INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: BRUCE PALMER

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

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Tape 1 of 2

G: General Palmer, can you give us a little insight into General [Earle] Wheeler's visit to Vietnam in February of 1968? Did he consult with you during that visit?

P: No. I knew he was there, and I talked to General [William] Westmoreland later about his visit and got it second-hand, but I did not see him directly. As I recall, he wasn't there very long, either.

G: A few days, I think. What was the purpose of his visit, according to General Westmoreland?

P: To see first-hand the impact of Tet, the enemy Tet offensive; to see what might be done in terms of exploiting the situation, that is, perhaps finally get a recognition of the magnitude of the job to be done over there and the fact that if the enemy was defeated, as we maintained, we should be exploiting that, following it up.

It was regrettable in a sense because the two men, I think, got sucked into the idea that, well, we'll take advantage of this to get more forces over here, and unfortunately it gave the impression that it was an emergency situation, that we were going to be defeated if we didn't get more forces. And nothing could [be] further from the truth.

G: That created a great deal of controversy.

P: And I learned later that General Wheeler himself, who was probably tired from the trip--and the poor man was overworked--that when he came back he gave the impression of how terrible things were over there, and what a close call this had been, and it was nip and tuck.

And so people seized upon that, that here our government and our commander over there hadn't been leveling with us, that here we thought we were winning and now all of a sudden, we're losing. That was the unfortunate part of it; in fact it was a terrible untruth, but that's the way it came out. So I think General Westmoreland and General Wheeler didn't think through what that impact would be in the United States. And that's what set the President to really re-examine the whole thing.

G: Let me ask: how did General Westmoreland, in his own mind, as far as you know, reconcile a request for 200,000 troops with his view that Tet was a great disaster for the enemy? It seems to me that there's a basic contradiction involved there.

P: That's exactly what I mean. I hate to criticize the two men, but the smart thing would have been to say, "We don't need any more troops over here. We've got them on the run." But no. But on the other hand, it was true that particularly the army and the marines had committed just about everything they had in Vietnam and that we were off balance, when you look at the whole world, strategically way off balance, and with the failure to mobilize, it's very true that the Joint Chiefs in the United States did not have any strategic reserve at home for contingencies elsewhere. And if the Soviets had wanted to heat things up in Europe, for example, or Berlin or something, we'd have been sort of hurting.

And so, on that ground, they were very sound, but the timing was godawful. That's what they thought they were going to do, you see, they thought, "We'll kill two birds with one stone. We'll re-establish the strategic reserve, not just for Vietnam but for the whole world, and for more important areas than Vietnam. We'll reconstitute that, and we'll also be able to give Westmoreland more forces if he wants them, if he wants to shorten the war." You must recall that before that, General Westmoreland had presented his optimum force and the minimum force, and he directly related the size of those forces to the time it would take to do the job. In other words, his theory was the more forces, the quicker we can--the only trouble with that is that's still dependent on this idea that you could defeat them with a war of attrition, and I think it's [been] pretty well demonstrated that manpower was never a great problem for them. And as far as attriting his will, it was our will that was attrited, not his. It was just a terrible strategy to start with; that's one of my basic pet peeves about the whole thing.

"No-win" is a bad expression. There wasn't even a strategy that would give you a draw. It was a losing situation, and we not only did it to ourselves, we left it to the Vietnamese when we pulled out. The South Vietnamese were up against a losing strategy; they hadn't figured out a way to win that war.

G: At least one analyst has said that a strategy of attrition is a last resort; it's no strategy at all.

P: Well, yes. The American Army, though--I guess we got on that kick in the Civil War; it worked. But the North was greatly superior to the South in numbers and industrial capacity, and you could wear them down.

G: How much of this was plain at the time? Did General Westmoreland discuss the motives for asking for troops with you, or--?

P: Yes. He realized later that it was a terrible blunder, just what I've said. So he's been trying to justify it ever since and, at least in his own mind, rationalize why he and Wheeler did it. I blame Wheeler more than I do Westmoreland, because in a sense I think Wheeler was the one who went back and gave this false impression of how terrible things were, and also, the chiefs were asking Westmoreland to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. Damn it, if we needed strategic reserves for the United States, it wasn't Westmoreland who should have been telling them. It should have been General Wheeler and the Joint Chiefs. But the chiefs had struck out repeatedly in terms of mobilization, so they figured, "Well, we might"--I say "they;" I'm not sure whether the other chiefs supported that or not, but Wheeler claimed they did. Of course, as chairman, that was his prerogative. He could say, "I'm the chairman." And the chiefs had discussed it many, many times, so he was on solid ground to say they supported it, the fact that we needed a strategic reserve. But Westmoreland felt very badly about it, because he felt that he had been blamed for this aborted request, when in fact it wasn't entirely his fault.

G: Did he ever express any pique about being used?

P: Yes.

G: What did he say, can you remember?

P: Well, he rarely expressed pique, but on this occasion he just felt that he had been used. He never uses very strong language; he just felt that "Bus just misled me on this one."

G: They met in the Philippines at one point soon after this, didn't they?

P: I don't know. Does Westy cover that in his book?

G: I believe he mentions that he went out to the Philippines, and that's when he got the news from General Wheeler--

P: That he was going to be the--

G: --that there wasn't going to be 200,000, there wasn't going to be much of anything, and the job would have to be done with what was on hand. I think they did ship, what, ten thousand or twelve thousand on an emergency basis, but that was it.

P: And frankly, with that kind of a mission, or poor strategy, there wasn't any point in putting more forces over there.

G: Why did it take us so long to get back into the countryside after Tet? The word was that the enemy had not, in fact, taken over the countryside, that there was a vacuum in the countryside. Why did it take us so long, apparently, to realize this and take advantage of it?

P: There was a paralysis, I think, for a while there in the South Vietnamese government. They were really frightened by the closeness of the situation as far as they were concerned, because they were really totally dependent on the United States. City after city there in the Delta, for example, in the upper Delta, My Tho, Ben Tre, Vinh Long, places like that, would have been captured at the great embarrassment if it hadn't been for the Ninth Division, U.S.

Even though the South Vietnamese government had gotten twenty-four hours warning, when they hit prematurely near Da Nang and in several places in II Corps, all the way from Nha Trang on the coast, and Qui Nhon to the Highlands--they had twenty-four hours warning things were

coming, and the President immediately canceled the cease-fire and canceled the Tet holidays, told everybody to get back to work. But you can't do it in twenty-four hours. They were scattered, and at Tet they'll often go long distances to visit their relatives. So the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] simply wasn't ready, and when Tet hit, and I guess it took a while to sink in that they had survived; it took a while to sink in that the Viet Cong in particular had hurt themselves, because they had come out of the woodwork, all the way from the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] to the Delta, and many people think that really set them back and led the way, which was probably Hanoi's plan from the beginning, for the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] and the North, really, to take over the war. In sort of the way that we had taken over the war in the South, the North took over the war from the South.

The mission--Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker and [Sam] Berger and Westmoreland and [Creighton] Abrams and so on there got together and pressed [Nguyen Van] Thieu to get going now; here you've got an emergency situation, because you've got a lot more refugees in all these urban areas; people, frightened, ran into the cities for protection, we've got to reverse that now and get them back. That takes a while, but I must say that once they got going I thought the South Vietnamese government did pretty well. But remember, it was short-lived in most of the country, but in places like Hué, that fight went on for weeks, and it was a very long fight. And remember too, there were sort of mini-offensives that occurred in March and April, not long after Tet. I remember the battle of the Y Bridge there, south of Saigon, where again a brigade of the Ninth Division saved Saigon from some more embarrassment, because the ARVN wasn't quite recovered and ready to do their job.

