decisions I don't think were ever made on the basis of the Saigon figure.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about numbers, and a minute ago you said something about reinforcing success. It was, I guess, in February when General Wheeler came out to Saigon, February 1968, on a visit, and a famous story emanated from that, and that was the two-hundred-thousand-man troop request, which created such a stir back here in the States. Was there any inkling of that over there at the time?

M: No, not really. I don't recall. We knew--I say we, using the press corps there as a generic term--that Westmoreland wanted more people. But we also knew, and this is very important, that Westmoreland suffered from the military bug of always wanting more people. I don't think anybody in the press corps dreamed that it was going to be a request of that size. And very few people--and once again I'm speaking for other people, and I shouldn't really do that--I certainly didn't believe that that number was necessary. In fact, I felt at that time that we already had too many people there. There were a lot of people who were well aware that we were taking over the war, and that we had brought in, in the

opinion of some of us, too many people. So all I can say is that when I saw that figure, that I was stunned, at the time. And I didn't agree with it. I was no--I don't want to be an armchair general.

G: Some have suggested that what he really wanted to do with those troops was cut the trails in Laos.

M: That well may have been the case, that he felt that if he got that number of people out there, that he would have to put them to some useful purpose, and that that would have been the case. But there is an argument against that. I know, for example, that from his very arrival in Vietnam in 1968 [1967], Ellsworth Bunker, with the support of Westmoreland and later General Abrams, had advocated from the very beginning an operation into Laos. Actually it predates Bunker's arrival there, on recent research, but I know specifically that Bunker's arrival gave impetus to it, because when Bunker arrived, Westmoreland said, "Well, let's give it another whack." And knowing that he had the support of Ambassador Bunker, they went again to the Pentagon for operations into Laos and into Cambodia. And Washington turned him down. This was not just a one-day campaign on the part of Ellsworth Bunker and Westmoreland, and later Abrams. It was a continuing effort on their part to go into Laos, and finally we did, with disastrous results. That's something else again.

But back in 1968 or 1969 it would have made more sense, and that may have been one of the factors motivating Westmoreland in asking for more troops. But the previous history was that he had been so consistently turned down that he had to be pretty Machiavellian, and I don't think Westmoreland is a very Machiavellian person. I think he felt that he could use those troops--he was then wedded, you remember, to a war of attrition,

and he felt that attrition would eventually wear the North Vietnamese down. I think he was wrong, but no matter. He had reason to believe, on his side, the figures supported him, that he was quote, "winning," unquote. So I don't think that he would have brought in those troops purely and simply to go into Laos. But it certainly entered into his mind that if he wins the war down here through a matter of attrition, that at that moment we will have a surplus of troops and we can go into Laos, and quote, "reinforce success," unquote. It would have been in keeping with the general thrust of his thinking. And I don't think he's ever denied that he wanted to go into Laos and Cambodia. But I don't think he asked for those troops precisely for that purpose.

G: Did you see General [Earle] Wheeler on that visit?

M: No, I did not. Nobody saw him, to the best of my knowledge. Well, physically, I laid eyes on him, yes. But it was the type of thing--those trips, Clark Clifford, people like that, they would occasionally--and I don't know whether Wheeler did so or not; I don't recall--

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

G: All right, sir. You were saying that these special high-ranking visitors--

M: I believe these guys came out, they weren't receiving these local newspaper types outside of a perfunctory interview at the airport, because they were going back and reporting to Lyndon Baines Johnson, and Lyndon Baines Johnson didn't look favorably on his people going out and disclosing the party secrets out in the boonies.

G: Tell us a little bit about the operation of JUSPAO [Joint United States Public Affairs Office], which somebody has characterized as the greatest public information juggernaut that's ever been unleashed on the press. Is that an accurate characterization?

M: Well, I think it's a little bit overblown, but within a certain context, yes I agree with you, because it was under Barry Zorthian, as we discussed on that other tape. And Barry Zorthian was very dedicated and a very talented man, smooth, suave, shrewd, glib, and I might add a very excellent poker player, too. Just as an aside, we used to go play poker at Zorthian's house, and that was when we had the curfew. And this was a real blood-and-guts poker game, because you were locked in from ten o'clock, when the curfew began, until five-thirty in the morning when the curfew lifted. And you'd sit around that poker table and Zorthian would have all the radios around there. That poker game was usually CIA, JUSPAO, and a half a dozen newspaper types that went in and went out. We always liked to play that game because you stayed abreast of what was going on; the radios were always on.

Zorthian got along with the press; he knew how to handle newspapermen. He had an unlimited budget, insofar as one could tell. He had centralized, in that downtown office of his--what was that old four-story building called? The Majestic? Was that the Majestic? I think it was; I'm not too sure. No, it wasn't the Majestic. But you could go in there and get information on anything that you wanted. You could go in there and get a helicopter; you could go in there and--you just name it, it was there. I've told you about Joe Fried, the *New York Daily News* correspondent, who practically lived in that building. He never went out in the field in his entire ten years in Vietnam. He'd go in there, and they'd provide him with the home-towners; they'd provide him with the communiqués, and he'd then go to the briefing and meet with the briefer.

But you had a North Vietnamese reporting section there which was exceptionally good, which I made use of and very few other people did. It was a combination of a library and a PR firm, and, in effect, a communications and transport outfit. It was a travel bureau. You wanted to go someplace, you went up to JUSPAO and you got there. I was an old Korea type, and [had] been used to scrounging my own transportation and doing this, that and the other, and when I first encountered JUSPAO, it boggled my mind. I'd never seen anything quite like that. When you consider that--I think the high point of the war, depending on what the high points are, but we got about twelve hundred quote, "accredited correspondents," unquote, out there, and JUSPAO was handling them all with relative ease. I think that out of that twelve hundred, you could probably say that two or three hundred were actually working correspondents, and the rest were for a vast number of boondoggles, which probably included ladies' knitting journals and anything.

But JUSPAO had consciously made a decision early in the war that if you said and had a letter from a publication that was periodically published, you got accredited. And this inserted an awful lot of peripherals. A lot of critics of the press out there said that--and this was within the press--the press itself, if you could have gotten together the working press, we would have shipped six hundred of those guys out of the country straight away, because they just got in the way. But no matter; JUSPAO was set up to handle them, and they had their requests treated just as seriously as the requests of the *New York Times* or anybody else--*pro forma*; obviously the *New York Times* and serious people got consideration. But those guys were able to go down there and get aboard choppers and do this, do that.

And old Zorro himself, he knew who the important people were. He'd have them--he loved to invite you into his office, and he would have papers spread out there, facing him, of course, with the "Secret" all over the top, you know. So Zorro would give you a little briefing about something, and he'd pick up a piece of paper, you'd know what it was, and he'd cut off the top with a pair of scissors and give it to you. Well, I strongly suspect that that was the original document, but if Zorro had wanted to do otherwise, he could have done so. And he loved to do things like that with a flourish, to show you a little of this, and let you peek under the covers.

G: He had a fellow Levantine in the embassy for a while named Phil Habib, who used to, I understand, join forces with him on occasion and give briefings. Together they were known as the Rug Merchants. Does that strike any chords in your mind?

M: Why, sure. They were known as the Rug Merchants, and they are still the best of friends. But in point of actual fact, Phil and Zorro had quite different feelings about the war. Habib--believe it or not; people don't know this--Habib was a dove. Habib early reached the conclusion that we couldn't win that damned thing. He was never disloyal or anything like that, and he would get out and soldier in the trenches. Zorro, on the other hand, he was an unreconstructed hawk at that time. I think he's modified his views since.

But that doesn't make any difference. The two of them loved to joke; they shared a Middle Eastern ancestry, although in the case of Zorthian, it's Armenian, and in the case of Habib, it's Levantine. And so, being of that ethnic background, the two of them would jibe at one another, and there was a rivalry there between the Levantine and the Armenian. So it's incorrect to simply characterize them as Middle Easterners and [inaudible] that they

would naturally be allies as a result of this, when in actual fact their goals were--both of them different and considerably more sophisticated--they were two highly intelligent men. But Phil Habib, he was assistant secretary of state back here for Asian affairs, which was considerably higher than Zorro ever got, and he is a truly Byzantine man. And there are some things to this day that I don't have the foggiest notion--I have known Phil Habib now for fifteen years, and I couldn't tell you what his position is on certain things.

