INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 10, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: DAVID G. NES

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Mr. Nes' home, Owings Mills, Maryland

Tape 1 of 1

G: Mr. Nes, may we begin by simply saying that the account in David Halberstam's The Best and the Brightest of your assignment to Vietnam and so on is accurate, according to your recollection, is that right?

N: Yes, it is. It's quite brief and written in his usual amusing style, but I would say that it gives the picture as it was.

G: Very well, sir. Well, let us simply go on from there. Would you describe what kind of preparation, briefing, the State Department provided for you before you left?

N: Perhaps I should preface this by saying that I was in London as the American diplomatic representative at the Imperial Defense College when a telephone call came through from the State Department asking me to return immediately to discuss a new assignment. I was not told what they had in mind. This was in December [1963]. The Imperial Defense College had not concluded its year and I was scheduled to make a brief address and give a paper at the conclusion. I did return to Washington and then ensued the various meetings incident to my assignment described by Mr. Halberstam.

However, during that time I got no briefing whatsoever on the substance of the situation in Vietnam, but considerable advice and

instructions as to the administrative side of things there. I think everyone concerned, from the President on down, realized that administration and the executive side of an ambassador's job in heading up a mission was not Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge's strong forte. And they thought if they sent out a deputy who was experienced as a deputy, that he could somehow pull together the country team operations, which are normally the foundation of coordinating the responsibilities of all the various government agencies in a country. They thought that I could do this more or less with Ambassador Lodge's approval but without his active participation, because he had made it quite clear that he had no intention of meeting with the heads of agencies there on a regular basis. He just didn't operate that way. So that my briefing was devoted almost exclusively to the administrative side of things in Saigon and not to the substance.

Now after these interviews in Washington, I was permitted to return to London and wind up my personal affairs prior to going out to Saigon in January. During those very few days I had access to British intelligence reports on the background and life particularly of Ho Chi Minh, which they in turn had gotten from the French. So I was able to learn something of the background of the communist movement in Indochina, of the infrastructure which had been built there, and also of the very extensive control of the movement from Hanoi. This all came from British and French intelligence; I got nothing from my own government at all.

In December at about this time, the NATO council had its annual meeting, and I got a wire from the department asking me to meet Defense Secretary [Robert] McNamara in Paris and fly out on his visit to Saigon. They thought this would provide an adequate briefing. Well, I did go over to Paris and I met with Secretary of Defense McNamara and we boarded his private plane, which was I think the tanker version of a Boeing 707. It had no windows. We started our take-off from Orly, which halfway down the runway was I think you call it aborted, with a terrible screech of tires and quite a lot of gaffuffle. The pilot had gotten the plane off the runway on the side and asked us to evacuate immediately since there was a danger of fire. The cause of this was apparently, through the mist and fog another air transport plane was sitting across the runway and we had not been properly cleared. We had to get another plane, of course, and flew on to Saigon, but I was immensely impressed by the fact that the Defense Secretary spent almost the whole trip with immense briefing books.

But when we got to Saigon and began our meetings with the country team members there--Defense, CIA, the embassy and so forth--I was somewhat disheartened by the fact that almost a half an hour of conversation was devoted as to whether the artillery batteries of the Vietnamese Army should be equipped with six or four howitzers. I somehow thought that this wasn't a subject of sufficient importance to take up the time of the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and so on.

But just to state this in brief, the State Department briefed me on the administrative problems but did not brief me on the substance of the Vietnam situation. Whatever I got, I got from the British and French in London.

G: It seems a little strange that you didn't get any more than that. Would you ascribe this to a belief that you don't need to know much about the country to administer the internal affairs of an embassy?

N: I think a lot of it was there just wasn't time. I flew back to London. I was in Washington two days, including my visit with the President. I flew back to London again, went over to Paris, went out to Saigon, returned to London, finished my affairs and then flew out to Saigon. And there was never more than a day or two in any one place; it was one of those very hectic periods.

G: Was there a sense of emergency about your going?