But you recall that President Thieu, though, had enough confidence in the results of this thing, the psychological results, that he did a couple of things. He mobilized, and the people responded, and he created this Self-Defense Force, where he was willing to give arms to anybody who was willing to say they were loyal. And both of those were rather risky decisions, but they apparently paid off. In terms of finding people for their armed forces, they didn't have much trouble after Tet. The people were really genuinely sore about it, that it was just not cricket, what the enemy had done.

And we noticed it in USARV, where I was--U.S. Army, Vietnam--because we were very close to all the administrative side, the logistic side, and the contractor side all up and down the countryside, and we saw what happened: that in the beginning when Tet first hit, our civilian work force disappeared. And we said, "Uh-oh." And the crepe hangers said, "Uh-oh. They were all VC [Viet Cong] anyway." (Laughter) "They were working for the enemy; we'll never see them again." They were wrong. In about three or four days they were all back to pre-Tet levels, and they all said the same story: "We're pretty sore about this, and we're prepared to do our job and support what our government and what you, the United States, are trying to do." And [they] came back to work.

G: You had to support the effort to arm the Self-Defense Force, is that right? Was that run out of your shop?

P: I don't recall. No, I imagine we probably supported it logistically, but MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] really handled all the advisory end of it.

G: Did they call on you for weapons, for example?

P: Yes, and we were able to scarf up some obsolete older weapons that were in stock back home, and things like that.

G: Do you remember the scale of that at all?

P: No. You mean our support?

G: Yes.

P: It was rather--I would think it was rather small.

G: I've seen several figures for how many weapons were actually issued.

P: It was quite an ambitious thing. They were talking about several million people, but I don't think the arms ever got up anywhere near that. But, of course, they were very busily upgrading the Popular and Regional Forces, as well as the ARVN, and we were instrumental in helping them do that. And rather than wait for the long process of the MAP program, we just scarfed up excess stuff that we had found from our own units and directly issued it to the Vietnamese.

G: That story continues a little, I think, when the Vietnamization program begins, doesn't it, trying to find M-16s for the South Vietnamese divisions? How serious a problem was that?

P: There was a shortage there for a while, but as forces started to go home, we were able to get more weapons from them and sent them home without their weapons; things like that.

G: How important was it to arm the South Vietnamese with M-16s? It assumed a problem of great stature back here. Was it that important?

P: I don't know. It was probably overblown. But I suppose they felt pretty well out-gunned on an individual basis when the great bulk of the enemy forces had fairly modern automatic rifles, like the AK-47, and

they were armed with pretty obsolete stuff, or with something like an M-14 (Laughter) or an M-1 or some great big heavy rifle. Sort of ironic; they should have been carrying the little M-16; we should have carrying the bigger rifle.

G: Yes, it was amusing to see the Ruff-Puffs [Regional Forces-Popular Forces] with M-1s and BARs [Browning Automatic Rifles]--
(Laughter)
Do you remember what you were doing on March 31 when President Johnson made his famous speech announcing the cessation of the bombing and his decision not to run?

P: I don't recall exactly what I was doing. I'm sure I must have been at Long Binh, where my headquarters at USARV was. We were all surprised and disappointed, kind of hurt that the President would quit like that. And later, of course, we learned from General Westmoreland--he confided that he'd known about the President's at least thinking that way as early as November the previous year, and even later I learned from people like Ambassador Bunker that the President had begun to lose his confidence in the war even before November; even before--remember McNamara, that's when he sounded off and the President decided to replace him as secretary of defense.

G: I hadn't heard that story. Do you remember the details of what Bunker told you?

P: He had told me that as early as March 1967 at the Guam conference, when our President met with President Thieu and [Nguyen Cao] Ky, and introduced his new team--it was going to be Bunker, Westmoreland and Abrams and [Robert] Komer and [Eugene] Gene Locke--and according to Bunker,

he--oh, I'm sorry, it was somewhat before that, before the Guam conference, when the President asked Bunker to go over there. It must have been a week or so before the conference, and just the two of them were alone, and the President told him, "Your mission is going to be to get the U.S. troops out of there as soon as possible."

G: That's interesting.

P: "Turn the war over to them." And I asked Mr. Bunker, "That doesn't seem to ring true with the--" he said, "Well, that's what he told me. We were the only ones present." But then when I read Westy's account and other accounts of that March 1967 Guam conference, it makes some sense, because Westmoreland told him, "Unless these people quit or we can stop this infiltration, this war can go on indefinitely." It was a very grim assessment. In other words, he was telling him that the strategy was no damn good. But the President made it very clear that he was not going to give him any more troops, any more forces. He made it very clear that he wanted the South Vietnamese to take over a heavier responsibility. But I don't think there was any feeling that he had lost his stomach for the thing and was going to pull the United States out of there. Also he knew that the President was under great pressure at home; he knew that.

G: When did General Abrams become responsible for what later became known as Vietnamization? Wasn't that his initial assignment?

P: Yes. When Westy made him his deputy--and the President wanted this and this fits right into what he had told Bunker--Abe's first job was to build up the armed forces of the Vietnamese. He was sort of the MAAG [U.S. Military Advisory Assistance Group] chief. That was the main,

principal job that Westy gave him, and that's another name for Vietnamization.

Of course, that should have been our primary mission from the beginning. One of the basic errors we did, of course, was to go in there and Americanize the war. I agree that we had to do it to stabilize the situation, get American troops in there, but then instead of giving up on the Vietnamese and saying we're going to do it ourselves, and that seems to be in effect what we were saying, we should have kept the--I'm getting into my alternate strategy.

(Laughter)

G: Go ahead.

P: My alternate strategy was that we should have held the U.S. and other foreign forces basically up north. We could have stopped the infiltration across the DMZ cold. And we would have stopped that business of--that was one of the major pressure points, you recall, and they had us on a yo-yo, particularly in the early days. They had the Vietnamese on a yo-yo; they'd hit up north, and the Vietnamese would send what little strategic reserve they had up there, and then they'd hit in the Highlands or hit near Saigon, and they'd have to bring them back again. What we could have done, at least, [was] taken that pressure point away from the North Vietnamese by stopping them cold on the DMZ. Then if we could have extended that into Laos, and that might have been possible--Bunker, you know, from the beginning, and Lodge--I don't think we've had an ambassador that didn't strongly recommend that. And the ambassadors all agreed that the fiction of the Laos Accords was just a fiction. The North Vietnamese had fractured it totally.

You mentioned Averell Harriman. Later, he's the guy that engineered that whole thing, and he was basically the guy that would block us. He just had too much clout. That's my understanding of it. But even if we could have, if we'd put the bulk of our force up there, and I'm sure we could have gotten permission at least to make periodically strong raids into Laos, and at the same time we kept a major amphibious threat against North Vietnam, and practiced it, again, made some raids that would have scared the hell out of them, I just don't think they would have ever dared send the bulk of their forces south. And I think it would have been an entirely different ball game.

In the meantime, it would have restricted the war to a lower level of war, the whole idea being to restrict the war between what Hanoi could do in terms of truly guerrillas recruited in the South, with a few infiltrations, maybe, but not a hell of a lot--restricted the war between the Viet Cong, let's say, and the South Vietnamese. In the meanwhile, our major effort was to turn ARVN into a force that could handle it.

Now, that might have broken down later. Assuming that that succeeded, it might have broken down later in the sense that North Vietnam would never have quit; they would have--just like North Korea has never quit--but the beauty of having that force up on the DMZ--and this is not a new idea, incidentally. Westy liked it; Cao Van Vien liked it; H. K. Johnson pushed it, but the beauty of it was, it would have been more than a U.S. force, it would have been an international force, á la the UN force on the DMZ in Korea. And then later if we [could have] ever negotiated any kind of agreement with them, perhaps we might have been able to keep some kind of international force there to keep that peace.