Whereas in the case of Zorro, he's a very upfront, outward guy. Now that he's out of office, he'll tell you what he thought about anything and everything in the last fifteen years. Habib is not that way.

G: Phil Habib was political counselor, I think.

M: He was the political counselor in the embassy, and I believe--well, he occupied a position at one time which was sort of the super-political counselor out there, because--I don't know whether he was actually the number two. You remember at one time we had two ambassadors out there, and I can't quite fit Phil Habib in [inaudible]. He was always--and everybody knew this--he was far more than the political counselor of that embassy, because normally the political counselor of that embassy was a man with no balls whatsoever. He had no standing whatsoever; he was totally ignored. I don't recall that Ellsworth Bunker or Graham Martin, those were the two ambassadors I knew well, ever relied on their political counselors at all. Their main concern was to make sure that the political counselor did *not* know what was going on. I mean, the back-channel communications with [Henry] Kissinger, that type thing; the political counselor--he just wasn't clued in. He was there primarily to make a certain input on what the Vietnamese might or might not be doing, and

he was welcome to file his memos and papers and whatnot, but in terms of offering advice to the ambassador, I don't know of a political counselor out there who would dare offer advice to either Bunker or Martin, in a really serious sense. I mean, sure, they got up at the council meetings and expressed certain opinions. That's about as far as they dared to go, and that was once a week, and they were ignored.

G: What do you know of the second of Ed Lansdale's missions to Vietnam? He came out in 1965, I guess, under [Henry Cabot] Lodge. I haven't been able to find out too much about what he was supposed to do or how he went about doing it.

M: Well, one, the first Lansdale mission, I was not there for the first Lansdale mission, so I can't really comment about that. Some people took him seriously, and felt that he had accomplished certain things. My personal view is the contrary. The second Lansdale mission can properly be called a laugher. He was given no resources; he was given no chores. He was considered by the people in the embassy and the CIA to be an amateur and he was horning in on their territory. And that's about all I really know. I know he was given minimal resources: a place to live, and everybody expected his quick departure, and that took place. But his second mission was really a laugher.

G: If he had a long suit, it's my impression that it was in the political side of things. How would that have jibed with Phil Habib's position as political counselor?

M: Well, I'm glad that you predicated that remark by "if he had a long suit," because there's a considerable body of thought that Ed Lansdale doesn't have a long suit, he has a--there's a considerable body of thought that holds that he doesn't have a full hand, much less a long suit. You have to go back with Ed Lansdale, who, as you well know, made his name in the

Philippines with Ramon Magsaysay, and there's a lot of question whether Magsaysay had a full deck either, and there was a lot of luck figured in with that, and the Philippines was totally different from Vietnam, and Lansdale to this day--I don't want to denigrate the man--but he exaggerates his successes in the Philippines, which came about through a confluence of forces that simply wasn't present in Vietnam. I have never spoken to anybody in authority in Vietnam who ever took Ed Lansdale seriously.

G: Did you know any of his team?

M: Did I know any of his team? I met them--this was in 1965, of course--but to say that I knew them, no.

G: I just wondered if you might have known Rufus Phillips or Daniel Ellsberg.

M: I met Daniel Ellsberg; that's all I can say about him. Eva knew Daniel a little bit better than that. Daniel Ellsberg didn't make any impression on me in encounters, singular or plural, I don't recollect. But I didn't know the fellow. But I do know from my contacts with the CIA, which go back to Lou Conein and people like that, they thought that Ed Lansdale was a boy scout, and they regarded him as being an irritant, and they wanted him out of there as quickly as they could get him out of there, and they got him out of there pretty quick. But I don't recall that he made any contribution.

G: Do you know how they got him out, under what cover or whatever?

M: Well, I don't know; you'd have to go back and check your books. I don't think it's a big secret. They just didn't give him anything to do, and I think Ed probably asked to get out, after a period of time. I don't know.

G: There was another man with a high-powered name who was operating as a civilian over there, named John Paul Vann. Did you know him?

M: Oh, I knew John very well.

G: He was operating as, I guess, an AID [Agency for International Development] civilian at the end, was he not?

M: Yes. He had been the military adviser, as I recall, down in My Tho, and got into a pissing match down there--he was a light colonel--and retired, and he came back about 1966 or 1967--we'd have to look it up in the book--as a USAID, what we called a provrep, a province representative, and went back down into the Delta. And he was very friendly with the newspaper types, because John Paul Vann compounded a number of--one, at that part of his career, he was a very candid, outspoken person. He was very much of a hawk, and he disagreed in significant detail with how Saigon, in effect, was going about things. John Paul Vann was very much, correctly, I think, a grass-roots man at that time. And he would have emphasized agricultural projects, not grandiose, but small. He was--who was the gentleman who said small is beautiful?

G: I know who you're talking about.

M: John Paul Vann would have been a perfect adherent of his at that time. And since he was a total hawk and agreed with the issue of Saigon's thrust in the war, he survived Saigon's displeasure, because he was always down there [saying], "Yes, we can win the goddamned war. There's no question in my mind. Now, those guys in Saigon might be screwing it up right now, but we're going to patch it up tomorrow, and don't you worry about it." But he was also the darling of the newspaper types, because if you wanted to go down there and

find out what was wrong in X province, he could tell you what was wrong. And he would go off the record and say the province chief is stealing--he'd say, "Yes, that guy is stealing, and that guy's poking that guy's mistress," and that kind of thing, and he'd give you the nitty-gritty about what was going on. And he was a totally sincere man; he felt that he was dealing with a group of honest people; I think he was, by and large. And he got a good press as a result of that.

He was a very complicated man. His opinion altered on the war. He was like--as we discussed--George Jacobson; he'd been there so long and seen so much that he was alternately optimistic and pessimistic. But right up until the end he remained basically an optimist. He felt that given the proper circumstances and support that we could pull it off. Which is one reason that he survived. He was killed when, in early 1975, late 1974, when he was finally killed? [June 1972] His chopper was shot down, as I recall.

G: Which I understand he was flying himself.

M: Yes. I told you the story; I'll repeat it for the tape if you want it.

He flew that chopper himself; he had learned to fly the chopper, and people who had flown with him complained that he was such a blabbermouth that if you were in the back seat--this was one of those old bubble-top choppers; I've forgotten the name of it.

G: H-13?

M: Yes. And you'd be in the back seat back there and John Paul Vann--instead of looking where he was going, he would have his head turned around all the time, jabbering away with you. Well, I'd flown with him twice and I didn't notice that, but other people have said that he just--I know that he was a compulsive talker; he couldn't refrain from talking. And

he wouldn't speak into the mike, because that didn't satisfy him. He had to turn around and look at you.

But he was flying that bubble top, up around--I'll tell you the story, repeat it--Kontum, two days before he was killed. He landed at the command post of an airborne brigade, where another lieutenant colonel named Pete Kama, a Hawaiian, who was an old friend of Vann's and was the senior adviser of that brigade. And he put his bubble top down, and he went over and said hello to Pete, and walked into Pete's tent and asked for a yellow legal pad, and he wrote out a new will, which couldn't have been very long. He folded it up, sealed it up somehow, and gave it to Pete and said if anything happened to him that Pete should see that got into the hands of the proper people.

Then he flew off, and Pete said later that Vann had never done anything like that, and Pete had known Vann for ten years [inaudible]. He said that Vann had a death wish, that Vann had given up; he knew the place was going down the tube, and Vann did not wish to survive it.

But anyhow, Pete kept that will; he put it in his pocket. And two days later--I guess within twenty-four hours, really, the airborne was transferred up to Danang. And so Pete did not know that Vann was killed until several days after the event, when he saw it in *Stars and Stripes*, or perhaps picked it up on the AFRS [Armed Forces Radio Service]. But it was several days, as much as a week, as I recall. And he got a plane and flew down to Saigon and walked into the embassy, and he delivered this yellow legal will, to the consternation of the embassy, because Mr. Vann had led a rather checkered life in his relations with several of the Vietnamese. He had two families there, and the embassy at that

time was already in possession of two previous wills. I don't know what the provisions of those wills were, but this will, obviously, was dated and witnessed by Pete Kama and superseded the other three [?], and it made a holy mishmash out of John Vann's affairs at a moment when the embassy would have preferred to have devoted its time to something else.