N: Always a sense of emergency with anyone that was assigned out there. I think there was some sort of a feeling in the top of the State Department and the White House that the more rank you sent and the more publicity you gave to it, the better off you'd be as far as your overall effort was concerned.

G: Well, would you describe your initial impressions of the personnel, the programs and so on?

N: In Saigon? I noticed the question here has to do somewhat with the morale of the American community. I thought the mission when I arrived was very well staffed. I thought the morale was good. I thought most people believed in the cause; they believed that we

should do what we could to prevent South Vietnam from falling under the domination of the North. There was a great deal of disagreement as to how this could be done or whether it could be done. Those who knew the country well and knew the history of Vietnam I think had grave doubts as to whether an insurgency that was so well imbedded, that had been put in place for more than twenty or thirty years, with which the French, who knew the country far better than we were, couldn't cope and finally had to leave, whether this type of insurgency which received its direction, its logistical support, its morale, everything, from the North and from China, could ever be handled on a counterinsurgency basis. I think there was a lot of disagreement within the mission on this.

The military I thought had the best that we could send out there. I think in dealing with a situation which was so largely political they were somewhat over their heads. I felt that had they been faced with the Russians on the plains of Germany they'd have given a very good account of themselves, but this was not World War II and it was not the preparations for World War III in Eastern and Western Europe.

G: Could you define in any way who took what side on these issues? Were there splits within agencies, for example? Was CIA more pessimistic than AID or anything of that nature?

N: As I recall, the greatest degree of realism as to what we faced in Vietnam was evident in the CIA. I knew Mr. [John] McCone very well, who headed the agency. I knew [William] Colby quite well. And I think they felt pretty much as I did, that counterinsurgency wasn't

going to succeed and that either we had to make a far greater military effort and occupy North Vietnam, or we'd better find some way to extricate ourselves.

AID I think was probably more optimistic and felt that somehow through their programs we could win the minds and the hearts of the people, the great phrase at that time. The military were doing the job within the limitations that were levied upon them by Washington. I think that there was division there between officers who served largely in the provinces, who were in touch with the deficiencies of the South Vietnamese forces, who knew better the strengths of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. I'd say at the level of lieutenant colonel and major, there was considerable realism as to the problems that we faced. Not so much with the senior officers.

G: Could you ascribe that to anything?

N: I think just familiarity. I think that those who were actually in the provinces and trying to advise, equip and train the Vietnamese forces were much closer to the situation than those in MACV.

G: But surely they reported their doubts.

N: I think they did. I think they did. But there is always an inhibition in reporting to superiors the things they don't want to hear and this has gone back to the days of the Greeks and the Romans.

G: Yes. All right, sir. I didn't want to ask--Mr. [John] Richardson had been relieved as chief of station I believe in October [1963].

N: He was succeeded by [Peer] de Silva.

G: There was a gap though, there was about a three-month gap, and I don't know who was in charge in the interim and I thought you might--

N: I can't remember either. I remember de Silva very well.

G: He came in December.

N: Right.

G: Just about the time that you did.

N: Right. Because he, of course, was involved in the bombing of the embassy and had some glass in an eye and so forth, and I saw him subsequently. But I don't recall who was in that gap at all.

G: Had Ambassador [Frederick] Nolting left any kind of legacy, any lingering imprint on the embassy or its operations?

N: Not really. I think he and his deputy, Bill Truehart, who you may have already interviewed, I don't know--were quite close. As you know, I think Ambassador Nolting felt that our opposition to [Ngo Dinh] Diem, which eventually probably led to the coup which overthrew him and to his death, was a mistake in that it deprived the country of the only sort of recognizable control over the province chiefs and the security apparatus that existed, and once this went, disintegrated, the generals that took over in succession after that never were quite able to pull it together again. Whether he was right or wrong in that, I'm just not qualified to say, but I know that he felt this strongly, and this is probably in the record.

G: Did you talk to Ambassador Truehart?

N: Bill Truehart? Before he left?

G: Yes.

N: Yes.

G: What was his state of mind? I've heard reports that he was nearing exhaustion.