I'm off the track there. Later, people associated Abe's job with pacification. You could argue that pacification also was Vietnamization, because again, pacification was a job for the South Vietnamese, not the U.S.

G: Right. Were you aware that there was some speculation that you were going to succeed instead of General Abrams?

P: Yes. I don't know what was going on there, to be very frank. There were all kinds of rumors, and I was kept in the dark. I was at Fort Bragg at the time and commanding the XVIII Airborne Corps in that post, but I was alerted something like six or seven times to go to Vietnam. I say alerted; I was warned. I'd hear I was about to go to Vietnam, but they never did tell me what my job was. I found out later there was quite a struggle going on. Apparently what Johnny Johnson, H. K. Johnson wanted to do, he wanted to establish a field army, an American field army, separate from MACV and USARV, and make that a four-star job, a guy in the field who would run that job, and Westy would be the theater commander. God knows he had enough to do.

General Westmoreland would never buy it; he wanted to be everything and that was one of my major criticisms of the organization. He was everything. He commanded the war; he was the MAAG commander; he was the allied commander; he was the link with the ambassador, the link with the Vietnamese government, with everything. (Laughter) And it was too much for one man and one headquarters. I devote much of this in this book I have written.

I tried to enlist Abe, General Abrams, when he was vice chief, into thinking that way when he visited over there. This was before he

took over, and before we were really quite sure he was going to take over as deputy. And Abe was noncommittal; he wouldn't say much about it. He would admit that he didn't think much of the organization, but that's about all. And of course later it dawned on me one reason he was noncommittal, he wasn't going to have to come over and make it work (Laughter), and he was the kind of a guy--he wasn't going to rock the boat and tell the commander how to run this war. He was going to be the faithful, loyal deputy, as he had been with H. K. Johnson. And besides, I think he felt that it had gone too far; it was in concrete. He finally admitted to me once, after he was over there, "I couldn't change this if I wanted to. It's just gone too far."

And I think by that time, too, he began to realize what President Johnson wanted to do, really, was to get out of there.

G: Why reorganize when you're getting ready to stand down? Now, you stayed in Vietnam until when?

P: June 1968.

G: June 1968. So you didn't serve under General Abrams?

P: No. No, Westmoreland and Johnson and Abe, they had a meeting there in Tan Son Nhut, where they agreed that I would be the vice chief of staff. I wasn't aware of this.

P: This was Harold Johnson?

P: Yes. This was a meeting in April. It must have been April, May of 1968. They told me about it once they had decided. So I went back not long after General Westmoreland did. I guess we must have gone back about the same time; I'm trying to remember. I remember he came to USARV to say goodbye to the headquarters people there. I think we must

have left almost at the same time, and I'm trying to think who took over from General Abrams.

G: Was it General [Frederick] Weyand?

P: No, Weyand didn't come until later. Weyand was in Paris, I think.

G: General Weyand had been commanding in III Corps.

P: Yes, but from there he went back and was ACS [Assistant Chief of Staff] Four of the army for a while, and then he got the job of working with Cy [Cyrus] Vance and the people in Paris on negotiations. So I guess it was Bill [William] Rosson; General Rosson must have been the first deputy under Abe.

G: We can check it.

P: And then Weyand came in later.

G: Let me ask you to talk about the media a little bit. Did you have direct dealings with media people in Vietnam, newsmen and so forth?

P: I had some in II Field Force, but I was only there for about three months, and some in USARV, but nothing like the MACV people. They really weren't too interested in USARV. But I can recall some of the people that came over there. I think I made some notes on that in anticipation of your question.

G: I think it's on the third page of the questionnaire.

P: I remember Slam [S. L. A.] Marshall, and Beaver Thompson [?], Orr Kelley [?], Joe Alsop. I didn't like Joe Alsop; he was just too darned optimistic. He was always--I said, "Joe, I'm trying to tell you--" He came into II Field Force, and he started lecturing me, and I said, "Joe, I know you've been covering this war a long, long time and I'm just a newcomer over here, but I really don't agree with what you're saying."

(Laughter) "This is a lot tougher situation than you realize, and it's going to last a hell of a lot longer." He got mad as hell, and he said, "Well, if you're not going to listen to me, I guess I'll go somewhere else." I said, "Okay with me." He calmed down. We both calmed down. But he just made me sore. After I became vice chief of staff back here, he asked to see me a couple of times. I'd go over and talk to him; he was just wanting to pump me about the army and so on. But I never liked his sort of Pollyannish--every time something would happen, he would put in his column, he would interpret to me that everything was going just great. And for that reason I thought he was very sort of unsound, sort of a sloppy kind of a writer.

G: Did he get special treatment in Vietnam?

P: Oh, yes. He got special treatment all the time.

G: Why was that? Whose policy was that, do you think?

P: I don't know. I thought the London ***Economist***--and even today, that British magazine was always about as objective as you could find. I didn't have the problems that General Westmoreland faced, or Abe.

But I do recall when I was in II Field Force, we did have a real bad incident with CBS. This was a war crime. I've forgotten the names of these people, but the CBS camera crew visited the First Division right after a big battle, and there were a lot of dead enemy soldiers lying around. The troops were policing up the place and starting to bury these people. The Big Red One chaplain was there, giving the last rites and so on, and the First Division had a sergeant there from their information office. The sergeant should have known better. Well, the crew got hold of a young soldier who was on this grave-digging detail,

and the guy said, "I'll bet you don't have the guts to cut off the ear of one of those dead bodies." And this kid looked at him and said, "Why would I want to do that? I don't want to cut his ear off." And the cameraman said, "I don't think you've got the guts to do it." Then another cameraman took out of his pocket a big pocketknife and handed it to him. "Here. I'll bet you just don't have the guts." So this crazy kid, with the sergeant from the information office looking on, he starts to saw on the ear of this corpse, the TV camera taking it all in. He wasn't very successful and he finally gave up and said, "I can't get the damn ear off," and handed him back the knife. That was all over the U.S.

G: How did you learn about this incident?

P: What happened, of course, [was] it came back to us immediately and we investigated it, and the investigation turned out to be that way, and Westmoreland was incensed. He banned this camera crew, threw them out of Vietnam, but about three months later they were right back again. But I thought that was one of the worst incidents that I know of, where the crew deliberately not only--they knew what they were doing. That was pretty bad.

Then, of course, in II Field Force and later in USARV, we had the unpleasant job of investigating all the alleged war crimes, and my recollection in USARV [was] we'd have about two or three hundred in a year, allegations. And my recollection is that about half of them would turn out to be just poppycock, not even good rumors, and the other half would have some substantiation and some foundation in fact. And where we could substantiate it, why, we would take action against the

individuals. But they were always, without exception, individuals. The most that were ever involved would be two or possibly three guys together. And there were violations of the Geneva Convention and that sort of thing.

G: Can you give us some examples of any that remain in your memory?

P: I said war crimes; it was broader than that. It was also allegations of indiscriminate fire, artillery killing civilians, that sort of thing. And we had the artillery; we had a separate setup there. The artillery had to investigate every alleged incident where civilians were killed by artillery fire. And USARV kept track of those. That was separate from the more specific war crimes. Abusing a prisoner, that sort of thing, mutilating a corpse. And there were some. There always are in every war. The CBS one is the only one I know that was deliberately incited by a press person, but it was typical CBS, I might add.

G: Why do you say that?

P: I had problems with them in the Dominican Republic, where they deliberately spliced tapes together from different points in time and then ran them back home as though they had occurred at the same time. We caught them on that one.

G: Who was responsible for that, do you know?