G: Let me ask you if any of these names strike any chords. I've no particular reason for asking about them; we're not looking for anything in particular, except that they were prominent in one form or another, and you were there long enough, I'm sure, to have known them all. How about Denis Warner?

M: Denis Warner. I like old Denis; he's a lovely man. He is a bit of a professional anticommunist, but then so am I. And that clouds his judgment from time to time. He's a damned good reporter. And that's about all I really know. Denis is a good drinking man, or was; I don't know whether he survives as such or not.

G: Okay. Did he ever express opinions on his fellow Australian on the other side of the political fence?

M: You're talking about Wilfred Burchett. Yes, he did. And I'm one of the few men, I suppose--Keyes [Beech] is another--who has maintained a friendship with both Wilfred and Denis. Wilfred violated the rule--in addition to being a communist son of a bitch--at the end. He brought a suit against Denis Warner, and I've forgotten the details of the suit, but it was in Britain and it cost Denis a great deal of money. He also filed it in Australia; I think he filed it in different venues. And those of us who had tried to maintain some friendship with Wilfred up until that moment, we said that was hitting below the belt, because Denis in effect had said that Wilfred was a communist. And we all knew that Wilfred was a

communist, and for Wilfred to sue on that point, we felt, was a little bit, as I say, below the belt. And Denis won the suit, and that was the end of that. But Denis' opinion of Wilfred Burchett--he, unlike some of the Americans who had been friendly with Wilfred since, well, since World War II, as far as that goes--Denis hated his guts from beginning to end, and up and down. He always expressed great distaste, to be charitable about it, that some of us maintained a line of communications with Wilfred. But I always felt that was rather shortsighted. As I've told you before, I would maintain communications with the devil if I felt he could give me some information. And in addition to that, I found Wilfred personally to be a nice fellow. He drinks his whiskey, and was engaged in the normal pursuit of life's pleasures, and if you avoided ideological discussions with him--and occasionally you could engage in those, to the mutual benefit of one and all--but if you avoided that type of thing and discussed life's events, Wilfred could be a very pleasant fellow. Do you want me to tell you about that story for the record, of the Cav and Ia Drang?

G: Sure, go ahead.

M: Well, an example of how Wilfred could offer a different insight into a given situation came up when he was in Phnom Penh after the introduction of the American 1st Cav into Vietnam, which took place in 1966--

G: 1965.

M: Right, it was late 1965. And the first serious engagement, when the NVA, in my recollection, sent in two divisions into the Highlands--it may have three--at least two divisions into the Highlands, and the Cav and the NVA got into the first really organized fighting between American units and NVA units as organizational structures. It was the

first sort of a formal battle of the war. It took place in the mountains and it was--as you pointed out, the Cav was totally elated that when it was all over and done with, although their casualties had been--I think severe is the proper word--that they had won the day, they had never lost a battle, this, that, and the other, and they had proved the mobility of the chopper and that they could control the terrain, and they were very well satisfied with the outcome of the battle.

I went over to see Wilfred, and we went out to a restaurant--and his wife, a Bulgarian, a nice girl--drinks her whiskey. And we had a raucous evening, and at the end of the evening we started to discuss serious matters, which he wanted to discuss. And that being the event that was on top of the news at that time, I asked him--I think I probably phrased it in the American manner. I said, "Well, you guys got your ass kicked," or something like that; that's the way I would have said it. And Wilfred said, "Quite the contrary." He said that what the North Vietnamese had set out to do was to find out if--they too were afraid of the Cav; they were afraid of helicopters, they were afraid of American firepower, they were afraid of American mobility, and they had set out to find out how well they could operate under those conditions. They'd done it in the Highlands because this presented terrain favorable to them. And at the end of a give-or-take two months' campaign, in which they had pretty well lost two divisions, but they were quite content with the outcome of the battle, because they had discovered that they could survive with total American command of the skies, with the mobility of the Cav; they could move in the valleys and the hills and the Cav couldn't really pin them down. The losses were severe, but the losses were within the limits that they could sustain. They maintained command and

control. From their point of view, they had gone out to find out what they could do, and they had found out that they could operate with the American helicopters in total command of the sky. And, you'll excuse me, the history of the war from that point forward proved that they did pretty well against the helicopter. They knew its potential; they knew it was a pretty damned lethal weapon. But they were not in deathly fear of it thereafter. And Wilfred said they viewed the battle of the Ia Drang in those terms as a victory for them. They had found out what they set out to find out, and it had proved to be within the parameters that would permit them to sustain the war.

Now, that's the kind of thing that Wilfred could tell you, because he was privy to their thinking, and was in close communication with people in Hanoi. And, of course, at that time he was the one, also, who vetted who went in and out of Hanoi, and although we were good friends, Wilfred told me earlier on in our relationship--it predates that--he would never let me go into Hanoi. He knew what I was going to write. He could be quite candid with you on a personal basis, like that. I'd ask Wilfred, "Can I get a visa into Hanoi?" He'd say, "No." But some other guy'd ask for a visa, "Yes." Wilfred would make the judgment on whether his stories would be, on balance, advantageous to his side.

G: You think he vetted Harrison Salisbury?

M: Oh, I'm sure he did. Wilfred had total veto power, through, I would say, 1970. He also had his problems with the communists over the years, but through that period Wilfred had veto power over whoever went into or out of Hanoi. If he put the blackball against a man, he didn't go in. A lot of people who were knowledgeable made their requests through Wilfred.

But if you made a request through Paris and/or London, it would come back to Wilfred in Phnom Penh, and he had a total veto power over it. I'd stake my right arm on that.

G: That's interesting, that really is, when you think about who got to go and who didn't.

M: Well, Wilfred knew all those people. You remember, Wilfred, if you knew him at all, he'd been a--the *Express*, I believe it was, it was the *Mail* or the *Express*, but I believe he was the *Express* correspondent--who made his name in World War II. He was the first correspondent to get down to Hiroshima when the bomb blew up down there. Everybody else was concentrating on the *Missouri*. Wilfred gets on the train and gets down to Hiroshima. And he had Hiroshima all to himself for forty-eight hours, and made the American high command so angry that when Curt LeMay finally threw the Americans in down there, he wouldn't give Wilfred a ride out on the plane, and Wilfred had to come out on the train, too. But he was that good a reporter; he was a damned good reporter. He had a nose for what the important was.

I met him first, of course, in Korea, where he showed up on the north side in Panmunjom and I showed up on the south side. And now that Wilfred's dead, I'll tell you the story for the record. He came down one day to my friend Robert Tuckman, the other AP guy; the two of us were covering it up there, and Wilfred said he needed a gross of rubbers. And we were a little bit taken aback by the number, and said, "You need a gross?" And of course he wanted us to get them at the American PX down in Seoul. He said yes, he wanted a gross. He was figuring on being there for a long time, and he was sleeping with a Chinese interpreter up at Kaesong, and he didn't trust the quality of the prophylactics being distributed by the Red Chinese, and he knew that if he got that little girl pregnant, that, one,

it would be the end of her career for all time, and two, it wasn't going to do him any good, either.

But the consequence of all that is that Tuck [Robert Tuckman] and I went down to the PX in Seoul, and I think we purchased them in two boxes, I'm not sure, but we got him a gross of rubbers, and carried them back up there to Kaesong, and that kept Wilfred's sex life a little bit happier for a good bit longer.

G: Did you draw any peculiar looks when you walked in and made that purchase?

M: That's why I say Tuck and I probably bought the thing in two packages. (Laughter) I don't recall. I know that I've never bought anything of that nature in those numbers before that, though. But Wilfred figured, justly, as it turns out--it says something about what was going on. This happened to be in 1952. Well, the peace talks went on for another two years, so Wilfred was quite justified in requiring a gross. I don't know whether anybody else ever continued his supply after that, or whether his liaison with that young Chinese lady ended or not. I know that was the only time that Tuck and I took care of his needs.

