INTERVIEW I

DATE: September 27, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT M. MONTAGUE

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General Montague's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

G: When were you assigned to Vietnam?

M: Let's see. That should be kind of easy, I think. I started out my military career as an enlisted man in the artillery, actually serving in your home state of Texas at Camp Bowie of all things. Right before my unit was scheduled to go to Europe in World War II, I got a telegram from Washington announcing that I was being offered an appointment to West Point.

G: What kind of appointment was that?

M: It was a competitive appointment. And so I really was diverted from the war in Europe to West Point, and I did attend the military academy graduating in 1947. I guess my claim to fame is I was first in my class then, but it was also the class of [Felix Anthony] "Doc" Blanchard and Glenn Davis of football fame. (Laughter)

G: You were overshadowed just a little I guess by both [of them]. West Point had a great football team.

M: That's right. That's right. Now after graduation I went into the artillery, but I really was interested in engineering and science. So I went the specialist route in my military career and became a nuclear physicist. I worked for many, many years in the development of nuclear weapons working at Los Alamos Livermore, Sandia Corporation, Sandia Base, and then on to the Pentagon to work in the nuclear weapons development section there.

G: You're not responsible for the target analysis course at Fort Sill in any respect, are you?

M: No. No. That's a tactical use of nuclear weapons and I am obviously familiar with that sort of thing, and I'm somewhat of a scientist in the affects areas as well as in the weapons design area.

Well, while serving in the Pentagon in the nuclear weapons business somebody identified me and asked me to come up to the chief of staff's office and do some work on overall military strategy, including the use of nuclear weapons, and conventional war, and unconventional war and all of the various aspects of strategy that we were talking about in the early 1960s. And the next thing I guess I got asked to do was to set up the first systems analysis office in the army, and interestingly enough I went out to get as an assistant Alain Enthoven, who later became, you know, very famous in systems analysis.

G: You recruited Mr. Enthoven?

M: That's right.

G: I didn't know that.

M: Well, I tried to recruit him for the army; at that same time Mr. [Robert] McNamara recruited him for the Department of Defense. But anyway, I worked for some time in the systems analysis area. About this time the Vietnam War was beginning to get more

recognition and since it fitted into the strategic framework that I had been working on and naturally I was interested, I actually arranged an assignment as an advisor to Vietnam; leaving for Vietnam, I believe, in June or July of 1963. I became the assistant senior advisor to the 21st Vietnamese Infantry Division, which was stationed at Bac Lieu then in Soc Trang province in the Delta.

G: Was Fred Ladd the senior . . .

M: Fred Ladd had been the senior advisor just before I got there.

G: I see.

M: I really was interested in going to that division because the senior advisor was a friend of mine and the person whom I admired very much, Jack Cushman, who also worked in the chief of staff's office here in Washington. Jack and I worked out in the division an interesting assignment or an interesting division of duties. He was very interested in the prosecution of the war against the guerrillas, and I was much more interested in, you know, overall strategy and how that type of tactical activity fitted in with the whole scheme of things in Vietnam. So I was given sort of the other war aspects of the advisory effort.

G: Did you call it that even then?

M: Not then, but later we came up with that foreign relation. So I became the advisor on the strategic hamlet program, the development of the village defense forces, the recruitment and training of the self-defense force, the improvement of the regional forces, and everything but the main operations against the organized guerrilla forces because at that time the Viet Cong in the Delta were coming together as battalion-size units.

In fact, perhaps a year after I got there, the 21st Division engaged in what people believe was the first engagement against a regimental-size Viet Cong force, where three of the Viet Cong battalions actually came together in a coordinated way for a particular attack in the Delta. Well, I was fortunate in having an extremely interesting Vietnamese general heading up the division who was also interested in the totality of the war. His name was General Hon, H-O-N, and I think he's here in this country today although I haven't seen him in recent years.

General Hon had a person in his division, his name was Colonel Y, spelled just "Y," that he didn't quite know what to do with. The person had been formally, and that was many years ago, with Ho Chi Minh, and [he] was perhaps somewhat concerned about his loyalty to the current Saigon government. But he knew that this officer was extremely perceptive, knowledgeable, intelligent, and had a good way of thinking about the strategy of the war. And so he really assigned this person to work with me and to bring together the resources of the division into the other war activities that I was interested in and the division commander was interested in, and that Colonel Y was interested in.

We found that the activities other than the tactical operations against the guerrillas really weren't very well organized, they weren't very well supported, they weren't very well understood; there was very little coordination between the self-defense force, the regional forces, the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], the hamlet leaders, the village leaders. [They] didn't know what was going on. There was very little assistance by the division to the district chiefs that had been assigned by the Saigon government just to run the districts.

The districts really were the most important political element in the country, I believe. You know, we were always talking about provinces and the province chief and the regional forces, but the province chief was very far removed from the people and it was too big a job for the province chief to know what was going on in the various hamlets and therefore that fell to the district chief.

We were fortunate to have a very intelligent, very active, very open district chief right in the town or city of Bac Lieu. It's hardly a city, it's really a town. And the district chief and Colonel Y and myself spent many hours together trying to figure out how we could coordinate the activities better and how we could really begin to affect positively the economic and political lives of the people in the hamlets. We had an extremely productive area. It wasn't as productive as some of the areas further to the north because there was salt water intrusion in Bac Lieu, being fairly far down in the Delta. But nevertheless it was very productive from the point of the view of rice growing and there was a lot of fishing, raising of ducks; and so economic potential was good.