P: After our investigation, we decided that it was in the New York editor's office. The people in the field didn't do it. Eric Sevareid came to Santo Domingo and personally apologized to me about the incident, and I said, "Why don't you publish your apology?" "Well," he said, "we can't do that." He admitted to me that it was the New York office that did it.

G: CBS seems to have something of a track record--

P: Very bad news. I think they do. I don't think that their standards are as high as the others. I think this so-called documentary, that hatchet job they did on Westmoreland, the ***TV Guide*** people investigated and said CBS violated their own ground rules.

G: Do you have any insight into that incident, the numbers game controversy? Did you--?

P: I knew that there was a disagreement within the intelligence community. There often is, particularly on overall enemy strength figures, the order of battle. You had DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] and CIA back here on the one hand, and you had CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief, Pacific] and MACV. Generally, CINCPAC would support MACV, and DIA would support the--in other words, they would support the people in the field. So really, you got down to--the difference was between MACV and CIA.

At that time, CIA didn't have any order of battle analysts of their own. But later, as a result of this controversy, they did, and they got into it in a big way. I think it was a good thing because they could keep the military guys honest. From what I know about it, I don't think there is ever any deliberate cooking of the figures and so on as has been alleged on that film. I think we all realized that it was a political question, because this was in the fall of 1967, and we knew the war had become a very political thing and it would be a big issue in the next election, and so on. No question about that, but to say that we deliberately distorted the figures in order to make it look good and also to deceive the President, that was the biggest canard of all, because people like Walt Rostow and Ambassador Bill [William] Leonhart

that were right there in the White House said that the President probably knew more about the disagreements on that than anybody. Because that was the kind of thing he ate up, and in fact he told George Carver of the CIA people to get with the problem and make them come to some agreement. That's why they had that meeting out in--I think it was Honolulu in that fall, 1967, and came to some agreement.

G: They came to Saigon, too, I think, didn't they, in September?

P: Yes, came to Saigon, and then Honolulu, and they also put out a Special National Estimate back here as a result. And that Special Estimate had sort of a compromise figure that they would agree on. But later, a couple of years later in the invasion of Cambodia, we captured all these documents. We got a lot of stuff there that confirmed the higher figure the CIA had, that MACV was too low, and that CIA was--

G: Were you privy to this at the time, the new information that you say we got in Cambodia, or have you learned of it since then?

P: I learned of that since, because one of the things I did at CIA was I looked at about 250 national intelligence documents that were produced in that period of about ten years, 1965 to 1975, because I wanted to see how well the intelligence community, but particularly CIA, had done. And I thought they did pretty damned well. The trouble was nobody was listening, I guess.

G: Let me make sure I read you right. You are saying that the intelligence we've gained since that time tends to confirm Sam Adams and the CIA more than MACV on order of battle.

P: In terms of the higher strength, that's right. I'd hesitate to say it confirms Sam Adams, because I don't think Sam is a very objective per-

son, and he's a very controversial guy. The CIA people didn't think much of him, basically. They told me that he never did accomplish anything he set out to do, but he loved controversy, and he insisted on this idea that somebody was cooking the figures for a long time. He's been on that kick for ten years, I guess. But I don't think he can really prove it. Unfortunately, the CBS people jumped to some conclusions there and then tried to prove it, and they did it the wrong way.

G: Do you recall the National Intelligence Estimate that came out in November of 1967? [It] had a big order of battle discussion in it, as I remember. The people that I know that have read it seem to think it summarizes the dispute pretty well, and that it's a pretty fair summary of it. Do you have any feel for that at all?

P: No, because I haven't looked at it since this--because I did this work, looking at them, in 1979, and then this CBS thing came out in 1982. So I didn't go back and look at it from that point of view. But at that time, though, in 1979 I did compare the figures that MACV was holding with CIA, and I could see the differences all right, and the biggest difference was in the ones that were the most difficult to estimate, namely the guerrillas and political cadre and that sort of thing. The order of battle of your main force units, for example, they were a lot closer. Although again, I think MACV had stricter order of battle rules than CIA at that time. Namely, MACV wouldn't pick up a unit that had been identified by, say, electronic means; they wouldn't pick that up on the order of battle until it had been confirmed by a prisoner, or a document, or something on the ground, that they actually arrived in South Vietnam.

Incidentally, that's one thing that CIA has asked me to do, and I hope to do it for them, is to spend about a year with them, digging into this very question, and I'll know a heck of a lot more about it by the time I do that. That will have to be on a classified basis, though.

G: I was going to ask--that was my next question. We may get to see it when the automatic downgrading process--what is that, twelve years?

P: Yes, I guess so. But in this book I've written, and CIA cleared it, I did mention this controversy, and pointed out the differences and how the CIA began to develop their own analysts as a result of it. Later they were able to get together pretty well, except in this guerrilla area, and I mention the fact that after May of 1970 when they captured those documents, though, that it showed that CIA estimates, the higher estimates, were closer to the truth than [MACV], if you can assume that the documents we captured are true. But they seem to be closer to the truth than MACV.

G: I see. Did you happen to have occasion to look at the differences in the intelligence community over the effectiveness of the bombing as well?

P: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, and there the CIA right from the beginning just said, "It's not doing any good. Look, any damages that they suffer are immediately replaced by either the Soviet Union or China, and they don't even pay for it." It was not damaging their morale and will to fight. They went into the manpower thing; it showed that they had ample to keep fighting. There weren't any strategic targets to really attack in the first place, but that their war effort was not hurt and that they had the capability to continue indefinitely.

G: In August of 1967, as I recall, the chiefs went before the Senate committee and testified very strongly that there were targets remaining to be hit and that they were important targets and that we ought to hit them, and so on.

P: Yes, that's true, but what the chiefs were really griping about was, though, the way we went about it. They were right there; from the beginning the chiefs and the air war wanted to hit them with everything but the kitchen sink, and right away, before they were able to build up their air defenses, and they built up enormous ones, the most formidable ones, apparently, I gather--we haven't had anything like that before. And the price of admission went up for our attacking aircraft. Even with the advent of the "smart bomb," that helped a whole lot, but there just wasn't enough up there to really attack.

G: Let me pose a hypothetical question. If the chiefs' advice had been followed, and we had, instead of a gradual intensification, hit them with everything but the kitchen sink right from the beginning, how critical a difference would that have made in the war, do you think?

P: I don't think it would have cracked Hanoi, the government. They simply would have done like the Chinese did on the Long March: gone up to the hills, if they couldn't live. I shouldn't underestimate the effect of that heavy Linebacker stuff, though, that went on at the end of the war, that is, the end of our participation. Because you recall, to get our POWs [prisoners of war] out, we had that famous Christmas bombing, and that round-the-clock bombing; that really got to them. I would not underestimate that one. And it got our prisoners out of there.

(Interruption)

P: Remember the intelligence, these estimates were based on the way we went about it. I realize your hypothetical question was quite different. I don't think, though, I don't believe that that would have knocked Hanoi out of the war. Unless we actually invaded on the ground.

G: You said something about the Linebacker bombing that intrigues me. What was the evidence that the Linebacker operation was so effective, that that was what made a difference?

P: I guess it was circumstantial. Le Duc Tho and company came round rather quickly after that, and agreed to the January 1973 cease-fire and agreed to turn our POWs loose. What other evidence there is I don't know. [Henry] Kissinger claims this, and he says so in his--both books, I guess, ***The White House Years*** and ***The Years of Upheaval***. And of course the chiefs claim it. And people like Douglas Pike, who knows about as much about Vietnam as anybody that I know of, think that it had a major impact. But whether we could have kept up that kind of a thing indefinitely is something else, too, because we were paying a heavy cost--

G: Yes. I know of at least one observer, I think he was in--

P: --in aircraft shot down and crews killed, and so on.