But I think that Wilfred under those terms could be very pleasant. But also he was always out plugging the communist cause, and he never made any bones about it. You just took it for granted that Wilfred was a communist. But he and Denis Warner got into a pissing match, because Denis being an Australian and a fellow countryman, apparently that upset Wilfred, and this--you remember, for years Wilfred couldn't go home, because they'd lifted his passport and, in effect, made him an exile. His aging father was down there, and finally he won permission to go back down there, over Denis' dead body, practically, because Denis hated his guts, of course. And it was during that trip down there, and

because of that, that Wilfred was, quote, "trying to rehabilitate himself," unquote, with the Australian left, and paint himself not as a communist but as something of an independent. And Wilfred, being a rather bizarre type, may have harbored some political thoughts about returning to Australia and at least partaking of political life there. And that's when Denis Warner came out and said, "He's a communist son of a bitch, period, paragraph." And on the basis of that, Wilfred brought that suit. I'm not privy to all the details, but he lost the suit.

G: Both in Australia and in Great Britain?

M: I think it went against him in Britain, and thereafter he dropped it in Australia, because I think it was decided in Britain not by a jury; it never got to a jury. The court, in effect, gave a ruling which said, Wilfred, you've been smoking the wrong stuff here, and you're not going to get anywhere with this suit. So he dropped it, and I think he dropped it in Australia at the same time [inaudible].

(Interruption)

G: All right, sir, I've got a couple of more names down here that may bear discussion. How about Stanley Karnow? You've mentioned his name, off tape.

M: Yes. Well, Stanley is--I think he's an incurable big-picture man, but whose judgment I don't particularly value. A nice enough fellow. I think of one specific thing to criticize. He went over to Vietnam after the war was over, and he met the *Time* magazine Vietnamese office boss, who remained behind, Mr. Anh, as I recall. And he discovered that Mr. Anh had been a Viet Cong--I don't think you'd call him a spy, except he'd been a Viet Cong all those years, and had been reporting to his bosses in Saigon. And Stanley came back and wrote a column

in which he said he suddenly realized that we could never have won the war in South Vietnam because South Vietnam was permeated with spies. Which of course is true, but which totally ignores, among other things, the American Revolution, when both sides were permeated with spies to a degree far exceeding anything that transpired in South Vietnam. And the fact that any reasonable newspaperman would be shocked when he came back after the war to find out that there had been spies within the newspaper offices in Saigon or in South Vietnam in general--I think that's fairly indicative of Stanley's judgment on greater issues. I know that I ran the Associated Press there at one time. We had about fifty people working for us--oh, I guess sixty, really--and about thirty of those were Vietnamese. We had a man whom I suspected to be--although he never later identified himself--but I suspected that he was the Viet Cong informant in our office. And I operated the office on the theory that an informant was there, that everything we did was going to be referred back.

We also had in that office, and this to my certain knowledge, but I'm not going to name names, we had a South Vietnamese informant, a young man who had, in the classic case, been entrapped by the South Vietnamese police, fed the booze and the girls and given the routine trip, tricked into minor disclosures until finally he was a full-fledged South Vietnamese police spy in our office. And one day he came to myself and another person in the office, broke down in tears, was very repentant about what he'd done, and wanted to know what he could do. And we told him to keep on doing what he was doing, that we were not conducting our business in such a way that we were ashamed to have it known by either the Viet Cong on the one hand or the South Vietnamese on the other. I would assume that the AP's case was more or less typical of any news agency in Saigon. If you didn't have

a couple of spies in your office, you weren't worthy of attention. I would have been seriously hurt.

G: So what could he have compromised, after all? What sensitive information could he have pipelined back to his bosses, on either side? Sources, perhaps?

M: On either?

G: Yes.

M: Except what it displayed was--which is obvious, also--that both the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese had an extreme sensitivity to what the American press was thinking and doing at any given moment.

I would assume that the man who was reporting to the Viet Cong would also have indicated to his bosses which members of our team were more or less sympathetic to their cause, and we had some who were, politically, ideologically or otherwise, which is not to say that we had any communists in our office. Although we may have had. But we certainly had some Caucasian correspondents who were quite sympathetic to the Viet Cong. Well, some of those might or might not have been the beneficiaries of favors, had the occasion offered. Had they applied, for example, for this, that or the other, they might have gotten favorable treatment; they might not have.

The same thing is true among the South Vietnamese. We had guys on our staff who were vitriolically anti-South Vietnamese, I mean to the point that they snorted and could never see anything good--well, that's normal. We had a news staff consisting of, as I say, about thirty people, they came and they went, a good number, and some liked this and some liked the other, and both the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese would have been

interested in that kind of nitty-gritty, which literally meant nothing, or really meant nothing. But that's the kind of information they would have wanted. What we filed was a matter of public record. They couldn't have been concerned about that. Some of our private messages might or might not have interested them, but even those private messages, by and large, went out over the public wire, which they monitored. And the North Vietnamese monitored those wires, too. If you had a really private communication with your bosses in New York, of course you sent that hand-carried by mail. Those were very rare; we didn't have that kind of thing going on very often.

G: I suppose they might have compromised a source from time to time if they'd gotten hold of that.

M: Yes, but in a newspaper office, one, you don't discuss your sources very much, even among your colleagues. Some stories, the sources are so obvious that it doesn't make any difference. I mean, you come from a background briefing. This is being held at MACV, and you simply said, "American military officers said," well, that type thing. Well, the Viet Cong are Machiavellian enough, perhaps, to want to know who the precise source was. Anybody knowledgeable with the news business can figure out the source in 75 per cent of those stories, anyhow. But presumably it could have been of some peripheral interest to those people in those few cases.

G: Ward Just.

M: I think that Ward Just is one of the best writers, and the most unrecognized, that has come out of that bailiwick out there. That very short novel of his, what was the name of that? Very good.

G: *To What End*? That wasn't really a novel; that was kind of a piece of analysis. Well, that was combat reporting, is what it was.

M: Yes. I think Ward Just is a very, very sound man. I like his judgment.

G: How well did you know him?

M: Oh, for a period of about a year and a half. Not well. You know how you have a drink down at the Continental and places like that. But it was a very small society there. He'd come by the office, that kind of thing. But I didn't know him well.

G: Charles Mohr?

M: Old Charlie.

G: It was his war, as I recall. Someone called it Charlie Mohr's war.

M: I don't know who coined that phrase, but I think it was a pretty good phrase. Charlie felt a proprietary interest about the whole thing, and Charlie to this day is a very opinionated man. If Charlie says it's right, that makes it right. But if Charlie disagrees, then you're obviously on the wrong side. But apart from that, Charlie was a very personable man; he was a very excellent reporter.

G: Do you know where he is these days?

M: He's here in Washington, to the best of my knowledge. He was doing Pentagon stuff fairly recently. I had to run into Charlie about a year ago at Keyes Beech's house on a party. But when I say that Charlie Mohr is opinionated, I'm sure he'd say the same about me.

G: Do you recall any significant disagreements you came to?

M: No, I really don't.

G: Okay. Peter Braestrup.

M: Well, Peter is another. You know, Peter was an ex-platoon leader in Korea, and that gave him a leg up on all of the other--in my opinion, he'd been a leg up on all the other reporters out there. Peter was, in my opinion, one of the soundest out there. He got along well with the military, of course, because, being a platoon leader, when he was talking to a company commander about laying down a field of fire and that kind of technical stuff, why, they were talking on the same wavelength. And the consequence was that Peter got along probably better with the military than 99 per cent of the reporters who were out there.