N: Well, I didn't get that feeling. I thought he was in full possession of everything when he left. He certainly was clever enough to leave his dog with me to ship back. I thought Bill was a good officer and had just run into the same buzz saw that I did and everybody else did eventually out there.

G: How did Ambassador Lodge impress you initially in his performance of duty?

N: Well, you know, I had known him briefly in that Libyan experience and also I knew him when he was in New York. Because during his tenure as our head of the U.N. Mission there, I went up on various occasions to handle issues that came up regarding the Far East at that time, Korea and Japan. I got to know him then and saw him almost daily. He certainly was a very impressive and personable man. I think his relationship with the top people at the United Nations when he was there and with the top people in Vietnam, particularly the Vietnamese government, were excellent. His French was good. I think he was a good diplomat. As I've mentioned before, as an executive he was poor; he had no flair for administration, he hated it. I think he was in some ways a prima donna, but very often that's necessary and an advantage. I don't know what sort of a person he'd have been in a top political job, whether as president or vice president, but he might have been pretty good.

G: There are stories about his working habits, his hours and so forth, that circulate. Can you, should I say, confirm or deny--?

N: Well, we come to another question here. From what vantage point did you observe the [Nguyen] Khanh coup of late January 1964? I think that illustrates things pretty well.

G: All right, we'll discuss it in that context.

N: The military in the provinces, the advisers at the provincial level, had begun to sense that something was afoot and that generals were thinking of moving in and replacing the government which succeeded Diem. And these reports, of course, came through the CIA and into the embassy. So during the afternoon of the coup, when it became apparent that this was a distinct possibility, we had sort of a crisis center organized. I was the deputy; I was the head of it. The Ambassador was fully aware of this, but he went home as usual and he gave me strict instructions that coup or no coup, he wasn't to be disturbed until the next morning. So the coup went off and we got the telegrams off to Washington as best we could during the night. I went over after he had finished breakfast and briefed him on the situation.

But he followed a fairly relaxed daily regime, which I personally think may be a good idea. I think these ambassadors that get into the office before anyone has had a chance to pull things together and read the traffic out of Washington and digest it, and stay there until all hours of the night and exhaust everybody really aren't doing the mission or their staff that much good. I think you can run a mission or I think you can run any job, as President Eisenhower certainly

demonstrated with the presidency, with a pretty relaxed time schedule, if you trust your staff and if you turn things over to them and if you delegate authority.

So I would never take exception to Ambassador Lodge's work habits per se, because had I ever reached that position, I might not have gone as far as he did, but I certainly would have had a game of golf once a week and I wouldn't have been in the office till ten o'clock every night. So I think you can do it. It was sort of a joke around that he'd leave the office and go to the Club Sportif and swim in the afternoons, then he'd take a nap and then he'd go home and go to bed at night. He'd never be disturbed until eight in the morning and so forth. These are all true, but I don't think it's really too relevant as to whether he did a job or not.

G: It may account for why he's still as vigorous as he is at eighty years.

N: It probably does. It probably does.

G: It has become a cliche that Americans failed to understand the nature of the war. Can you recall how we perceived the nature of the war at that juncture?

N: This is a pretty big question. My impression is that at the policy level we perceived it as a communist effort on the part of China and the Soviet Union, through the regime of Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam, to absorb another area of Southeast Asia through the use of so-called insurgency. That this was more or less a demonstration project for them to prove they could do it without involving the crossing of

frontiers, as they did in Korea, and which of course brought immediate U.S. reaction in the form of conventional warfare in South Korea. That they could do it through propaganda and through an insurgency effort indigenous to the country that they happened to be interested in, whether it was South Vietnam, whether in the future it would be Cambodia or Laos or what have you.