G: I think this observer [who] was in the British embassy says that the North Vietnamese shot their bolt as far as their antiaircraft capability was concerned, that there were no SAM IIs [surface-to-air missiles] left in country.

P: But again they might have gotten resupplied, too. Of course, those things came awful late in the war, and of course they had a different objective. Their objective then really was to get our POWs out of there and get the hell out, bug out, [which is] what we did.

Like when we mined and closed Haiphong. That was great, but it came too late. Those are the things we should have done years earlier, in hindsight. (Laughter)

G: Should we have used--?

P: But the basic thing wrong with the bombing wasn't so much the effect of the bombing per se; it was the idea that you could punish Hanoi and deter them from their mission in the South by punishing them through air war. I think that's a loser; I don't think you could. They might cease and desist for a while, until you got off their backs. In the meantime they organized this gigantic, successful propaganda campaign against you, so that the whole world thought that here was this big superpower, this big bully, picking on this poor, helpless little country. It boomeranged on us, the air war did. And besides, physically the way we went about it, it didn't do any good anyway.

But you always find disagreements on this; you recall after World War II. You should read [John Kenneth] Galbraith's book, ***A Life in Our Times***, because he was on those bombing surveys. And you talk to Paul Nitze. As I recall, they were--I've forgotten whether they were on both, or one was on Europe and one on the Pacific, but anyhow--and we'd sometimes go back and read those bombing surveys. The air force, or at that time the army air force, tried to block those bombing surveys; they tried to stop them, because they were just absolute heresy. They hadn't won either war.

G: Rostow takes another view, I think, doesn't he?

P: What does Rostow say?

G: Quite the opposite, as I recall.

P: In Germany, the production went up (Laughter) during the height of the bombing. But Galbraith, who is sort of anti-establishment and anti-military and everything else, but Galbraith says in the end what wins these wars is the soldier has got to physically occupy the ground, and this is that bombing--and it must just kill the air force to--

G: Not to mention the fact that it was very expensive for what you get out of it.

P: And that's the other trouble with the air business in Vietnam. It was done in a vacuum, in a strategic vacuum; the only objective was to make them stop. But that's not a very sound objective. It wasn't related to any ground action. If we'd at least threatened them with an invasion and said, "You guys are not only going to cease and desist; if you don't, we're going to come in on the ground," and we had a fleet out there, waiting to invade, they might have talked turkey. But even then, I think it would have been only for--they'd have talked turkey just to get us off their backs, and the minute we pulled our fleet and bombers off their back, they'd be after South Vietnam again.

So it was sort of a waste of time. What we should have been concentrating on was building up South Vietnam and its forces, and not trying to make Vietnam quit; we should have known they'd never quit. They'd out-wait us a hundred years, if necessary. That's what we should have known. We should have sort of ignored them and concentrated on South Vietnam.

G: That's very well put. Let me bring us back to the media for a minute.

P: As it was, as a result of our intervention, we made it a hell of a lot worse for the poor damned South Vietnamese. We compelled the North to

turn their rather primitive army into a very modern army that showed the Chinese how modern they were. (Laughter) I'm not sure who gave who a lesson on that one. They got all this modern equipment, tanks and every damned thing else, and they now have the third largest army in the world.

G: The Prussians of Southeast Asia.

P: And China, they just grind their teeth thinking about it, because here instead of--they wanted a weak country on their flank, a buffer state. Now they've got the third strongest army on their flank, allied with their bitter, mortal enemy, the Soviet Union. And when we left the poor old South Vietnamese, we just handed them one huge problem. We converted it into a big war, and then walked off without giving them the means to fight the big war. They didn't have the air power, the naval power, and without that they just couldn't handle it. They didn't have enough troops in the South; they didn't have the artillery, they didn't have the training, they didn't have the leaders--and walked off with a lousy strategy.

G: And yet we had been saying for fifteen years that we were building the ARVN up; the ARVN was getting better and better, and so on. These were the public accounts of what we were doing and why we were there. Why didn't the ARVN do better when the invasions came in the 1970s?

P: [Gilbert] Warren Nutter--he's dead now--when he visited Saigon in August 1974, he said then, "The morale of this country is gone. They think the United States has deserted them." This was nine months before the collapse. "They think that we've deserted them; that we're not going to help them; that they're not going to have the means, either economic or

military, to survive, and they're very pessimistic. They think Uncle Sam has bugged out."

And the Vietnamese are funny people. They're very loyal to their own family, and Thieu used to warn Bunker about this. He said, "The average Vietnamese soldier is going to think of his family first and his loyalty to the army and the government second." And that's exactly one of the reasons that they did so poorly; once their families got involved in the retreat, it was about all over. They quit; they went with their families. On the other hand, down there in the South where the Eighteenth Division--which used to be one of their weak divisions--fought so well, their families weren't in danger.

But what about our people? How well do we fight if our families are in danger? What happened in the South? You remember during the Civil War, the desertion rate was terribly high in the spring when thousands of the southern soldiers would go home for the spring planting. The southern leaders wisely decided that wasn't desertion; that was temporary leave of absence, because they couldn't stop them. These guys always came back, but they said, "How can I stay here and fight when my family is starving to death?" I often said to myself when I was stationed in Heidelberg, and that non-combatant evacuation order, you remember NEO (non-combatant evacuation order) and all those plans? I used to tell Kay, "You forget those orders. You head for Switzerland." (Laughter) "You haven't got a prayer of making it to the Channel ports, in my opinion." That was private. But a lot of us asked ourselves the question: what would we do if we were suddenly attacked in overwhelming numbers? What would we do? Would we desert our families?

G: There are two schools of thought. One of them is that it makes you fight harder--

P: That's right. I think we would have taken them with us. That's what I would have done. I wouldn't have deserted, but I wouldn't have told them to go back through France, either. (Laughter) In Heidelberg, I could say, "Head for Switzerland," because it wasn't very far away and I figured they could make it.

(Interruption)

G: Sir, do you think we should have had press censorship in Vietnam?

P: With the advent of TV, I suppose it would have been helpful, but I think in a democracy such as ours, I just don't think it's in the cards anymore. Now, the British demonstrated in this recent Falklands thing that they could do it; they got away with it. But I think they got away with it only because it was of a relatively short duration. If that thing had started to turn sour on them, and there were British troops out there dying and freezing or starving and so on in the Falkland Islands, I wonder how long they could have kept that censorship clamped on. Today, with all this instant communications and satellites and TV and so on, I don't think it's feasible anymore. You can try, but I don't know whether it's worthwhile.

G: I think General [Maxwell] Taylor has said in one place that we should have done something different than what we did. I don't know that he uses the word censorship, but--

P: Yes. And the idea of censoring letters and things like that, I just think it wouldn't be worth the effort. Because now you're up against telephones and radios and so many ways to communicate. And perhaps you

shouldn't. I understand the idea of keeping your plans away from the enemy, but if you're trying to hide mistakes, then that's the other side of the coin. So my problem with the press I suppose, though, is that they seem to be people dedicated to making their own country look bad. That's what makes me so unhappy about the press.

G: Who were some of the--you mentioned Mr. Alsop--do you remember any other good-bad reporters who stick in your memory?

P: I didn't mean that Joe was a bad one in the sense that he was against us; he was too much for us. (Laughter) He just wasn't objective.

G: Did you know that President Johnson used to call him General Alsop? Not to his face.

P: Yes, he was the expert on everything. I guess that's what really made him mad when I said, "Well, you seem to be the military expert around here. Go ahead and talk." He'd get mad.

G: Were there any bad ones that stick in your mind?

P: From Vietnam?

G: Yes.

P: I don't recall their names.

G: What about the Dominican Republic?