I remember also, Peter's a talker. And I remember one night at Hue we were sitting there, the lights were out--in fact, we had no power. We were sitting there nursing a couple of candles, and there were about eight of us in one room, and Peter and this gyrene sergeant were over there, and they were discussing military tactics. We had a quart of brandy, and that quart of brandy--with all of us, that ran out about ten o'clock, and everybody was trying to get some sleep. And Peter and that sergeant sat up until four o'clock in the morning, discussing--really, esoteric military points. Peter had an eye for detail, still does have an eye for detail. That's the only Braestrup story that I can recall, off the top of my head. He was a crackerjack military--

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

G: All right, sir, you were about to tell us about--

M: You were asking how Braestrup's book [*Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*] was received among the profession, and I think that's a very interesting point. When Peter set out to do that book, he knew what he had to say; he had the facts in hand. He had been

there; he had covered Tet, he had covered it exceptionally well, and had been and seen, and he had been to the Delta afterwards, and was in a perfect position to make his own judgments, but he also knew that if ever a man had to cover his ass, he'd better do so. And the consequence of it was, if you'll read that whole book, he set about it in this particular instance more as an academician than a journalist, although the journalist is certainly in there. He crossed his Ts; he dotted his Is; he cited chapter and verse, and the point that he was making was that Tet had been misreported. It was so irrefutably proven that the consequence is that those newspaper people back here who would like to argue the point find it impossible to do so, on the basis of Peter's book. So, that being the case, he got excellent, brief reviews for a brief period of time, and has never been since mentioned in any of the major literary publications that covered the war. He gets passing reference from time to time from people like myself and others, but the quote, "establishment," unquote, still thinks that Braestrup is an outsider, and I'm sure that pleases him. He was well received simply because he'd covered his ass, and he knew he had to cover his ass, because anything less than that, and he would have been pilloried. And Peter knew it, and knows it.

G: Of course, he's outside journalism, I guess--

M: I don't think--that wouldn't have saved him. Well, he's down at the Woodrow Wilson Institute. From what I gather, he's doing a very good job down there. I know he's very happy; he loves the academic surrounding, because as I say, he's part academician, and very happy with that society. But that would not have protected him from the criticism that people would love to get at him. But they can't. The book is there; it stands for itself.

G: How well did you know Don Oberdorfer?

M: I knew Don very well; we're both Georgia boys. I didn't know him before Vietnam. We'd never worked together or been thrown together. We've been thrown together a good bit since then. But Don Oberdorfer approaches things--quite unlike some of his colleagues on the *Washington Post*, Don Oberdorfer is a genuinely sophisticated country boy, and he approaches his stories--I don't care whether it's Vietnam or whether it's the State Department, or whatever it is--it's not reflected in his prose but it's reflected in his reportorial techniques, and it's reflected in the substance of his reporting. He gets down to what a country boy would ask, and he's not concerned, insofar as I could see, with ideology or Democrat or Republican or who's on top. He is a good old-fashioned courthouse reporter, and he just happened to be involved in Vietnam, and now he happens to be involved in covering the State Department. He's still basically a courthouse reporter who's snooping around and watching what the sheriff is doing.

G: Of course, you were in Vietnam when he was researching his book on Tet [*Tet!*]. Did you talk to him?

M: Yes. Of course, he was there during Tet.

G: Yes. What's your appreciation of his book?

M: I think he makes a--in effect, his is the first building block upon which Braestrup built, and if you want a primer of what happened at Tet, I think Oberdorfer's book is an excellent book. He points out the fact of what happened at the embassy that day, which was really more sound and fury than it was action. They never got inside the embassy building; there was never any danger that they would get inside the embassy building. He points that out rather well. He points out what I mentioned earlier, that the Viet Cong infrastructure was

virtually wiped out at Tet, that in military terms--it's very hard to use the word victory and this, that and the other, and I don't think Don does that in his book. He would avoid that kind of thing. But he points out quite frankly that the outcome of Tet, in terms of the relative strength of both sides, and although it was not realized at the time, the relative--the Americans and the South Vietnamese were incomparably stronger at the end of Tet than at the beginning of Tet, and he makes that point in his book. It's a good--what one dislikes--Creighton Abrams used to use the word that the journalists out there were engaged in "instant history." And, in effect, that's what Don has done. But as instant history, it is damned good.

G: One of the points that Braestrup raises in his book on the coverage of Tet was the coverage of Khe Sanh. Did you cover Khe Sanh?

M: Yes. I told you, this was a--I think I did, I'm not sure--the criticism has been made that we were totally unprepared for Tet, which is not true. Everybody before Tet knew that something was going to happen. The military, the newspapers, the diplomats, you name it. Don--as he has told you, his theory was that it was going to happen immediately after Tet. I felt that it was going to happen at Tet, and so the consequence of that was--I was then with the Associated Press. I was not the bureau chief; it was before I became the bureau chief. I was just a roving reporter. So I told the boss, who was then Ed White, "Well, I'm going to take off for Khe Sanh. If anything is going to happen, it's going to happen up at Khe Sanh." So I flew up there; got up there the day before Tet. And all the gyrenes were in a state of alert; everybody was all keyed up. The people at Khe Sanh felt something was going to happen there, too, 'cause they'd had previous intelligence that there were two, and perhaps

three, divisions in the immediate area. But that night passed off. I don't even think a shell came in that night; not a damned thing happened.

So at Khe Sanh, you're seventy miles from anywhere; your radio communications are not good. All that day I sat around; there was no indication that things were going on. And we began to get the AFRS broadcasts sometime. I was wandering into some tent, and found out that there had been attacks in Danang and whatnot. So the next morning, nothing having happening--I stayed there two nights, and nothing happened--I found a chopper that was going down to Danang, and as the chopper circled in over the I Corps CP out there, the helipad, we looked down there and there were about a hundred and fifty bodies lined alongside the helipad. Well, that was the first we realized--these were all the Viet Cong who had been killed assaulting the Corps CP the night before, hadn't gotten in. They had all been put out there--the corps commander had left them there as an object lesson to anybody else who might try the same thing.

We scrounged up a jeep somewhere and headed into the old press billets in Danang. That road takes a ninety-degree turn by some fuel tanks as you were going into the press billets, and we hit that ninety-degree turn, a machine gun opened up at us over there, and it was over in those fuel tanks, which the VC had taken; we didn't realize that. So we made a quick bank to the left and got the hell out of there.

Well, the fact that the VC were there meant that they were only about half a mile from the press billets, and we had a line out there. Anyhow, I got to the press billets, and I got clued in that all hell was breaking loose, and that the NVA/VC had occupied most of Hue, but that the road was still open into Hue. So I got together--my recollection is there

were half a dozen of us headed up there that day, including Neil Davis of NBC, who had a motor scooter. He was the gentleman who got killed in Bangkok last month. But we had a jeep--I say we; I've forgotten who. But anyhow, half a dozen of us got into Hue that day, and we crossed that bridge on the southwest side of Hue, and it was blown that night, behind us. Then the VC had sort of closed the loop on Hue. So we were trapped in there for the next two weeks before any communications were established out. Oh, you could have gotten out by chopper, because they were evacuating people. The idea that Hue was surrounded and in danger of being lost, that's incorrect. But it was cut off for the next two weeks. I don't know what led me up to Hue.

It was Khe Sanh that I went up to. The point of it--I went up to cover Khe Sanh, and nothing happened at Khe Sanh. I went back to Hue, and a hell of a lot happened. The point I was trying to make is that everybody knew that something was going to happen; it didn't come as any great surprise. What came as a surprise was that it was so widespread. It hit so many places, and of course that came as a surprise, because it was military stupidity. Had they concentrated their forces against one or two, or even three or four or five, they could have accomplished a great deal more. They wasted a whole division; they kept a division in reserve up outside of Hue. If that division had been thrown into the battle, undoubtedly it would have captured Hue. Varying estimates are that they had about a hundred and twenty thousand people available in the south; don't pin me down on that number. But they only committed eighty thousand of their troops, and they committed eighty thousand troops scattered up and down the country. It was a stupid way to use troops, despite the fact that they accomplished their psychological objective. But it wasn't their psychological objective

at the time; they didn't have a psychological objective at the time. Later admissions by the Viet Cong themselves have shown that. So anyhow, it was a surprise--we were surprised that they were so widespread, and we were surprised that they were so stupid. But we were not surprised that they were going to throw something at us, and throw something very strong at us.

G: What did you make of the charges that one heard a great deal of later on, of the abuses in the Phoenix program, and the abuses in pacification generally? Were you privy to anything in that line?

M: Well, you say, was I privy; did I specifically see anything? Of course not. When somebody is going to shoot somebody in a clandestine way, he's not going to do it in front of a newspaperman. [William] Colby defended himself very well on the Phoenix charges; the overall figures--I'd have to have them in front of me. But the overall casualty figures attributed to the Phoenix program were simply people killed in battle who were later identified after the battle as having been--from personal identification, ID cards or something--on the Phoenix wanted list. But those were guys who were just creamed in the ordinary course of the fighting out there. And they accounted for the vast number of people who were scarfed up in the Phoenix program.