From the political point of view, the farmers--peasants--were largely apolitical. They were interested in themselves and their family and the hamlet and perhaps interested in the village, but they weren't sort of subjugated by the Viet Cong; they weren't particularly friendly with the Viet Cong. On the other hand, they weren't particularly friendly with the Saigon government. The Saigon government was fairly far away and seemed to be interested in other things than themselves. But the climate was such that given the kind of support that the government of South Vietnam with help from the United

States could give to the people, then there was a chance of making them supportive of the government and the government's efforts.

Anyway, we felt that it was important to design some coherent local strategy, and so we really put together on paper a pacification program, and we read all the things that we could gather from around the world. We got good help from RAND [Research and Development Corporation]. Some of the people in RAND were interested in it at that time and studying the strategic hamlet program, pacification programs in other wars or in other conflicts, and through RAND we got some information about the French pacification program in North Africa. That seemed to make a good deal of sense. The situation there was not totally different from the situation in at least our part of Vietnam. We didn't know a whole lot about other parts, but we convinced the Division Commander, General Hon, that we ought to be allowed to conduct an experiment. And that we could get some of the materials from the strategic hamlet program which was sort of going downhill fast after the assassination of President [Ngo Dinh] Diem, who was actually the driving force behind that along with his brother.

So we said, well, there were some resources there and we to talked the AID [Agency for International Development] people. We had a very good AID advisor there in the area, Dick Holbrooke, who later became the assistant secretary for Southeast Asia under President [Jimmy] Carter. Holbrooke was a really bright, hard working, innovative, resourceful person. He was very friendly with the USIA [U.S. Information Agency] advisor who was there, at least on a part-time basis, and we roped him in. We had fairly good connections with the CIA people that were in the area so we could work in the

intelligence side perhaps better than it had been worked in before; and we really just started out on a pacification plan. I could go into it in great detail but I won't do that now; we could do that some other time.

We applied the concept to three hamlets in one village called Binh Loi village in the district which was Binh Loi district, as a matter of fact, in Bac Lieu province. And we trained the hamlet defense force and we trained the hamlet and village officials; we talked about what was going to go on with all the hamlet people and hamlet meetings, and we just went about the whole pacification effort [which] later became very large in microcosm in these three hamlets. The little experiment generated a lot of interest because there was somewhat of a vacuum after the death of President Diem and there was a lot of attention to the turmoil in Saigon, the formation of this government and that government, the struggles within the government on a political level. And, of course, there wasn't any really large, coherent program being pushed by the government with U.S. advice and support, so we fitted in rather neatly in a vacuum.

The corps commander got extremely interested. He would visit every two or three weeks. He decided, "Gee, we ought to make a movie of this," and we actually made a movie. It was called the *Oil Spot* and it was just [inaudible] from the French experience in North Africa where they chose to call the technique the Oil Spot Technique because it was going to start at one place and spread out slowly and start somewhere else and spread out slowly, and then the spots would come together; and then you would have this black spot on the map that would represent a secure area under government control with a viable economy going, road open, markets operating, and communications working, political

communications from the top down to the peasants and from the peasants on up to the top through town meetings or hamlet meetings and village meetings and that sort of thing. I still have, I think, a copy of the movie somewhere in my possessions.

Well, it worked very well in that one particular place, Binh Loi village, and we got authority from the division commander, Vietnamese division commander, and the corps commander to expand it to five villages in five districts. One district in each of the five provinces in the division area; the 21st Division being responsible for five provinces south of the Bassac River. That experiment took a lot of our time; we worked on it night and day, Colonel Y and myself, and we spent a lot of time in the various hamlets and villages. And we were out supervising the training of the hamlet militia and we worked on a training program for the self-defense force. We integrated the regional forces and we even got the division commander to allocate some ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] support. He got the various ARVN regiments, or the three ARVN regiments and the battalions under them, alerted to what was going on so if there was any call for assistance at least we got priority attention by the ARVN, if they weren't off on some tactical operation far from where we were. But the experiment worked just as well in the other five districts as it did in the first district and Saigon began to take notice.

So General [William] Westmoreland had just come over replacing General [Paul] Harkins. General Harkins had actually been down and liked what was going on. General Westmoreland came down and he liked what was happening and asked me to stay on at the end of my tour, which was about that time ending, to be his special assistant and try to expand what we had done successfully in this one division area to other parts of the

country. On the Vietnamese side in Saigon there was general support for that because they were looking for a replacement for the strategic hamlet program and so it became a joint Vietnamese-U.S. effort with the U.S. simply providing advisory assistance and economic and other kinds of support. There was no U.S. direction to the effort whatsoever. It was clearly a model advisory campaign or effort or program, whatever you want to call it.

Well, as special assistant you have a hard time getting things done, so I convinced General Westmoreland I needed to be both the special assistant and have an operational role in the Operations Directory J-3 at MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] headquarters in downtown Saigon. So I also got that job where I had the good opportunity or good fortune to work directly under General William Depuy who is somewhat famous in the Vietnam history on several different counts. So I had a good deal of support in the headquarters and a good deal of flexibility being able to work in a staff position and also at the top. We developed very good relationships with the Vietnamese Strategic Hamlet Division out at the RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces] headquarters out by Tan Son Nhut airport. We worked very closely with Colonel Loc, L-O-C, who was sort of Mr. Strategic Hamlet in terms of being the planner and the executor of Ngo Dinh Nhu's strategic hamlet program.

G: Didn't the strategic hamlet program have rather a bad name by that time among the Vietnamese?

M: Yes. It had a bad name because it was primarily a program where the government came in, put up barbed wire fences, did some reconstruction in the hamlets so that it was a whirlwind tour.

G: Right.

M: Kind of like a presidential stop on the road. There was lots of stuff that took place all at once and then the government withdrew and the hamlet sat out there as a target for the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong were bright enough to know that the best thing that they could do was to strike fast after the government did something and to negate whatever the government did. And that's what they consistently did.