P: Tad Szulc was a baddie. (Laughter)

G: He was?

P: I thought he was.

G: What was the book, ***Dominican [Diary]***?

P: He won a Pulitzer Prize for a thing that was just atrocious.

G: The book?

P: It was garbage.

G: How would you grade it, on a scale from "A" to "F?"

P: "F." (Laughter) It was inaccurate, misleading, false, subjective. As somebody said, "You don't win Pulitzer Prizes for telling the truth."

G: That's a very serious allegation.

P: (Laughter)

G: Did David Halberstam have a lingering reputation in Vietnam when you arrived? He wasn't there, I know, he had been there in the early years.

P: I think he's turned out to be one of the better ones; he has a conscience, very much a conscience. Did you read that piece he did in ***Parade*** not long ago called "A Letter to My Daughter?"

G: Yes.

P: He's had some second thoughts.

G: Did you know Don Oberdorfer?

P: I just met him. That book, ***Tet!***, seems to have been a pretty good book. He seems to have been one of the more objective ones. I guess it was difficult for them, though, to avoid making their own judgments and conclusions. But it seems to me, though, with what's happened, and you see it daily on the TV, that it's no longer news; it's entertainment. They're putting on a show and they're not objective in any way, shape, or form. They decided beforehand whose side they're on, and then they pick and choose what they want to put on the tube or in the newspaper that supports their thesis.

G: Did you talk to Walter Cronkite when he came out after Tet?

P: No.

G: Was the war lost in the columns of the ***New York Times***?

P: Oh, I don't think so, no. It was a lot deeper than that. It was lost at the strategic and political level, is where it was lost. We did it to ourselves.

G: When you came back from Vietnam and became deputy chief of staff--is that right?--to what extent was Vietnam included in your duties?

P: I was the chief of staff's alter ego, and that meant that if he were away on a trip or something, I represented him at a JCS meeting. And of course the chiefs were seized with Vietnam for the entire war. And then theoretically the vice job was invented to allow the chief to devote his--according to the law, he's supposed to devote his primary attention to JCS affairs, and they gave him a four-star vice who's supposed to look inward and devote his attention to the internal affairs of that service. I say that's theoretical because no chief can do that; he's got to still be chief of his own service, as well as a member of the Joint Chiefs.

At any rate, my principal problem, though, was internal, and of course the army was still engaged in supporting Vietnam. That preoccupied much of our time and attention. We had the manpower problem; getting quality advisers over there, and so on, and the morale and discipline problems that--

G: How serious a problem was morale after Tet?

P: It didn't dawn on us at first what was happening. There's always a time lag, I think, between the forces overseas, a theater, and Washington, and that time lag may be anywhere from six months to a year or even longer. For example, it didn't dawn on us what was happening to Seventh Army in Europe for a while, and General [James] Polk kept trying to tell

us that this army doesn't exist anymore; it's disintegrating. Because of this basic decision for the one-year tour in Vietnam and the fact that the army wasn't large enough, didn't have enough people, to support the one-year tour in Vietnam and the one-year tour in Korea and maintain a large force in Europe for three years; there weren't enough people there.

So the so-called sustaining rotation base, instead of being the forces in the United States--we had to enlarge it; we had to use everybody except those in Vietnam and Korea to support Vietnam. And so the forces in Europe became part of that sustaining base. And instead of three years' tour in Europe for key people, it was more often six months. And when your sergeants and company commanders and battalion commanders and so on were only there for a few months, a few weeks, even--at the same time, the drug problem suddenly appeared in the army.

G: Was that sudden?

P: Very sudden.

G: What do you attribute--?

P: It first appeared in Vietnam. It appeared right after the Cambodian invasion. That was May of 1970, and in about six weeks we had drug problems all the way from the DMZ to the Delta, just like wildfire. And a few months later it hit Germany. Nobody knows. One thesis was this was the Mafia that figured this all out. Another was that Hanoi had figured it out. We don't know. I guess what happened was that this, of course, had hit the United States earlier; it took some time for the new generation of the drug-Woodstock-pot cult to hit the armed forces. And they hit kind of simultaneously, I guess. When was Woodstock? 1968?

G: 1968, I think.

P: Was it 1968, or late 1968, early 1969?

G: That's about right.

P: About a year later it appeared overseas. Also remember, the draft didn't start really hitting the middle class white youth until late in the war, and it's rather shameful, unpleasant, ironic, whatever word you want to use, to realize that our people didn't get so badly excited about the war until it started hitting their families. As long as the disadvantaged were going to Vietnam, and in 1965 and 1966 the figures show that if you were a black or a minority, your chances of being drafted--point one--and then being sent to Vietnam--point two--and being in a combat unit--point three--were far higher than if you were white. And our white youth knew it back here.

In 1967 and 1968, when they had to start drafting some of the not-so-disadvantaged, that's when the great outcry came. It was all right when somebody else was getting killed.

G: There was the matter of a tax surcharge, I think too, that began in the fall of 1967.

P: And our kids in school knew it, the ones who went into the reserves and the guard; that was another shameful thing. And the guard and the reserves haven't recovered from that yet, because many people say, "Why do we have you people? When we needed you the government wouldn't call you up."

G: What did Vietnam do to the army? We have already begun discussing this. How would you compare the army of 1972 with the army of 1965?

P: In the career force, the repetitive tours began to take their toll, because about after the second or third tour the wife would say, "No

more of this," and threaten to divorce her husband or something. So we began to lose a lot of noncommissioned officers in particular and younger officers who'd say, "I've had enough," and would get out. For those who did stay, it was hard to take because the family was being subjected to abuse and didn't understand why daddy was over there in Vietnam, and it was sort of doubly hard for them. And that, of course, had to affect the morale of the troops, the officers and the men. I think that the most devastating thing was the realization that the people at home weren't supporting the war. It didn't take any smart person to figure that one out very quickly: the fact that they were unappreciated and being accused of being baby burners and so forth.

The fact that we didn't mobilize stretched our leadership and experience very thin, so we had the Lieutenant Calleys; that My Lai thing I don't think should ever have happened. And to digress, I think that as far as I can tell, that was an aberration. I don't know of any other unit-sized deliberate war crime like that, and then deliberately covering it up, because I've talked to innumerable soldiers and officers and have asked them the question, "Do you really think that could have happened in your unit?" They all say the same thing: "We did some bad things, but we would never have thought of, never would have condoned ever doing that." And so the fact that your experience was diluted, because the army kept expanding as the war expanded, and then you started losing that experience--I've already mentioned what it did to the Seventh Army in Germany; it literally destroyed that army. That was the finest field army we ever fielded in peacetime, I think, and by I guess 1969 or 1970 it was gone. And we knew it would take years and

years to rebuild it. General Abrams used to talk about it would take us about five years to rebuild; I think it's more like ten years. I don't think we're there yet. That's another question, though.

And then, of course, it left the fact that we failed in our mission--I won't use the word [defeated]. We weren't defeated in the classic or literal sense. The American army was not defeated in the field, although I think their performance steadily deteriorated in the field. It's to their great credit, though, a credit to those leaders in the field, that the great bulk of them were able to hold their units together and carry out their mission right up to the end, even though they knew that the leaders back home, to include U.S. senators, were talking against them in the field, and they bitterly resented that. They were able to carry out their missions right up to the end. So I don't think they were defeated in that sense.

But the United States and the American army failed in their mission in the larger sense, and it was a defeat from that perspective. And I think that hurts, down deep, everybody who served in the army. I'm speaking now of more of the professional career officer or career soldier rather than the citizen-soldier. But even the citizen-soldier must feel that rather deeply, because he knows that he did his job and he did it well, and he knows that he was up against a real, sure-enough enemy; he wasn't fighting old women and babies. And he doesn't buy the propaganda that North Vietnam is a nice bunch of quiet, peaceful people.