We therefore visualized this demonstration as a test of American ability to deal with it through counterinsurgency. As you may remember, we established a counterinsurgency school in Washington, which incidentally I was asked to investigate and report on after I returned from Vietnam, and that was an interesting sidelight experience. That you countered an insurgency by using the indigenous forces, using Americans to train, [providing] equipment, through imaginative propaganda, through AID efforts that would benefit the people of the area, in this case South Vietnam, and so forth. That this operation in South Vietnam was the real test of will between the communist side, which was trying to win areas through insurgency, and the American side, which was trying to prevent it through counterinsurgency. And I think that many people at the policy level looked at it in these terms.

G: Did you look at it in those terms?

N: Not after I'd been there for about a month.

G: What changed your mind? How did you change your mind?

N: Two things. Reading the life of Ho Chi Minh, including the fact that he was a pastry cook for a top restaurant in London at one time.

Reading of his success in establishing this massive infrastructure in the South. Reading the history of French involvement and the problems they went into and their final demise after Dien Bien Phu. Seeing on the ground that you'd cut off a tentacle in one province and it would spread in another province, that the Viet Cong were very adept and skillful in using terrorism not as a sword but as a rapier. That to take out a village chief in the night and disembowel him and hang him up in a village square in the morning was a very effective means of seeing to it that the people in that village and the surrounding countryside did not support the government. This was widespread throughout Vietnam, as you know. All of these things put together convinced me by as early as April after I'd only been there a few months, that continuing the type of program that we were putting so much stock in just wasn't going to succeed.

G: Did that bring you into conflict with anyone else on the country team?

N: Not so much on the country team as in Washington, I think. You've seen the letters I wrote to Bill Sullivan and one or two telegrams I sent in when I was charge d'affaires while Lodge was away. I think in the State Department and the White House they began to feel as early as April or May that perhaps Nes wasn't quite on their team, and I think maybe you can find more of that evidence in the [LBJ] Library in Austin.

G: It's very possible.

N: But unfortunately, I've always been very frank and I've always put whatever I felt was right above a career. I think I was helped by the

fact that together Mrs. Nes and I are financially independent, so I could quit the State Department at any time I wanted or be booted out, it would make absolutely no difference at all. But with respect to Vietnam and later the Middle East, I just felt very strongly that we were on the wrong track and said so, and this is not very popular.

G: I believe it's also Halberstam who intimates in one place that this got you on the wrong side of the military in particular. Do you recall anything of that nature?

N: Yes, I think the thing that got me on the wrong side of the military was the fact that I felt our effort to organize, equip and train the South Vietnamese forces on a conventional war basis at that time was not meeting the situation that we had on the ground. That to build up this tremendous force built on three corps or four corps, I forget, maybe it was four corps, and divisions and brigades and regiments and so forth, was really fine in meeting a situation such as we'd had in Korea, when you had a massive invasion from the North. But at that time there was no evidence that North Vietnam planned to introduce division strength units into the South, which of course they did later after we signed the peace accords. But this type of structure and training and equipment just wasn't the best thing as far as meeting the insurgency was concerned. I think you'll see that in some of the memoranda I wrote both to Lodge and subsequently to Senator [J. William] Fulbright when I got home. I think anyone that takes exception to the way the military are doing things is apt to run into some difficulties. And yet General [William] Westmoreland and I

remained good friends throughout, and I see him now in Charleston, play golf with him.

G: Were there special problems involving Cambodia at this time? I seem to recall that you got some special responsibilities involving South Vietnam's relationshp to Cambodia.

N: If we could turn that off a minute, I'd like to refresh [my memory]. (Interruption)

G: All right, Mr. Nes, would you reiterate what you just told me then regarding this cable of February 18 in which you noted that external developments would probably be more important than the counterinsurgency effort in determining the outcome of the struggle?

N: What I had in mind at the time was the degree to which, first of all, North Vietnam would continue and increase its involvement in the South, the extent to which they would be bankrolled and supported by China and the Soviet Union, the extent to which we could obtain the cooperation and support of our principal allies in the area, Australia and New Zealand and so forth, the extent to which we could obtain like cooperation from our Western European allies, in particular France, where De Gaulle seemed to have been thwarting our efforts through his proposals for neutralization. These were the external factors I was thinking of.