Government forces would pull out, the security would leave except for the poorly trained self-defense force, self-defense corps it was called, SDC, and with very little effort the Viet Cong could come in, cut down the barbed wire which was symbolic of the strategic hamlet program and the presence; the government burned the hamlet school that had been built, blew up the bridge that had been put in by the government, terrorized the people. They didn't kill the people or anything like that, they simply showed that they were very strong and that if they didn't follow them that they were in for deep trouble, but then they'd leave. So you had no permanence and there was just total lack of coordination, preparation, follow through, and explanation.

G: What were the chief obstacles that you had to try to overcome in getting your ideas implemented on pacification?

M: The big obstacles were that, as you said, the strategic hamlet program had a bad name and that there was this great gap or gulf between the civilian side of the government in Vietnam and the military side. And they were in effect separate in Saigon, with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Interior and this ministry and that ministry, and then the RVNAF were the armed forces. They didn't have a coordinated program there and the two

uncoordinated programs get transmitted to the province chief who was the agent of both the civil side of the government and the military side. But the province chief didn't have the resources on the civil side nor did he have the resources on the military side because he had zero control over the ARVN.

To the contrary, the province chief reported on military matters to the division commander, to the ARVN division commander, and then to the ARVN corps commander. So he was the guy answering to many different people without resources, without proper training, often times poorly selected. Province chiefs were selected often times, in fact most of the time, on their political loyalty. They often came from totally different parts of the country. They may have come from the northern part of South Vietnam, Hue or Da Nang, and then get inserted in the Delta where they simply didn't understand the people. They came from different cultures, didn't like where they were, would leave whenever they could, you know, to go visit their relatives, as I said, in Hue or Da Nang, go away on holidays or whatever. They had that strong family connection. They weren't shirking their work or anything like that; they were just concerned about their family and longed for where they came from.

G: Sure.

M: So anyway, they were frequently not properly selected and certainly they were never trained for their, you know, very, very difficult job. I mean, it's unbelievable the range of duties that the province chief had in Vietnam; he was responsible for everything that went on in the provinces. He was, in effect, the governor plus all of a state here plus all of the U.S. government activities in that state all wrapped into one person with a very small and

largely untrained staff. Generally had one or two very good people on the civil side which were the holdovers from France. They were knowledgeable about administration and understood organization.

(Interruption)

M: We even had night training for the--

(Interruption)

M: I don't even know what we were in the midst of talking about.

G: I think we were approaching the point of the Hop Tac Operation.

M: Well, we're about to get there. I think I was describing the difficulties of the province chief. Anyway, I think in working very closely with the province chiefs and district chiefs I came to understand the crucial importance of these people in the whole scheme of things, including the activities against the Viet Cong main forces because these people were the collecting points for intelligence against or on the Viet Cong. And I saw that the province and district chiefs had to be supportive of the division commander and vice versa, so that you had to be very careful about who you had as district chief and province chief, had to make certain that he was compatible with the division commander, and compatible with the people. So it was extremely important to select the right person.

And anyway, this was something we did many years later. When Ambassador [Robert] Komer came over we instituted a grading system if you will, assessment system of district and province chiefs by our advisors and then we worked directly with the president, President [Nguyen Van] Thieu, in selecting and placing province and district chiefs one by one.

G: Can we follow that just a second?

M: Sure.

G: If I'm correct someone has described this as a sort of report card system--

M: Absolutely.

G: -- in which the American advisor rated his counterparts.

M: Right.

G: Well, aren't there problems associated with that?

M: Well, there are certainly problems in that if the person knows he's going to be rated, he may be unfriendly to the advisor, you know, distant, unwilling to take advice, wary, so forth and so on. Whereas we always said that the advisor shouldn't become a very close friend of the person but he should become a very respected advisor, and there had to be very good communications and the advisor had to be open, and he ought to try to get the advisee, again, to be open about his plans and thoughts. We tried to do it sort of in a non-numeric way.

Later the military side of MACV instituted that grading system, sort of an efficiency report system on the ARVN officers, and that became kind of statistical like the statistical efficiency reports over here in the Pentagon. We tried to keep ours much more subjective, tried to get the advisors to talk about strengths and weaknesses as opposed to grading the person, what kinds of assistance he really needed. In other words, if the province chief or district chief was really strong on the tactical side and didn't have the administrative skill, then we ought to get from the ministry in Saigon somebody down to the province to help the province chief on the administrative side. If the intelligence system stunk, the province

chief didn't understand anything about intelligence, then why should he? Why is he going to be an expert in all fields? Then [we needed] to get somebody down there from the police special branch to help put together the kind of intelligence system that was needed.

Anyway, that's the way we tried, on the pacification, side to do it, not to give the guy an A, B, C, or D but rather what was he good at, what wasn't he good at, was he out of place there, would he be good somewhere else. If he was especially pretty good on the tactical side there were plenty of poor RVNAF officers in the ARVN units and the guy was probably anxious to go back anyway. Let's get him back over there and find someone else.

G: How hard was it to find people that could do the job? People who had the training and talent to . . .

M: Well, we had forty-four province chief positions to fill and 245 district chief positions. That's not an inordinate number of good people to find, and they were there. There's plenty of people that were trained very well by the French. We trained an inordinate number of Vietnamese officers here in our military schools, and the intelligence level of Vietnamese is very high. They're highly capable people; it's not like working with a bunch of dummies. They are extremely perceptive, have a strong sense of history, high moral values and they were--the raw material is clearly there.

G: I want to talk about that some more but before we leave the early period, I had a few more questions about the time that you spent in the Delta before General Westmoreland reached out and--

M: Rescued me.