G: Agrarian reformers.

P: (Laughter) He knows what they are; he fought against them and he respected them, too.

I think it's probably caused a crisis of doctrine in the army. One of the things that occurred, a sort of a--I don't know what the word is, a reaction, revulsion--a lot of people said, "We're not going to get mixed up in a doggone little"--dirty little war, I think General Wheeler called it at one point--"We're not going to get mixed up in that kind of a war again. We're only going to fight in places like Europe where we'll be up against a first-class, sophisticated, modern enemy, and we'll fight like the warriors of old, the professionals against the professionals," not realizing that on both sides, it wasn't professional against professional, it was also going to be citizen-soldier against citizen-soldier. At any rate, that group said the army should concentrate its entire thinking, organization, doctrine, everything, on Europe. And we've done that. You remember General Bill [William] DePuy led the change in all the field manuals, the "How to Fight" series.

G: That's rather ironic, considering his background, isn't it?

P: Right. But the only trouble with that kind of a doctrinal shift, you're kind of assuming that the army, or the military, is going to make the decision as to where and who we're going to fight in the future; that's not our prerogative. We don't know where we're going to fight. The chances are we will have to fight again somewhere besides Europe, and that's the paradox of Europe. It's the most direct and sophisticated threat in any way you measure it, but it's also the least likely place we'll fight. We're much more apt to be in the Middle East or somewhere else. Maybe back in the jungle somewhere. (Laughter)

G: The marines are currently patrolling in Beirut.

P: In Lebanon. Yes, incidentally, that's just like what we were trying to do in Santo Domingo. I used to think that was a pretty complex situa-

tion, but it was pretty straightforward compared to that mess in Beirut. (Laughter) We didn't have--well, we had one religion to deal with; they've got all the major religions of the world, I guess except maybe the Hindu and Buddhist. (Laughter)

G: The Buddhists aren't there yet.

P: And we were up against only people who were fighting each other who had relatively unsophisticated weapons, and here they've got foreign troops of several nationalities, and they've got pretty good modern arms. I'm digressing again.

The killer effect on the army. It had this doctrinal effect, this morale effect, and I guess this effect of searching, wondering what is our mission? Why do we exist? If we're going to be sent overseas to fight for our country in what we thought we were doing the right thing and a worthy cause, and then find out that (Laughter) it wasn't at all, rejected; what kind of a profession is that?

G: Let me ask you something in this connection. In Vietnam the army was doing a lot of things besides fighting an enemy. There was something--

P: A lot of humanitarian things going on.

G: A lot of things called nation-building.

P: Exactly.

G: Is that an appropriate role for the army?

P: I think it's an appropriate role while you're engaged in fighting. We've done that in every war. Wherever we had a chance we've tried to help the indigenous people. The American soldier has always done that, and you didn't have to tell him, either. But we've tried to build roads and rebuild schools and whatnot as we went along; if we had any surplus

engineers around, they always ended up doing something like that. We did it in Germany; we did it in Korea, we did it in the Philippines, every war we've ever been in. I'm not so sure that [William] Sherman did that when he was marching through Georgia, but that's a little different story. (Laughter)

And of course that was part of the real mission over there, should have been, as you said, building that nation and basically building the armed forces, but we were also building roads, and unfortunately I think we built some things we didn't need to build: all those jet airfields of no use to the South Vietnamese. The jungle reclaimed most of that very quickly. We left them these big, beautiful jet airfields, but no jets. (Laughter)

G: What has happened to counterinsurgency?

P: It's still there. I don't know, to be real honest; I'm not up on that. But it's still there. We still have the JFK Center; what do they call it now? Security Assistance?

G: I'm not sure.

P: The JFK Center of Security Assistance, isn't it, rather than Special Warfare? It's still there, with a different name, I guess. But we'll probably be mixed up in that sort of thing whether we like it or not, because of the simple reason that that's the way the Soviets and their proxies and surrogates, that's the way they're operating today. The Soviets have built this enormous military machine, but the main purpose of that machine probably is not to fight, but to intimidate, overwhelm the people they're trying to subjugate. Now they're fighting in Afghanistan, and they messed that one up. They underestimated that

situation, I think, just as we underestimated the situation in Vietnam, and they're going to be fighting in Afghanistan a long time. But other than that, I think [it's] a miscalculation on their part, they've got these enormous forces, and they're now beginning to develop the means to project them, but basically they like to use proxy forces, remember, completely armed and trained by the Soviets. And they've got Cubans in Angola, and Ethiopia, Nicaragua, and a lot of other places, I suppose. They're in at least a dozen countries--Yemen. Both civilian and military, Cubans. There are doctors and teachers, although often they use the teachers as simply a guise for intelligence and military training, as they tried to do in the Dominican Republic.

But the Soviets would much prefer to take over a new country through subversion and subvert it, but with this tremendous military threat over-watching and breaking down any resistance from the people. And now we see [it] with the Cubans doing that in Central America. We must remember, now, that Cuba is second only to the United States in the entire Western Hemisphere as a power; it's a military power. It's now building in Nicaragua, with Soviet help, they'll build the largest armed force in all of Central America; it will dwarf all the rest of them put together. And using that backdrop, they're trying to subvert those other governments, supporting guerrilla warfare and propaganda warfare and everything else against them. And of course I think we're doing the right thing; we've told the Soviets, "There are not going to be any more free rides anywhere. We're going to try to oppose you politically, psychologically, economically, and perhaps even militarily if necessary." And so we're in Honduras, and [in] El Salvador we're trying to

shore up the indigenous forces; at the same time we're trying to encourage, if not compel, the government there to make the necessary political and social and economic changes that everybody--I said everybody, just about everybody--agrees is needed. We would rather see a change under our conditions than the opposition's, because we know what will happen then. That's why I don't think counterinsurgency is dead. How about the fellows that are in El Salvador and Honduras right this minute?

G: How is Vietnam complicating our task in this respect?

P: The individual must be saying to himself, "This is the way we started out in Vietnam." The scale of course is not comparable, and too, the critics, of course, are saying, "My God, that's"--I don't know the answer to that one, but I think it's necessary if you're going to stop them.

Here, though, for the first time, the American people ought to realize how close that threat's getting. Honduras is on the border with Mexico. A large area in southern Mexico is Indian population, who have become more and more, in recent years alien, almost, to the central government, and they're out of the mainstream of the Mexican politics and so on.

G: And they have a revolutionary tradition, too.

P: Yes. And you see what the Mexicans have done since their revolution; they've co-opted any opposition by this system they have of a six-year presidency, and they pick the president in advance, one party. They pick him in advance, and they've been very smart about picking a liberal and then a conservative, so that they keep it balanced, and they co-opt

the opposition by their system of patronage so that the average peon, he looks to his patron as his savior and so on, and he doesn't listen much to the revolutionaries.

But I think that's going to change. And I think it's just a matter of time, if this Mexican government doesn't wake up, that they're going to have revolution on their hands, and it'll start in the South. And just ask yourself the question: look at the problems we have with Mexico today and the United States, this porous border--you know better than I, where you're living today. There must be a strip of at least fifty kilometers from Tijuana to Brownsville now in the United States that's as much Mexican as it is American.

G: Or more.

P: Or more. English now is a second language in many of these places; they don't even bother to speak it or teach it anymore. And we're only just seeing the beginning of that revolution, and we may end up with Texas back in the hands of Mexico (Laughter) and we may have to go up and join Canada. There may be more truth than poetry to that. Anyhow, we better wake up. And the men of the Soviet system have to keep moving; it's dynamic, it cannot--and the people must understand this--under their system, they can't be like ourselves. They can't be satisfied with the status quo. Their system has to be moving, constantly moving, and expanding. That's why Afghanistan, and that's why Cuba in Central America; it cannot stand still.