G: How important was De Gaulle's neutralization campaign, if we can call it that? What difference did it make within the South?

N: I think that many South Vietnamese intellectuals who were French-spoken and French-educated, who were a little bit on the fence as far

as the entire situation in the South was concerned, perhaps looked on neutralization as a means of getting the communist influence out of the country, at the same time perhaps bringing back a closer relationship with France, which they looked on with considerable nostalgia.

G: I see.

N: And I think it was this group that were greatly influenced.

G: Were these the people that were called the attentistes?

N: That's correct, that's correct. They were still out in full force every day at the Club Sportif in Saigon, swimming and playing tennis, running their plantations, paying a little hush money to the Viet Cong.

G: I see. One issue that was being discussed at this time I believe was whether or not American dependents should be evacuated. Did this have any connection with the beginning of clandestine operations against the North called 34-A Operations?

N: I don't think they were really connected. The possibility or the desirability of evacuating dependents was a lively subject from the time of my arrival there. I think a decision was inhibited by the fact that this would demonstrate to the South Vietnamese government a certain lack of confidence in their ability to handle the situation. The discussion of the issue became much more lively after several guerrilla attacks on American installations in Saigon itself. As I recall, there was one attack on a movie theater where Americans were attending, on a baseball field and so forth. After that the departure of dependents was, during my tenure at least, put on strictly a

voluntary basis and many of the wives and children did leave and many did not. Most of the senior families were still there. General Westmoreland's family was there, Mrs. Lodge was there, my family was there and so forth. But it was a very live subject. I have an idea that probably Ambassador Lodge felt that the risks to American lives were really not sufficient to undergo the lack of confidence which this would have engendered throughout the country.

G: Were these clandestine operations also being discussed at this time? Were you involved in that at all?

N: 34-A?

G: Yes.

N: Well, involved to an extent that we talked about a tit for tat operation type of thing. And of course we did have clandestine operations going along the coast with boats going in and so forth. But they were not nearly as extensive during my tenure as of course they became later.

G: I believe we were also sending penetration agents over the North, were we not?

N: We were, yes.

G: Air drops. Yes.

N: Yes.

G: Do you have any insight into how successful those were?

N: No, I don't. None at all.

G: Can we talk about the press a little bit? That was a very lively topic, too, I think.

N: I'd like to go to the next to the last question first.

G: All right.

N: The policy in the embassy was that no one, repeat no one, talk to the press except Ambassador Lodge.

G: In any connection whatever?

N: Any connection. And so our public affairs officer, who I believe at that time was Barry Zorthian--

G: He would have just been a brand-new arrival, wouldn't he?

N: A brand-new arrival. He was left a little in limbo as far as that was concerned. Now, he did have the totality of his public relations campaign throughout Vietnam, the usual USIA operations and so forth, but Ambassador Lodge wanted to handle the press himself. Now, there were the military press briefings I think every day on what was going on in the provinces and so forth, but they were limited entirely to the military statistical approach to that sort of thing, as you remember.

G: Which was referred to as the five o'clock follies even then.

N: That's right. That's right.

G: So the press policy was rather restrictive?

N: Very restrictive. I had no contact with the press whatsoever.

G: I see. Then you can't even comment on how the press regarded the press policy.

N: I can't I'm afraid.

G: How did the press like Ambassador Lodge?

N: I think they liked him. I think they liked him. He was quite adept at handling the press and the other media representatives. He was very able in giving the impression that they were receiving information when in effect they weren't getting anything. (Laughter) Which is pretty good. I think he got along fine with the press, as far as I know. Now what they may have said on the side, I have no idea, because I had no contact with them at all.

G: I see. There was a policy change, I think it was in June of 1964, which reversed that situation, that gave Barry Zorthian real responsibility for dealing with the press, and apparently Ambassador Lodge either suggested it or certainly did go along with it, and it seems a rather strange flip-flop. Do you have any insight into that?

N: Well, if it took place in June it was on the eve of Ambassador Lodge's departure. So it may have been stimulated by the fact that he was leaving and no longer had any particular interest in personally handling the press. But I don't remember that at all.