G: --rescued you from the depths of the Delta or whatever. What was the press situation, the American press situation down there? We have the impression that there was a lot of hostility--

M: Yes.

G: --between the MAAG [Military Advisory Assistance Group] people and the press in general, not on every occasion. But was there any press policy for your guidance whenever a reporter would come around and start asking questions or--?

M: Well, I think there was fairly explicit press guidance and the guidance was basically, "Be careful." But I think that I was lucky in that I had never dealt extensively with the press before I got to Vietnam. But Jack Cushman, the division senior advisor, had worked for a number of years. In fact he was the executive to the chief of staff or he may have been the executive to the secretary of the army. But, anyway, he was pretty astute politically and had worked with the press and so I just kind of took my lessons quickly from him. He welcomed the press and he was an outgoing, very friendly person in dealing with press people. As a military person he was very stern and very demanding and very positive and was kind of a typical commander figure, but he had this other side that he used extremely well. And he simply went out of his way to invite some of the top press people down. An example is David Halberstam.

We had kind of an interesting little division compound which was made by the advisors just before me. There were little houses in a rather nice little area right outside the division command post. They were, you know, houses about the size of this room, twelve by twelve and two people were in it, but they were kind of like little A-frame and they were

on little stilts and it was kind of a pleasant place, and a lot of times [inaudible]. But Cushman just would invite the Saigon press down for the weekend. When things would slow down in Saigon, they would get on Caribou, which landed not very far away, the Caribou airplane, and they'd come and stay the weekend with us. And we generally had military operations over the weekend because we said, well, it was a tradition of everybody going back to camp over the weekend and so you could probably surprise the Viet Cong if you went out on Saturday or Sunday.

G: Did it work?

M: Sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't. So we just simply invited the people down and cut them in on the planning of the operation on the basis that they wouldn't report until after the operation had started, cut them in on the planning on our pacification, take them out to meet the village chief, talk to the hamlet chief, talk to the people out there, give them an interpreter to help, and ride them around wherever they wanted to go and really demonstrate what we were doing; have them meet Colonel Y, have them talk to the division commander, who was an extremely bright person.

G: It sounds very positive. How well did it work?

M: Well, we got a lot of good stories out of what we were doing on our experiment and I think that's one of the reasons that people like General Harkins, General Westmoreland, the Vietnamese leaders came down; they read about some of the things going on. So we really didn't ever in my recollection have an argument with something that the press people reported after they came down to see us. They didn't go back and write extremely glowing

reports because despite what I say here, that we were trying something new, things were going well, we certainly had our difficulties.

G: Have you ever read Halberstam's book, *One Very Hot Day*?

M: Yes.

G: Do you recognize the people in there?

M: No, not really, and I haven't thought about it for a long time, so—

G: I was wondering if there are real advisors in there or if it is just a composite or what it was.

M: It is probably a composite. His approach was to look at a lot of things and then put the integrated story together.

G: Right. Was John Paul Vann still there when you got there?

M: Sure. Well, Vann had just left the Delta when I got there. I guess he went home. Of course, he came back later on and was an important part of our pacification effort.

G: Has Neil Sheehan seen you about him?

M: No, he hasn't. I know he's writing a book.

G: Has been for eight or nine years, I think.

M: Yes.

G: Okay.

M: Neil came down our way a number of times. Bob Kaiser--he may have come down in later years--got involved. He may not have come down and visited us there but.

Tape 1, Side 2

G: So you went up to MACV in the summer of 1964--

M: That's right. Yes.

G: --and began, I guess, trying to organize a national kind of pacification policy.

M: That's right. And you mentioned earlier Hop Tac; this was General Westmoreland's idea to get more visibility on the pacification effort--it wasn't mine--and to improve the security around Saigon.

G: Now you said it wasn't yours. Did you not approve entirely with this approach, the Hop Tac approach?

M: No, I didn't like the approach.

G: Were you in charge of it?

M: Yes, in a way. I mean I was a major representative from MACV headquarters on the Hop Tac planning and I was there practically every day on the operations side. Colonel Jasper Williams [Wilson]--I guess it was Jasper--Wilson was the principle advisor on Hop Tac because it was a corps operation and he was the corps senior advisor. So I was a fifth wheel there, unwanted representative from MACV headquarters.

G: [Inaudible] from headquarters.

M: Yes. (Laughter).

G: Well, I was going to say, don't the lines of authority kind of tend to get crossed and short circuited?

M: That's right.

G: And somebody is going to be burned usually.

M: Well, no. It was clear that the corps senior advisor was the advisor on Hop Tac to the Vietnamese.

G: What went wrong with Hop Tac?

M: I don't think anything really went wrong, except that it was too big an operation and it was pushed too fast and it didn't have the slow and persistent and continuous kind of activity that we were proposing, that we had demonstrated was necessary for pacification. It was more a show-of-force type of operation. You do a lot of things for political purposes and I think on the Vietnamese side it had a political purpose to demonstrate to the largest collection of people in South Vietnam, the people in Saigon, that the government really cared. And on the U.S. side we were I think--I would say maybe General Westmoreland was happy to see the Vietnamese want to mount a positive program even if it was not terribly well thought out, planned and executed.

G: Were there after-action appreciations of Hop Tac? Was there an effort to draw lessons from it?

M: Well, we had a pretty good advisory staff there and I think a fairly good Vietnamese staff, and there was a report made by the joint staff really--I don't recall where it is and I don't even remember the name, but I think it pointed out that we tried to accomplish too much in a short period of time and as the case was normally made that the ARVN performed poorly. That was kind of a standard thing to say, that the ARVN performed poorly, and maybe they did. It was all a matter of taking the time to convince the ARVN commanders what it was they were trying to do and to demonstrate to the platoon leaders and company commanders what they were supposed to do, and that time wasn't taken in Hop Tac. There was a good deal of shifting of military forces and lack of permanence, the constant need to go off on other operations.