The other side of the coin is--what were those troops that each province chief had at his disposal as part of the Phoenix program?

G: PRUs [Provincial Reconnaissance Units?]?

M: Yes, PRUs. There is no question that they were misused in a goodly number of provinces. Misused--well, they were used not in accordance with a textbook, and occasionally they

were sent out to do the province representatives' personal dirty work. I don't think there's any doubt about that; Colby wouldn't deny that. But insofar as you have a program which is designed to go out and kill or eliminate certain targeted members of the enemy opposing you, you're obviously--you've got yourself into a gray area of difficulty there. The Viet Cong who was targeted, for example, their equivalent to province chief or this, that and the other, well, he was wearing black pajamas. Are those civvies? And you go in and you shoot him down. Have you shot a civilian? Under those terms, when you consider that, however you state it, the South Vietnamese were attempting to put down a rebellion, the rebellion was manned, staffed, and motivated by the Viet Cong, that a number of their hierarchy--and in the nature of things, they were all paramilitary; they were paramilitary at best, [at worst,] military. So to target a person like that I do not think violates the rules of war in the slightest.

Now, to blanket-say that Phoenix never did anything quote, "wrong," unquote, obviously you can't do that. Henry Kissinger said that almost anything you can say about Vietnam is true; the problem is to find out what is relevant. Well, that's the Phoenix program. I think we expended an awful lot of resources on the Phoenix program, and mathematically, whether it paid off or not somebody else will have to judge. But I do think that it was within the context of the war that was then being fought. It was a justified program, and I'm not inclined to get overly upset about the abuses that did exist within the program--nor to deny that there were abuses.

G: What is your sense, either from this distance or at that time, whichever suits you, of how the situation moved after Tet, for the next, let's say, four or five years? [Inaudible] conventional invasion in 1973--1972, I guess it was.

M: Yes. Boy, you're asking me for the real big picture stuff.

G: Well, what I have in mind is, did the Viet Cong to any extent rebound from what happened to them at Tet?

M: Well, no. The Viet Cong never came back. They were never a factor in the war thereafter, except as Hanoi wished to exploit them, as it had always exploited them, but even more so. Except that Hanoi would exploit them as front men in Paris and for propaganda purposes, and to maintain the myth of COSVN [Central Office for South Vietnam], and to maintain the myth that the liberation front was a viable entity separate from Hanoi, which, of course, it was not. So the Viet Cong never again figured in the war, and I think the disillusionment of the Viet Cong after the war is ample proof that they were impotent and were shown to be impotent. They were greatly disappointed when the war was over and none of them were given anything.

In terms of the sweep of the war, they had refilled--they, the North Vietnamese, most of their units--brought them up to a semblance of combat strength, by mid-1969 and 1970. But at the same time they never regained the strategic ground that they lost. They controlled, geographically, much less of the country. The NVA could not disguise itself as being indigenous to the South, and the consequence was [that] their intelligence was far worse; they operated in the countryside in a much more restricted area. This, in turn, gave the South Vietnamese far more freedom and latitude to move around. They began to move

back into geographic areas that they had not dared to move into beforehand. By the end of the war, I'd say by 1975--we had our ups and downs in 1972 and 1973. I think in 1972 in military terms the South Vietnamese probably peaked, at that moment. They were very close to being in total control of the country. And for reasons of lack of American support and disunity on their own side--that latter was perhaps the most important in the long run--but they lost that initiative. By 1973, at the time of the accords, I think the South Vietnamese pretty well knew that they were going to go down the tubes, despite Mr. Nguyen Van Thieu's wishful thinking to the contrary.

But even so, by the time of the Paris Accords of 1973, at the time they were signed, the South Vietnamese were very handily in control of about--well, they were in control of all areas of that country which might be called economically viable. That portion that they didn't control, the Highlands, the very distant reaches of the Delta, would have been insignificant geographically, all other factors being equal. And of course, the final blow came, as you well know. Van Tien Dung, the North Vietnamese general, said that the only thing that defeated the South was a conventional offensive, and it was not guerrilla warfare as such or any semblance of guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare, as such, had been defeated by 1970. It was still there, and could still inflict great harm and cause casualties, but guerrilla warfare as such was kaput, as the North Vietnamese themselves recognized. And it had died at Tet.

G: What is your opinion on the way the South Vietnamese--the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], I should say--acquitted itself in the earlier invasion, the 1972 invasion? Did

we stop that with American air and naval power, or did they stop it on the ground, or--what's your judgment of that?

M: I think it was a combination of both. I don't think they could have stopped it without American air power. But both sides were notoriously bad tank soldiers. Creighton Abrams despaired. But in the final analysis, they [the NVA] displayed themselves to be marginally better people with tanks than the South Vietnamese were. And they also had the tremendous advantage [that] they were on the offensive, and for the first time *they* were waging an American war. They were using ammunition like they had the stuff coming out of their gazoo. And you're an old gunner; you know how effective that can be, when you're just shooting twenty-four hours a day and trying to move forward. The South Vietnamese had never had to face anything of that intensity before, and they had a very rough time handling it. But the other side of that coin is, the South Vietnamese 1st Division fought pretty good. They had some marines up there; they had some airborne up there; did pretty good. They were, with the exception of some minor units along the way, they were never routed. They held their lines. What's the town up right on the border on the DMZ [demilitarized zone]?

G: Quang Tri?

M: Quang Tri. They got out of Quang Tri in pretty good order. They gave it up, of course. But a retreat, as you know, is not an easy operation. And they maintained the cohesion of their units, and then they went back and retook it. And at the end of the whole affair--I think this is the telling thing--no South Vietnamese division, to my recollection, had to be

reorganized. They all continued to exist as units, as recognizable units, having gone through about three months of fairly intensive fighting, some of it fantastic fighting.

Anyhow, their army, so long as it fought, as you well know--they never had an army. They had--even the 1st Division, which was one of their best divisions, it was a militia division. It was a geographically based division; all of the families were right there in the Hue-Danang area. The other divisions were the same, and this was true throughout the South Vietnamese army; it never had--with the exception of the airborne and the marines, which were specifically organized as mobile units, [it] didn't have mobile units. You had these militia units which fought for territory that they recognized and in which they had their families.

So long as those militia units were not overwhelmed by numbers or firepower, they did very well indeed. But when the firepower and numbers became overwhelming--and in the end, the 1st Division was destroyed by President Nguyen Van Thieu, not by the North Vietnamese. He said, "Stay there. Go back. Stay there. Go back." And at the end of about five days of that, those troops, had they been told to stay and defend Hue, they'd have been defending Hue to this day, because their families were there. But they were told, "No, we're all going back to Danang." Well, their first impulse was to go and get their families, and then we'll go fight, after we get the family back in Danang, sure, I'll be rejoining my unit. But with an essentially militia division, you don't act like that. And that was what destroyed the 1st Division, and other divisions, too. I believe it was the 2nd Division at Kontum that folded up under similar circumstances. And then the general bugged out, and [inaudible]. But what you had in the end was not a failure of the South Vietnamese army as we had

known it. You had a total failure of the command structure and a total failure of will. But there were an awful lot of little folks out there who would carry on as before, had their commanders carried on as before. But their commanders did not.

And, of course, the support level was different, but once again, the intensity of the North Vietnamese attack was such that they could not have withstood it without American air power. And the North Vietnamese were well aware of this when they launched their final offensive, and they launched it only in the certain knowledge that American air power would not again intervene in the war.

G: Am I keeping you?

M: No; I'll give you another half an hour, give or take, if you've got anything to say. I'm about spoke out, I thought.

G: See, you know more than you thought you did.

In the last offensive, in which, of course, the South Vietnamese crumbled so fast--I guess [it] surprised everybody. Were we in fact surprised by that crumbling? Were you surprised?

M: No, I wasn't surprised. I mentioned--it may be on the other tape; I wish I had the chronology in front of me. It was about four months before the end when Graham Martin came back to the States for his dental treatment, right?

G: Yes.

M: And I had told you that at that time I had once again become very friendly with Graham Martin. And he would have me and Eva over for movies over there, at which time he would sleep through the movie, and then after the movie he would wake up, because he was

a night owl, and then he would sit and beat your ear for as long as he could keep you there. And he was going back to the States the following day for a number of things, dental treatment, primarily. And he kept repeating over and over again that night--because we were at that time in a crisis of supply. You know, the argument as to whether we would give them the extra millions of dollars. The Americans were trying to hold down on their use of ammunition and whatnot, because we couldn't see any in the pipeline coming down the road.