G: Did you ever talk to Mr. Zorthian about the state of affairs in which he found himself rather limited in his activities?

N: We did discuss it from time to time, but I think he realized that Ambassador Lodge wouldn't be there forever. He was a good soldier and he just conducted the affairs of the USIA in a way that didn't interfere with the Ambassador's directive.

G: I see. When did you learn that you were leaving Saigon?

N: While I was shaving. I heard it on the BBC.

G: Oh, my.

N: I heard that General [Maxwell] Taylor was being assigned as ambassador and that Ambassador [U. Alexis] Johnson, who was the top career ambassador in the Foreign Service at that time, was being assigned to replace me as deputy. I think my wife and I were given a week to get out.

G: Would you like to talk about why the rather strange circumstance under which you left? That doesn't seem like the usual way State Department does business.

N: Look, nothing that involved Vietnam at that time was usual. My assignment was unusual, as was that of my successor and predecessors, and I think the departure of all of them was unusual from Foreign Service traditions. I think that certain quarters in Washington had been unhappy with my views as long ago as April. Ambassador Lodge had been unhappy with my attempts to bring some sort of order into the administration of the mission through the pacification committee, which we saw as a device of really running a country team without calling it the country team. General Westmoreland and I cooked this up between us, and it worked very well until Ambassador Lodge caught on that in effect we were running a country team without him.

G: Now you must forgive me for interrupting, but if he was not running things, as seems to have been the case, what objections did he have to somebody else running it?

N: I think it was sort of a dog in the manger type of attitude, you know. I would have thought that he would have been delighted to have the day-to-day coordination of the various parts of the mission taken out

of his hands so that he could concentrate on dealing with the Vietnamese, on dealing with Washington, on dealing with the White House. I'd have thought he would have been delighted, but he wasn't, and he resented it very strenuously. What's in the file, I don't know, but I imagine there are things in the file on that.

G: Did he discuss this matter with you?

N: Yes, he did. Yes, he did. He didn't make any bones of the fact that he didn't want this pacification committee meeting to proceed in the way that it had, and it just really sort of fell apart at that point.

G: Well, what did that leave you to do?

N: Very little. Very little. I was still doing the political reporting, a lot of it, and visiting the provinces and so forth, but certainly not performing the usual DCM job, as I have in other missions.

G: I see. At whose instance did you leave Vietnam? Was it Ambassador Lodge or the State Department?

N: I don't know. I think it was a happy combination of them both. I think also that General Taylor obviously when he went out there wanted his own deputy. He didn't want to continue with me. And I think that in line with the feeling in the White House that the more rank you put out there the more Viet Cong you handle, that he wanted as his deputy the top career officer in the service. I was out-trumped by a number of ranks. I think three things together: I think that Lodge was displeased with my attempt to, in effect, carry out the orders I went out there with. I think that certain elements in Washington were displeased with my what seemed to be pessimistic outlook. And I think

General Taylor wanted to choose his own deputy. I think all these three things coalesced together.

G: Were you glad to leave?

N: Yes, I was. Very, very.

G: Some people in the State Department had said at the time that Vietnam was poison.

N: It was. It was.

G: Did it poison your career?

N: It didn't because--I was very lucky really. In the first place, I was long overdue for home leave, so as soon as I got back I took off for New England for two months. At the end of that time, the department found various things for me to do, to look into the counterinsurgency school, I served on the promotion boards and so forth. Because to assign a class-one officer just like that is very difficult. It takes a long time. You just can't find a position of his rank and his background and capabilities like that. So it took almost a year until they could find Cairo as a post. In the meantime I was offered several ambassadorships in very unlikely places, which I thought would be dull as dishwater and I held out for a stimulating post, which it certainly turned out to be.

G: Well, that's not a minor post either. It's a critical post.

N: Yes.

G: Concerning Senator Fulbright, what was your relationship with him when you came back?

N: Golf. I played a lot of golf with him at the Chevy Chase Club.

G: Is he a good golfer?