We were saying in the pacification concept that ARVN forces, if they were going to be assigned to pacification, had to be assigned on a long-term basis. They had to be given some training and then they had to be put under the command of the person in command of the pacification effort, namely the province chief. Well, that was not accepted on the RVNAF side of the house because they had not necessarily put the right people in as province chiefs. As I said earlier, the division commander didn't trust the province chief. He clearly wasn't going to put his battalion under the province chief. That's why I said it was so important that there be that trust and faith and ability to work together. All that didn't happen in Hop Tac. It wasn't anybody's fault; it was just thicker than we could handle.

G: When did you leave Vietnam after your first tour? You extended in order to go to Saigon.

M: That's right. Then I stayed another year and I left in the summer of 1965 to go to the Army War College at Carlysle Barracks.

G: You were still a major at that time?

M: Yes, I guess so.

G: Summer of 1965 was when the first large increments of American combat troops--

M: That's right, yes.

G: --began to arrive. Was there a sense that this was coming in Saigon?

M: Well, it's kind of an interesting part of history that in probably February of 1965 General Westmoreland called me in, since I was his special assistant, and he says, "Bobby"--and the reason he called me Bobby is because when I was a kid, Lieutenant Westmoreland was my scoutmaster.

G: Is that a fact?

M: How about that?

G: In South Carolina?

M: No, he was my scoutmaster at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. How about that?

G: I know Fort Sill very well. Well, I knew he had been an Eagle Scout.

M: Sure. He was an Eagle Scout and then he was assigned to be the scoutmaster of the boy scout troop at Fort Sill. As lieutenants get extra duties, that was one of his extra duties.

G: Okay. That's an interesting footnote.

M: Yes.

G: So he called you in and . . .

M: And said, "Bobby, when we went to Fort Leavenworth we learned the estimate of the situation. Do you remember that?" I said, "Yes, absolutely, sir." He said, "Well, I want you to do the classic estimate of the situation here in Vietnam. The situation is changing and we've got to take a broad look at where we are and where we need to go, and we need to come up with strategic options. You've got the full resources of the staff in MACV headquarters to do this estimate of the situation and I'd hope you'd be able to do it in a week or ten days."

So there was a staff meeting and Westmoreland announced this and told all these generals that they were to cooperate with Bobby Montague. By and large everybody cooperated except our good friend, Joe McChristian, General McChristian, the intelligence guy because, as I said, that was a very important part of the estimate, the intelligence

estimate. So I went to General McChristian and all of his people to get all of the information and the first thing they did was say I wasn't cleared.

G: You mean the situation's not clear or you weren't--

M: I wasn't cleared.

G: Oh, you weren't cleared.

M: Right.

G: You weren't cleared for sources or facts?

M: That's right. I had top secret clearance, but I didn't have all the special clearances.

G: I see.

M: And therefore he couldn't deal with me.

G: At all?

M: He couldn't give me the things I needed. (Laughter) All I got was a hard time.

G: And you really didn't have time to--

M: To fight it. No. Anyway, I talked to General Depuy and he provided some help. He said, "Joe's hard to get along with but I'll talk to him." And I didn't run back to complain to General Westmoreland because that would have just made the situation bad. Perhaps I had enough anyway without the source material. You know, I didn't need to know where they thought COSVN [Central Office for South Vietnam] was at the last minute and who they had infiltrated into COSVN or what have you--(Laughter)--I didn't need to know that.

Anyway, I made the estimate of the situation and presented it to General Westmoreland and later to the mission council. Interestingly, we came up with three courses of action. One was to continue doing what we were doing but strengthen the

advisory and support activities. Number two was to bring in U.S. forces to protect the air bases and the major political centers of Da Nang and Saigon.

G: Was this after the Pleiku incident?

M: Yes.

G: Okay.

M: Yes. The third way was to bring in U.S. forces to assist in conducting the war. I recommended course of action number one and I think that a lot of military people were very much in favor of number three.

About the same time that I was doing this, I think General [James] Gavin came out with his article back here. I don't even remember where the article was, but he came in with his, I guess it was enclave idea which was basically to protect the air bases and the political centers *plus* the Highlands. His little article, and I think he may have even had a map where he put some U.S. forces in the Highlands as it being important strategically. In my course of action number two, I didn't have, I don't believe, the U.S. forces going into the Highlands. I just had them in the three places--Da Nang, Ya Trang [Nha Trang?] and the Saigon/Bien Hoa Area. And I had computed how many Vietnamese battalions that would free up for various other things. I mean each course of action was thought through in a fairly long-range strategic sense on what you could do over a long period of time.

G: You presented this first to the MACV staff and then to the [Mission Council].

M: And then it was discussed at the Mission Council.

G: How was it received?

M: Well, it was received--the people over here liked, at the top, number two. In fact, number two was selected, that was to bring U.S. forces in to protect the political centers and air bases, and we came back to Washington. General [Maxwell] Taylor, and General Westmoreland, myself, we actually came back to Washington to present the plan which had been to do number two. That had been converted by General Depuy, J-3, working with some information and some knowledge of the Vietnamese. There was not a whole lot of discussion with the Vietnamese. I had discussed with the Vietnamese, my friends, over in RVNAF headquarters, when I was making the estimate, their thoughts. I wasn't revealing any intelligence information so I could do that.

But, anyway, the people came back to present the plan to bring the forces into essentially four places with the first ones coming in at Bien Hoa, 173rd Airborne Brigade. So that was an interesting sidelight for the pacification expert.