G: That's exactly what a Marxist would say about capitalism, wouldn't he?

P: And that's what the battle's all about, except that I would rather call it slavery versus freedom.

G: How do you react to this shibboleth: "No more Vietnams?" What reaction does that bring from you?

P: I don't know how they define Vietnam in the first place. Do they mean no more failures of U.S. policy?

G: I don't know what they mean either.

P: That's what they're saying; we're not going to have any more failures of U.S. policy. But five presidents supported what we were trying to do in Vietnam, five of them, both parties. Were they all a bunch of dummies? Were they all bad, evil men? I don't know what they mean by "Vietnam."

G: Was our effort in Vietnam justified?

P: I can see both sides of the coin. The other side of the coin that people overlook is the fact that we gave the non-communist nations in the west Pacific and Southeast Asia ten years, and during that ten years, while we were engaged in Vietnam--it was really longer than that; I just use that as our major effort--those countries prospered: Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan--who was tangentially involved, but they let us use their bases. South Korea prospered. Taiwan prospered, Hong Kong, [the] Philippines have prospered, although they're having their problems now. Australia, New Zealand, those people know how close that threat was to them. You don't have to tell them.

And the greatest prize of all, in the sense of strategic value, is probably Indonesia, 150,000,000 people there. They've never been able to get their act together economically, but the talent is there, and the raw materials are there if they can ever get it organized. But many Indonesians will tell you, and Ambassador Bunker will tell you that if it hadn't been for Vietnam, if the United States had not gone into Viet-

nam when it did, the countercoup in Indonesia would never have happened and that Indonesia would be communist today. But that encouraged the non-communists to throw the communists out. It was a bloody thing; it was a massacre. But Indonesia would be communist today, and you have to ask yourself the question: if Indonesia was communist, where would that leave the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand? What about our friends on the mainland now? Then you see what's happened since then, the threat is still there. Vietnam now is--of course, they already had Laos, but they've consolidated Laos, and they've now gobbled up Kampuchea, Cambodia.

G: Some opponents of the war point to that very fact and say, "Okay, the worst has happened; we lost out, and two of the dominoes at least have fallen, and so what? I can't see that the United States' position has altered significantly. And yet we've paid 55,0000 lives to prevent that."

P: That's true. It wasn't vital to our national interests or to our survival, either one. And from that point of view, we should never have gone in. We went in for other reasons. I think the people that made those decisions in those days knew that it wasn't vital to our survival, but they felt that it would have hurt us so badly in the eyes of our allies in the western Pacific that we could never expect them to help us again. You have to ask yourself the question, though, about having abandoned Vietnam in its time of need. This is one of the statements that Warren Nutter said. He said, "South Vietnam feels it's been abandoned. In my opinion, no ally in the Pacific will ever go to war with us again. They don't trust us." Think about that one. And you could

argue, you shouldn't have gone in, because you lost. I don't know the answer to that.

I like to think it was not in vain; I'd hate to tell the mother who lost her son over there--sons or daughters--that it was in vain. I'd hate to tell them that. I don't think so; I wouldn't call it noble, either. I don't know what the word is. It was in our own selfish self-interest. That's why your countries go to war. And the only sin that South Vietnam committed in my eyes was that they asked us to help. And we helped them. We didn't do it very well; we ended up hurting them. I won't defend our record; the record speaks for itself. Although I will say that where are these people who talked about "so-what" questions; what do they say about what happened to Kampuchea? Now the critics, like [William] Shawcross, say that--and that twisted, distorted story he tells is just awful. That has been thoroughly rebutted, you know. At any rate, the critics would say that we caused that. I must say I can't swallow that one, though. It might have occurred anyway.

G: Let me ask you this. You may not want to respond, or feel that you should, but I know that you've had some association with the CIA. What did Vietnam do to the CIA?

P: What do you mean? Do you think it hurt them?

G: *If* it did; I don't know that it did. I'm not coming from a position when I ask that question.

P: It's a funny thing about that CIA--it's a very interesting question, because I haven't made up my mind yet, and I've spent three and a half years out there with them on the analytic side of the house, not the operational side, which I know very little about. But they're a funny

bunch, kind of detached. They don't get emotionally involved in these things like you and I do, or like the military guy does who has to go out there, or State, the foreign service, who have to go out and carry out these policies of the United States.

CIA can be very objective and detached because they don't have to make or carry out policy. Although of course they have tremendous influence on policy. This is one of their hang-ups. I saw that when I was there, and they had this hang-up of being so sure that they don't dirty their hands by getting into policy, that they lean over backwards to be objective, and they miss the boat. Because the whole goddamned point of intelligence, for a government, is to help you make up your mind what your policy ought to be.

On the other hand it would be bad, of course, if they got too much involved. But one of the things that this administration has tried to do with the CIA has been to get it more involved in, not policy-making, but in the support of policy, and it's quite interesting--as a matter of fact, for Mr. [William] Casey, we did--a senior review panel I worked with--a little sort of analysis for him. We did a report card on the Carter Administration, and then a report card on the Reagan Administration. We compared the last two years of the Carter one, looking at the major policy decisions and the intelligence input, and so on, how they worked out, with approximately the first year of the Reagan Administration. Very revealing, because it was not only--of course, some of the policy issues were the same old policies. It was very interesting, because you saw how differently the two administrations operated. But I don't want to waste any more time on your tape on that.

But coming back to your question, CIA--I discovered this in this Vietnam thing--when the war started and the bombing started, they began to do analyses of the bomb damage. But guess who did it? At that time it was called the OER, Office of Economic Research. And [the] Office of Political Analysis, OPA, did a lot of the political work. But they didn't have anybody, really, looking at the military side of it. So they put the economic guys on it, because they felt that's related to the question. The OSR, the Office of Strategic Research, which was the most military-oriented, was entirely focused on the Soviet Union. And Bruce Clarke was the head of OSR at that time; he was the son of General Bruce Clarke. He's since retired. Bruce didn't want any part of the Vietnam War. He said, "My job is the Soviet Union." So for the whole war, OER became the CIA's experts on Vietnam. Whereas to me, if I'd been running the place out there, I sure as hell would have had OSR.

Since that time, partly due to the efforts of the senior review panel, they have reorganized, and this is the first major reorganization since the CIA was first established right after World War II, in which you have a geographic organization, basically. You have an Office of Soviet Analysis, and an Office of Latin America, and Africa, and Asia, and so on. And each one of those does the whole bit, the economic and political and military, and so on.

G: Did you know George Carver?

P: Yes. Yes. There's also a George Allen. I'm going to be working, I think, with George Allen, on this study I mentioned.

G: Is he still on active duty?

P: No. I don't think so. But he's involved with what they call the Studies for Intelligence, which I'm going to be working with. I'll be

doing a historical kind of a thing for them. But I've already talked to George Allen, because he figured prominently, you remember, in that CBS film. But he's furious about the film, because he got--everybody who gets in one of those things gets sucked in. You have to realize, those guys are not going to show you the film until it's on the air. He said they took answers from different questions and spliced them together as though they were the answers to one question. He said it was totally dishonest. And remember, he was sort of the CIA spokesman throughout the thing. But they distorted his testimony. So he's pretty sore at them, too.

I can't account for the other fellows in that thing, though. There were several of them that made some terrible statements. I just can't account for them; I don't know where in the hell they get it. I can see there's plenty of room for difference of opinion, but to accuse people of deliberately falsifying--I just can't believe that. Because I don't see the point of it. You know, it's just as bad to overestimate an enemy as to underestimate him, so I don't see the point of doing it.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II

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