But Graham said that night, "The South Vietnamese will never be defeated militarily." And I've forgotten what my precise argument to the contrary was, but I know it was to the contrary, that I didn't see it in those terms, and I saw some pretty rough times ahead. And that I could see the way they were using their supplies--they had plenty of supplies on hand, but they weren't using them, because they were like the man who is always afraid he's going to starve to death tomorrow, and they weren't going to use it today, for that reason. So I could see a deteriorating situation. I suspect Graham could too, but anyhow he kept repeating over and over again that the South Vietnamese could not be defeated militarily.

Well, he flew off; of course, he was gone for about four weeks, as I recall. And he didn't come back until after Hue had already fallen, and military defeat had already begun. And at that time he wouldn't speak to me again until April, until the final days, because he knew what he had told me that night. I guess he was embarrassed. He certainly should have been. I am told that his first impulse when he came back was that he wanted to fly up to Danang, and he had some grandiose vision of rallying the troops himself and turning the

North Vietnamese invasion back. And cooler heads prevailed, and he was talked out of flying up to Danang, which vanished underfoot within the next forty-eight hours, and nothing any mortal man could have done would have saved Danang, because the chaos up there was total at that point. Everybody was anxious to flee, to get the hell out of there, and they were going any way they could. We had some very brave people up there at the time.

Al Francis was our consul general, and he was largely responsible for persuading Martin not to come. Al was then evacuating people on ships, doing anything he could. The last airplane that landed up there was piloted by that nut from World Airways [Ed Daly?]--what was his name?--who was drunk at the time; who was that guy--he's now dead, I think--who owned World Airways? [He] flew that jet up there, was going to evacuate refugees, and all he managed to pick up were those armed policemen who virtually forced their way aboard the plane. Some guy was caught up in the wheel well going out, some guy--

G: Oh, that's the famous picture, sure.

M: Yes. Anyhow, that guy was drunk, flying up--anyhow, the situation up at Danang was absolutely beyond salvation, and Martin was told that. How did we get embarked on that?

G: We were talking about last days. What is your judgment on the accusations that we carried out the evacuation so badly because we were trying to avoid a panic and so on?

M: That was always Graham's position, and obviously he had a valid point. If he starts to evacuate people in great numbers, the Vietnamese are going to look around and say, "Well, the Americans are bugging out." And at that point, you remember, we were making crazy gestures not only out there, but back here in Washington, "Well, we're going to hold on and do the best we can." We send Fred Weyand out on the last of one of these desperate

missions to see if we can salvage something. Graham Martin is sending cables back saying he thinks he can negotiate, even at that late date, some kind of settlement with Hanoi.

So all of that was the rationale for maintaining the belief that the Americans were going to remain, somehow, when everybody, *everybody* on the scene, with the exception of Graham Martin and his dog, knew that bugout time had come. And the only real question then was--and history will have to judge Graham--under the circumstances, did we do it, did we the Americans do it in about as orderly a fashion as it could have been done? And I'm inclined to believe that we did, because if you had started to evacuate a month in advance, it would have simply sped the collapse of the South Vietnamese, and that, in turn, would have imploded upon the evacuation that was then going on.

We doubtless--or perhaps; I don't know why I say doubtless; one should never use the word doubtless about Vietnam--we could have perhaps gotten a few more people out. We might have gotten some more sensitive people out. I doubt that. There were people coming into my house in Saigon right up until the last day. I had a goodly number of friends. I remember a woman brought over her husband; he was a navy captain--a Vietnamese woman. And she said, "Please talk to him. He thinks we're going to fight on." And I don't know why he had agreed to come, but he had agreed to his wife's exhortation. They sat in my living room for an hour, and I simply told the good captain what I saw happening all around me, and it was quite obviously a pretty grim picture. And he left there with gloom and doom, and his wife was smiling from ear to ear, because she thought he would get out. I don't know whether he got out or not; I never heard from him since. But

that was the kind of scene being repeated all over Saigon, bizarre things were going on there.

G: Did anybody try to get you to get them out?

M: Oh, yes. I had a great and good friend who'd been one of my best sources of information, and he was a good Catholic fellow; he had twelve kids and umpteen relatives. And I had some people whom I got out; I had no problem at all. I had a channel with a guy named Jim Eckes at Continental Air Services--

G: What was that last name?

M: Eckes, E-C-K-E-S. You might want to talk to him. Anyhow, if I could get people out to Jim Eckes--he had a safe house on the way to Tan Son Nhut--if I could get people there, I could get them on out. Well, I used that channel and got some people out.

But this Catholic friend of mine with the umpteen-jillion children and relatives, he was a super-patriot, and "We're not going to give up; we're going to fight till the end." He didn't come until the last day. He came on April 28, and at that point there was nothing I could do. Eckes himself had closed up his safe house and was sitting out at Tan Son Nhut, and he left that evening, and I had no particular access to the military, and this, that and the other. I told my friend, "You waited too long. I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do for you."

But I don't think there was a single American in Saigon who didn't get some people out. And the system was so porous and such, that--and this went on for about three weeks; this was not something that took place in forty-eight hours. There were planes leaving; there were ways to get people out for three weeks prior to the end. All of those who checked in early--there were planes leaving with plenty of space [inaudible]. And in point

of actual fact, three weeks before the end I had all of my files, which you saw out at my house, I had two foot lockers full of the things I wanted to get out. I flew over in a commercial, one of the last Cathay Pacific flights. I guess this was about the first of April. [I] flew over there with those two footlockers; there was space on the plane, commercial plane, as late as the first of April. [I] flew over there one day, came back the next, having gotten those things out safely that I wanted to get out. Pan Am was still flying. I think their last flight left about the first of April, and there were empty seats on every flight but the last one, and that last one was a special which came in there--that was very unique. There was a man named Al Topping, who was the station manager for Pan Am there, and he knew that plane was coming in, and it was about the first of April, don't pin me down on the date. They had a 747, and Al quietly passed the word that every Pan Am employee who wanted to leave, this was their opportunity. The 747 would fly them out, and Pan Am would take care of them, see that they got refugee status and were cared for, and this, that and the other.

But they still had some problems out at the airport, because everybody who wanted to could not get into Tan Son Nhut. You had to either know a back way, or have papers, or something. And one of the ways that they solved that was fully 50 per cent of the women who got on that flight that day went out in Pan American stewardess uniforms. I guess about 10 per cent of the girls actually were stewardesses, but they were busy for a week prior to that sewing uniforms for their aunts, uncles, mothers and whatnot. And Al says when he got aboard the plane he went with them. He was there at the gate checking them up. Never saw so many stewardesses in his life. But as a Pan Am stewardess they all got in the gate. He managed to get them all out.

That 747 carried out, that day, about six hundred people, and Al went through there collecting machine guns and hand grenades and rifles and whatnot from the males who had brought them aboard. Some had brought them aboard because they were simply on duty at Tan Son Nhut, and had gone aboard the airplane. And Al got aboard the plane, and Jim Eckes, who was still behind there at Continental Air Services--Jim left on the last commercial plane leaving, a little twin-engine plane that he'd kept behind just for himself. But Jim had agreed to serve as Al's ground crew, so that when Al closed the door and got in--he was the last Pan Am man there. And then Jim took over as the ground man for Pan Am, just to get them out of town, to maintain a presence, and then Jim quickly reverted to Continental. And the people up in the tower, of course, were in on the know. Al had spread a certain amount of largesse in the tower, because he knew that was going to be the last Pan Am plane; it was going to be carrying people who were not necessarily authorized.

All I'm saying is that you wanted to get out on or about the first of April, and through the fifteenth or twentieth, it was not too congested. You could get out. But an awful lot of Vietnamese wouldn't go. They thought--a lot of official Vietnamese thought--that there was going to be American air intervention, as had been promised Nguyen Van Thieu. They pinned their hopes on that. Of course, it didn't materialize, and that was the end of them.