G: Do you have any insight into where General Taylor stood on this issue, bringing American troops in?

M: Well, he carried it back here and supported number two, to the best of my knowledge.

G: Okay. And this is in the late winter, early spring of 1965?

M: Yes. I don't believe I ever discussed with General Taylor, in detail anyway, the strategy. I happed to very friendly with General Taylor as well as General Westmoreland. Tennis partner of General Taylor.

G: I see.

M: He was a very close friend of my father. So I knew General Taylor through the years.

G: Were you ever included in a doubles match with Big Minh [Duong Van Minh] perhaps on the other side of the net?

M: I never played with Big Minh. Big Minh was pretty much out of favor by the time I got there. I knew him, but I've never played tennis with him.

G: He may have even been in Bangkok at the time.

M: Well, most of the time he was in Bangkok.

G: Yes. Could you kind of sum up? Do you have to go?

M: No, I have to make a telephone call at 9:30 and then I've got to leave about quarter to ten unfortunately, but I can get together with you again while you're here.

G: Sure. I'd love to.

M: All right.

G: Could you at this distance describe the state of pacification when you left Vietnam after your first tour of duty there? Is it possible?

M: You know, the whole effort was barely getting started. It was very difficult to take something that happened in five villages and try to extend it to 1,700. It was very difficult to extend something that was basically not understood and even opposed on both the advisory side and the Vietnamese side. And so we made scant progress in that year and there was a lot of turmoil at the national level. There was difficulty getting a coordinated effort on the Vietnamese side. How do you get the ministries to work with the RVNAF; those things hadn't even been started to be worked out. It was a long-range plan and it would take a lot more than a low-level staff-person, even though that person had support from the ambassador and the COMUSMACV [Commander, U.S. Military Assistance

Command]. I didn't have any staff and what have you. I'm not claiming I made very much progress because I didn't make a whole lot of progress.

G: Okay.

M: And you know I had other things to do.

G: So you came back in the summer of 1965.

M: I came back and went to the Army War College. And next time I really gave a lot of thought to Vietnam was in probably May or perhaps April of 1966 when Robert Komer called me from the White House and said that President Johnson had told him that he wanted to do more in Vietnam on working with the people and improving the political system and improving the economy and all these things. So Komer said that he heard I knew a lot and would I be interested in right away starting to work with him, and then come on down to Washington when I finished the War College. I said sure, that's fine with me. I was very interested in that war and the kind of activity that I had started and I'd like to follow through on it. We did some work over the telephone. I can't remember how many times I came down; I actually came down to Washington a couple of times. And as soon as I graduated from the War College I think I rode down here the next day or maybe--probably the same day. In fact, I know I rode down here the same day, and I'd already come down and gotten a house. So the day after I finished the war college, I reported in to the old Executive Office Building in the office in the northeast corner on the first floor, at least the first floor over the ground, right next door to Vice President [Hubert] Humphrey who we used to see almost every day in the hall, and he was very interested in what we were doing. A very wonderful man to work with.

G: Well, what were you doing? What was Komer's [position]?

M: Well, Komer was the special assistant to the president for Vietnam. And he really was working directly with Walt Rostow, national security advisor, and working with Ambassador [William] Leonhart as his deputy, and they were churning away on how to do better in the pacification program, how to improve the economy. How to develop the political system better, how to improve intelligence other than pure military intelligence. There are a number of things that happened in 1965-1966. They had various conferences on pacification. Things were proceeding over in Vietnam; in other words, it didn't stop. When I left, they said I wasn't a motivating force.

G: Okay. Let's consider it. You were--

M: And so Komer who's a get-things-done guy and who probably had a good deal of pressure--I know he had a lot of pressure from President Johnson--was eager to take some very, very positive actions. We had some very extremely good people. We had Chuck Cooper [?] who later did a fine job in the State Department; he was good on economics. And we had Dick Moorstein who unfortunately has died or died a couple years ago.

G: What was his name?

M: Dick Moorstein. Moorstein was an economist from RAND. Both Chuck Cooper--Charles Cooper--and Dick Moorstein were from RAND, and RAND in fact lent them I guess to the White House.

G: This is not Chester Cooper [?] is it?

M: No, Chuck. Charles R., I believe, Cooper. Well, with our small staff and my new knowledge, we started working on a longer-range plan and soon it was decided that I ought to go over and start things moving faster in Vietnam.

G: In what capacity?

M: White House representative.

G: Okay.

M: Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge was back by this time I guess and Ambassador Lodge had sort of appointed Deputy Ambassador [William] Porter, Bill Porter, to be the point man to receive all these communications that came from Komer and to report back on all the questions Komer asked, because Komer is a guy that keeps firing out sort of the hard questions. He's not a guy that goes into huge detail and wants to put together plans twenty-two feet thick or anything like that, but he is very good at getting at the heart of the matter. So he kept firing out these questions and somebody had to answer them. So I think Ambassador Lodge said, "For Christ's sake, we'll appoint Bill Porter to do all of this." And Porter is an extremely fine gentlemen. He's very thoughtful and dedicated, hard-working, concerned. I guess the only criticism you could make of Ambassador Porter is that he is just too kind a person. I think he would put up with non-action or poor people rather than light a fire under somebody or actually get rid of somebody because he's just such a wonderful man and so intelligent.