N: He was a very good golfer in those days.

He, of course, was very interested in my views on Vietnam, as a result of which he asked me to do a little informal paper for him, which I did, a copy of which is among those that I gave you.

G: Could that conceivably have gotten you in hot water?

N: I think it was too late by then. I think people were thinking about other people and other things than Vietnam. That was in December. I had gone and had home leave. I don't think so.

G: I thought in light of the record that Senator Fulbright later made, that anybody who was supplying him with papers might have found themselves in the bad graces of the administration.

N: It was true on the Middle East, too, you know. I don't know what your view of Senator Fulbright is, but he was a very well-educated, intelligent and charming gentleman. He was a lot of fun to be with and a lot of fun to play golf with. I think he was quite accurate in his overall views of Vietnam, his pessimism as to the thing. You can consider that he was wrong and part of the element in here that undermined our effort, but to have succeeded in Vietnam we would have had to have had public support for the occupation of the North and I doubt if that could have been cranked up at the time.

G: What should we have done in Vietnam that we didn't do?

N: It's so easy in looking back on things. I don't think we demonstrated the sort of imagination and political risk in this country that was necessary to grapple with the situation. Let's just think for a

moment whether we might have begun our opening to China at that time if the China lobby had not been so strong here, that we could have proceeded along the lines that the Nixon Administration eventually proceeded, talked to the Chinese about Vietnam. After all, they'd been in a state of confrontation with Vietnam for a thousand years, and as demonstrated more recently, they've invaded Vietnam. Whether we couldn't have neutralized Chinese support for the North, and having done so and given them adequate assurances that we had no intention of approaching another Yalu, whether we could have gone in and occupied the North and finished the thing off once and for all.

Now, that is looking at it in hindsight. I think any idea of talking to the Chinese at that time in the political atmosphere that existed was absolutely anathema. I think anyone would have been considered out of their mind. As you know, we were tentatively talking to Hanoi through the Canadians at that time, but in a very desultory way, and I don't think we ever offered the Ho Chi Minh regime anything that was sufficiently attractive for them to forebear for a while this--

G: Mr. [Belford L.] Seabrook I think was carrying that message.

N: Yes, that's right. But basically as I think is shown in the papers I gave you, I didn't believe that counterinsurgency would succeed and so I felt that we really had two alternatives. We could begin trying to negotiate our way out, as we eventually did, or we could try to clean the thing up with an occupation of the North, such as we did in Korea and Germany and Japan.

G: But the escalation as it did take place, not involving an occupation of the North, what did you think of that? Of course, I realize you were not there.

N: I was out. I was preoccupied with the Middle East. Really, there's no use going back and trying to visualize what I thought, because I frankly don't remember. All I do remember is that in talking later with General Westmoreland--and I don't know whether he'd admit to this now--he told me, "Well, we could have occupied the North and cleaned this thing up with far fewer forces and far fewer casualties than we eventually suffered through feeding things in step by step by step." Whether this was true or not, I don't know. But I imagine we could have. I mean, a half a million men over there, God, we could have certainly occupied North Vietnam with that.

G: William Colby has said that if they had just left the CIA alone, they could have handled the situation.

N: (Laughter) I doubt that. I like Bill Colby, but I don't think they could have. I don't think they could.

G: Well, sir, is there anything that we need to talk about? Any point that you would like to get on this record? We've covered the questions.

N: I don't think so. No, I think we've covered it all.

G: All right, sir.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of David G. Nes

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, David G.Nes of Owings Mills, Maryland do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on November 10, 1982 and March 25, 1983 at Owings Mills, Maryland and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

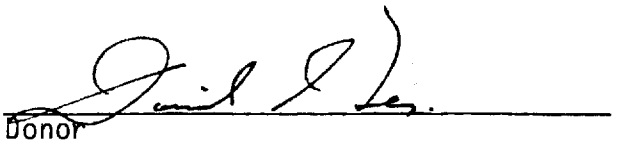
(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the tape.

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

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

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



Donor

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Date

Archivist of the United States

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