We are back to the question of whether Martin could or could not have organized it better. Individual groups within the embassy obviously could have been better organized. The evacuation of USIS [United States Information Service] personnel was a shame and disgrace. It was a shame and--I won't get into the pros and cons of the varying people

involved [who] have publicly condemned and defended themselves. I don't think it would have been better handled over a period of time than it was. It would have been bungled one way or another, because the people at the top were bunglers.

The CIA itself left some of its people behind. Its operations were so widespread that I don't see how it could have happened otherwise. Some CIA people were going to be left behind, unless you had an absolutely ideal evacuation in which the NVA were leaving you alone, and this, that and the other. As it turns out, for the last two days the NVA left us alone. It was unwritten that so long as we were continuing to get out, they were not going to take Saigon. They were going to continue to maintain the pressure, but make no mistake about it: they let us get out of Saigon, because they could have had that city twenty-four hours earlier if they'd have wanted it.

So the point is, I'm not inclined to be over-critical of Mr. Martin about the evacuation, or, to put it another way, I recognize the validity of his argument, that he couldn't just come up and say, "Well, it's time to go, and we're going to use Plan A."

G: You think Frank Snepp's book [*Decent Interval*] is a little too hard on him, then?

M: I think Frank is a little hard on him in that particular aspect of it, because he had very few viable choices. But he compounded his own difficulty with his paranoiac belief that he could talk to the North Vietnamese; he was going to negotiate a peaceful surrender of Saigon. And he maintained that belief right up until two or three o'clock in the morning, when the President ordered him to leave. He never left that embassy willingly; in effect, he left under duress. He was going to stay and negotiate with whatever North Vietnamese walked in the door that morning, I guess.

So that paranoiac belief on his part led him to shade all of his decisions down the line about the evacuation. And there's no question he could have sped it up a day; he could have sped it up thirty-six hours here, he could have organized it better there. Whether the word would have gotten out that he was doing this, well, somebody else will have to make a judgment about that. It would have certainly had its effect on the overall situation. But overall, I'm not inclined to be too critical about *that* aspect of the decisions he made in the last thirty days.

G: I take it you are critical in some others.

M: Well, I've given you my view of his dream, delusion, that he could negotiate with the North Vietnamese far beyond the time they had won. He also had a policy in that embassy, [that] even though he deluded himself that he could talk to the North Vietnamese, he wouldn't talk to the South Vietnamese. And if you've talked to General [Charles] Timmes, you know that Timmes was forbidden to maintain contacts with Big Minh [Duong Van Minh], who was so obviously the conduit and channel to the old National Liberation Front. Bless his old heart, Timmes disobeyed those orders, and over that last--over the entire tenure of Martin's visit there, Timmes disobeyed those orders, and maintained quite friendly relationships with Big Minh. And so the consequence of that was that--I don't know the exact--

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M: --how you could communicate with the North Vietnamese, and the way to do it, even he recognized, was through Big Minh, to whom he had refused to speak for the last two years. Not only to speak, but also not even be civil, not even tip his hat when he met him in public. So then he had to revive old Timmes, and say, "Go see what Big Minh will do." Well, Big

Minh opened up the line of communications straight away. It would not have gone that smoothly had not Brother Timmes been available and on excellent relationship with Big Minh--probably is to this day, because the good general has now reappeared in Paris, I understand. But anyhow, it was Martin's obtuseness, stubbornness about certain things like that, and I can well understand why people criticize him about the evacuation, because the man could be monumentally stubborn.

G: Did it ever cross your mind not to try to get out?

M: No, but that was a personal matter. Because I had--when was it? In early March, I had a ruptured duodenal ulcer, and went to the hospital. And I had it cut out, and they patched me up, and I was only in the hospital for about a week. But I went back to my house, and I couldn't go around at even something remotely similar to full speed. And I did not want to subject myself to the medical treatment that might or might not be available. If I had been fully healthy, I don't know what I would have done, but I had long thought about it; it was the kind of thing you thought about for a long period of time. But I do know, I will say this, that when I departed on that night, April 29, I was just so happy to get out. I knew that we were not in any physical danger. Oh, I felt we were in minimal physical danger, but, like the guy said, I wasn't 100 per cent certain. And you'd look out on the horizon, and the place is blowing up around you, so that if you'd asked me that question on the night of April 29, I'd have said, "Shit, get me out of here!" There would have been no second thoughts, or this, that or the other. Now, ten years down the road, I can say that yes, I thought about it. I don't think I thought too much about it, but my thinking was very much influenced by my

gut at the time, which has still got a scar that will rival Lyndon Johnson's, I think. It looked considerably worse then.

G: You went out on the last chopper, is that right?

M: Oh, no, no. We went out at about ten-thirty, between ten-thirty and eleven o'clock, on the night of April 29. I think there were about ten choppers that left thereafter. And then there was a hiatus of several hours, and then the final chopper left, which carried those five marines--I think it was five, could have been seven--who held the helipad all night long. They had a rough time of it. But the helipad--luckily, the walls were quite sheer. The only entrance from inside the embassy was a very narrow stairwell, and so the marines held that stairwell with concussion grenades, and they had tear gas, and they had one other nonlethal-type weapon with them, in addition to their M-16s, which they were quite prepared to use if they had to, because if they had lost that stairwell, that would have been the end of that pad, because no chopper would have, or could have, then come down. But those five or seven guys, they held that thing until, I think, about five or six in the morning, when the final chopper came in to get them. And then they had all that stuff up on the roof with them. They put a grenade down in amongst the tear gas and then they dumped the whole goddamned case of it inside the embassy and it blew up.

One thing they'd seen up there--I talked to one of the guys the next morning on the ship--some South Vietnamese policemen had come up, and they had gotten the Ambassador's limousine, and they had hot-wired it, and last thing is they were driving that limousine out the gate and tooling it down the street in front of the embassy. I don't know how long they kept it or how much they enjoyed it, but they had the limousine for one night.

Those gyrenes, they--before--it was just about the time that Eva and I left. The walls had been scaled, and we held at that time only the building, not the compound itself. And the people who were trying to get into the building, because they knew that the helipad was up there and the last ride out of Saigon, for their purposes, they went out from the--we had a little fire station that actually was in the embassy compound, and they got the fire truck out of that little fire station. And it was a pretty [good]-sized fire truck; it was a pumper and a six-wheeler. And they ran that thing back, got as good a running start as they could, and ran it through the big oak rear doors of the embassy, and it smashed those doors. That's how the people got into the embassy. Up until they got the fire truck, which was about eleven o'clock that night, ten or eleven, I don't know, we had left the building, or at least we were in an area where we couldn't see it, and wouldn't know, and whether I would have noticed the shudder I don't know. Anyhow, I didn't witness that, but I talked to others who did, the breaking down of the back door of the embassy.

And then they took it over, floor by floor. But we held the first--the third floor was the ambassador's floor, and they held that until about midnight or one o'clock. Now I told you on the other tape; I'll repeat it, because I don't want the line to be lost. I had been downstairs, waiting. I wasn't going to leave without Eva. So about nine-thirty that evening--I had avoided Martin's office all day long. I just--I had avoided it for varied reasons. And I went up there about nine o'clock with some friends up there, some people I knew, of course. And Eva was there; she was typing away. After some--a number of things had happened, and somebody had broken out some scotch and some gin and this, that and the other, and we were sitting around and drinking it in paper cups. It was no celebration;

I'd say it was a wake. But then there was an exchange of varying sorts between myself and the Ambassador. Then after a while a few things happened, and it was about ten o'clock. He came out, and his office was right adjoining the stairwell, where people were going up to the helipad. And he came out, and he told Eva, "Miss Kim, I don't think I'll have any more dictation today. I think you should go."

And at that point she folded up her little notebook; she'd been ready to go for several hours, I assure you. And so all we had to do was walk ten feet to get in the stairwell over there. So we walked over to the stairwell, because we both had overnight bags--not overnight bags, airline bags. We had known we were going to get out of there that day; there hadn't been any doubt about it. So we had come to the embassy [prepared]; everybody else with any sense had. I also had brought my great big Zenith transoceanic radio that I was using all day long, battery-powered. But I left that behind. I hope the Viet Cong treat it well. I imagine it wound up in some colonel's possession somewhere, but one can never be sure in South Vietnam.

G: Certainly not in Saigon.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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