Anyway, I went over really to work with Ambassador Porter. We got some bright ideas that really--as I said earlier, the only way to have effective action was to coordinate the many activities over there because we had tremendous capabilities in the military area

clearly. You had more military force than you could possibly ever need to defeat the enemy. You had more intelligence resources than anyone probably has ever assembled in a small territory. You had really from the President and the Congress almost unlimited support. On the economic area, you could get as many civilian advisors as you could really recruit and train. You didn't want for things. So the matter was of getting these people somehow to work together and I'd had enough experience to say, "Gee, the AID people wanted to be AID people, the USIA people wanted to be USIA people, and, the worst of all, military people wanted to be military people and they didn't want to deal with the State Department guys or the AID guys." In fact, I can even remember Cushman. He knew the importance of working with these people but he really had a hard time putting up with them because they didn't cut their hair. (Laughter) I can remember once upon a time, Holbrooke came down, Dick Holbrooke. He said, "Holbrooke, get out of here until you get a haircut." Well, I mean I don't think Holbrooke ever forgave Cushman for that.

Well anyway, people even on the U.S. side wouldn't work together and so how in the world could you make them work together on the Vietnamese side. Perhaps Komer and I and the others in the office came to the realization that, well, if we couldn't demonstrate cohesion on our side, how could we ever expect it on the Vietnamese side. So we came up with the scheme of integrating all of the advisory effort, at least on the civilian side, in Vietnam, and so we created and got presidential approval for going ahead with the development of the Office of Civil Operations (OCO).

And so I sat over there and drew up OCO plans with some of Ambassador Porter's assistants and some State Department people and some of the people from AID. For

example, one of our principle planners was Clay McManaway, who is now the ambassador to Haiti and a long time assistant to Larry Eagleburger over in the State Department. And so we put together this plan and got White House approval for it and moved ahead, and we took over a building and we worked together. And it seemed to be effective. We had all of the civilian advisors except the CIA people who were engaged in penetration operations against the Viet Cong political apparatus. All the CIA people out in the provinces that were working on local intelligence and all that, they came under us. OCO was really only a strategic ploy, however, on the part of Ambassador Komer and perhaps even the President was involved in it. I don't know, but [he] could have been. But I guess my feeling was that he wasn't involved in the idea that this would be a step for ultimately bringing in all of the military advisors that were working with the pacification forces. Anyway, that was a constant thought in our cables back and forth and in our telephone conversations back and forth. Dick Holbrooke by that time was back working for Komer, and so Holbrooke and I talked on the telephone essentially every night as to . . .

G: And your status was Special White House Representative?

M: Yes.

G: Okay. And you talked to Holbrooke.

M: Yes. Every night, almost every night. As I said earlier, as a special representative you can't get anything done. So I took a position in OCO as the director of operations.

G: Sort of the G-3 of OCO.

M: Yes.

G: Well, this gives you some clout within OCO then, certainly.

M: Yes.

G: But it was still difficult--

M: Anyway, the long range--the thought behind all this was that it really wasn't going to work even though we said it was unless we brought the military advisors in. And so we were scheming on the telephone and in the back channel cables and what have you as to how we were going to do this.

G: Is that risky? I mean, bureaucratically speaking, is that a risky thing to do?

M: For me as a military guy, sure. Because the people over in MACV were leery of what I was doing.

G: Did you have to report to somebody other than Ambassador Porter?

M: I knew General Westmoreland. I let him know what was going on.

G: Am I inferring too much to say that this puts you in a pretty delicate position *vis-a-vis* MACV staff people, for example?

M: Yes. Why do you think I'm here?

G: Could you explain that. I mean, I think I know what you mean, but what do you mean why do I think--

M: Well, I did three unpopular things in the army. First of all, I developed nuclear weapons. I really didn't ever want nuclear weapons. You know, nuclear weapons were going to lessen the importance of the army on the globe. It was clearly going to make the air force pre-eminent and the army really only got interested in nuclear weapons when there was a possibility of tactical nuclear weapons. So General Taylor--I worked with General Taylor in the Pentagon and, as I said, I knew him personally for a long time. So I was involved in

the development of at least military strategy and particularly army strategy on how you were going to integrate tactical nuclear weapons into army doctrine and therefore somehow keep the army from being eclipsed. But as I said, most of the generals didn't understand that and they were uneasy about it. So there wasn't a whole lot of attention given to the nuts over there working on nuclear weapons. So that was my first mistake.

My second mistake was to get involved in the whole pacification business, get hooked up with the White House and Komer and the big conflict between really the civilian side and the military side, and the conflict had to be fueled by charges that the military side didn't understand the war and weren't interested in cooperating. And so I always became the spokesperson. I mean, Komer was the spokesperson; I was the source of the words or the cables or the plans or what have you because I'm a writer of plans, a writer of strategies. I can sit down and write them down. Tell me to write a plan on something, I can learn all about it and I can write the plan quickly.

G: Okay. That confirms something I was told when I asked who you were. I was told you were the guy who wrote all that stuff that Komer signed.

M: Right, and there's a big controversy, just like there is a controversy here, who signed it. Did Montague sign it or did Komer actually sign it? I signed 9/10 of it. He didn't have time to sign it. He would always back me up. He'd say, "Sure, I signed that." Never an instance that that didn't happen.

Here, Eunice Kennedy Shriver is the driving force behind the foundation. We have hundreds of letters and stuff going out each day, most of them not signed by Eunice

Kennedy Shriver. As long as they are within policy, I authorize them to be signed. I can't sign her name, so I can't do it.

G: Did you get proficient with Komer's name?

M: Sure.

G: I see. Okay. That's fascinating. What was your third mistake?

M: My third thing is I took the job of eliminating the draft. That was the thing that was most damaging because military people want the draft, by and large.

G: The military didn't have any choice in this instance did they?

M: Well, they wanted it to fail. They wanted the volunteer effort to fail.

G: I see.

M: I think. Most of them.

G: Did Volney Warner play a part in this?

M: In the volunteer force? No. He was just involved on the Vietnam thing. He, in effect, took my place in Komer's office here.

G: When you went to Vietnam?

M: Yes, after I became a permanent fixture over there.

G: Okay. OCO was formed I guess, what, in the fall of 1966?

M: Yes. Well, maybe a little earlier. Yes, fall of 1966.

G: How much did that change things? How much did that effect--

M: Not a whole lot.

G: Because of the lack of resources?

M: No. Lack of time to get it established and I guess Ambassador Lodge could have been stronger in support of it, and perhaps Ambassador Porter could have had more time to work on it. You know, he had to do a lot of Ambassador Lodge's work and he was constantly torn away.

G: Yes. Well he was also deputy chief of mission, wasn't he?

M: Yes. So he had an office in OCO and an office at the embassy. So he was bouncing back and forth between the two. It was just an extremely difficult task to get this new organization going and to get the right people in it and provide leadership to those people.

So OCO didn't make any real impact except to be the precursor of the organization that would really have a chance, namely the organization that would include the military advisors. Now the difficult thing of course was that it was impossible to get the military advisors to come over to OCO and so Komer, and I'm sure with the President's okay, came up with the workable strategy of saying, "Oh, since we can't get them to join us, let's join them." And so that move was approved by President Johnson and he simply sent Ambassador Komer out to Saigon to be the deputy COMUSMACV, and of course that to the military people was the worse thing that could possibly happen from an organizational point of view. How in the world can we have a civilian being a commander of military forces in time of war? Unheard of. And when they got to know Komer, it was even more unheard of. A lot of people point to me as the guy who caused that to happen, and I didn't cause it to happen although I did tell Komer that it was the only way it was ever going to work. I didn't engineer it.

G: Who convinced General Westmoreland to accept this scheme?

M: Komer and the President.

G: [Inaudible] But you had known and he had known that something momentous was going to happen but the details had not been worked out--the command structure, the chain of command. Had you been asked to do any groundbreaking before this?

M: No, I don't believe so.

G: What do you think persuaded General Westmoreland to accept such an unorthodox--this is something new under--as you suggested . . .

M: Yes. Well, I just think that we got a lot of pressure put on it and I also think that he felt that he could control the situation and he was going to control it as we learned later by simply limiting the number of people that Komer could have on his staff, because immediately after Komer and General Westmoreland came back we entered negotiations as to what Komer would have in the way of staff and where his office was going to be and whether he was going to get a car or this, that and the other thing. And the agreement was that he would have a staff of four--I think it was four--one of whom would be designated by General Westmoreland. So General Westmoreland sent a Navy commander down to join me and two other people that Komer would select.

G: A navy commander?

M: Right.

G: That's a fairly junior person.

M: Well, we didn't want to give them too much power. (Laughter) We had a guy that could watch us.

G: And Komer was a deputy to General Westmoreland? Is that right?

M: Yes. Deputy commander.

G: Deputy commander.

M: Right.

G: Are you saying that there was a chance that if a sniper got Westmoreland one day that Komer would put on four stars and take over.

M: Right. In fact, interestingly, Komer said, "Well, doesn't every four-star general, and I'm now a four-star general"--he really thought of himself as a four-star general--" have an aide?" I said, "Absolutely. Got to have an aide." He says, "What kind of aide are we going to get?" I said, "Well, what we need is somebody really, really smart. You know, you don't want General Grant's aide, you know. We want an aide that can really help us because we haven't really got very many people on the staff. So we don't want an aide aide, we want a fifth staff person." So we went to the chief of staff and we said that we wanted records of these kinds of people and all these records came in and we poured over them and we picked out one person. His name is Dave Pabst.

G: Could you spell that?

M: Pabst, like Pabst beer. And so we got Dave Pabst to be an aide. And so Captain Pabst says to me, "I'm an aide now, what kind of insignia should I wear." "Well, you wear aide insignia." He says, "With four stars?" I said, "Absolutely. Go down and get them." And so he put them on. Within a day, the chief of staff of MACV called me down and says, "Montague, what in the hell is going on? Who authorized Captain Pabst to have aide insignia, particularly with four stars on it." I said, "Well, I did." "Well, why didn't you check with me?" I said, "Why should I check with you?"

G: Who was chief of staff at the time?

M: This was General [Walter T.] Kerwin, I think. It was the guy before General Kerwin. Dark, black-haired guy. It wasn't General Kerwin. General Kerwin later became the guy that got after me on a daily basis. It was not General Kerwin.

G: It wasn't General [William] Knowlton, was it?

M: No.

G: He was J-3.

M: That's right.

G: General [Richard] Stilwell. He was gone by that time.

M: No, he was gone by that time. Stilwell, he was a good friend of mine; he wouldn't have done that.

Anyway, then I had gotten Pabst to go out and get four star plates to put on Ambassador Komer's car, and that was the next huge furor. So there was a big meeting after that between General Westmoreland and I think Ambassador Komer as to, "Well, that was going a bit far." And Komer said, "Well, I want four stars." And General Westmoreland reportedly--I don't think I was at that meeting--to have said to the chief of staff, "Well, come up with something." And so what they did was they got the eagle of the United States and put on a square plate with the eagle and then put four stars this way rather than the red plate with four stars that way.

G: You mean they put--I see, okay. I thought they were going to make them three and a half stars, you know.

M: No. I think that they talked to me, "Would Ambassador Komer think of any--is there anyway that he wouldn't think of four stars?" I said, "Absolutely not. You just cannot sell any plate without four stars," because they kept sending people up to see me. And so they finally came out with this design and they brought it up to Ambassador Komer, as I said the design I just described. And he said, "Oh, that looks really nice. In fact, that's bigger and better than Westy`s plate." (Laughter) So we put it on.

End Tape 1 of 1, Interview I

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