INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: DOUGLAS PIKE

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Mr. Pike's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Would you recount how you came to enter government service?

P: I worked for the United Nations in Korea during the Korean War and then came back to the U.S. and went to work for the Washington Star. I was recruited for the Foreign Service by letter. Foreign Service officers were asked for names of people they thought might be interested in joining. When I went into the Foreign Service I was given a posting choice of Seoul, Korea; Vientiane, Laos; or Saigon, [South] Vietnam; those were the three [choices].

G: What year was this?

P: This was 1959. I chose Saigon, got there in 1960. That was the same year the National Liberation Front was formed. I had done graduate work on the communication of ideas in underdeveloped societies, and specifically social organizations used to communicate ideas. There are three ways ideas systematically can be communicated: mass media; social movements as channels of communication; and the so-called informal channels, such as word of mouth, rumor and so on. In underdeveloped societies such as Vietnam you do not have mass media; informal channels are very unreliable; so what's left are the social organizations as channels of communication. You'll find this process

in all societies. The Boy Scouts, fraternities, the military, all are social organizations that communicate ideas, values, virtues and so on.

When the NLF was formed, I looked at it as a social organization and was interested in its communication process. I began to collect materials on it, and after about three years [I] had a great filing cabinet full. So I asked the State Department to send me to MIT to do a book strictly on the NLF communication matrix. But by the time I got there I realized I should do a broader book. That was Viet Cong. From then on, of course, as long as the war continued, I was labeled an expert on the Viet Cong and experienced in Vietnam. So I couldn't get out of the field. I spent the next fifteen years abroad working on Vietnam, either in Saigon or on a regional assignment outside of it. Then [I] came back to Washington, to the Policy Planning Council at State. Then I had a sabbatical on Capitol Hill where I did some work with the Congress on Vietnam. Then [I] went to the Pentagon, to ISA, as a Hanoi watcher. Then I retired and went to the University of California doing the same sort [of work]. The Vietnam wart has grown on me. I've been stuck with it all these years.

G: What exactly was your official capacity when you first went to Saigon? What was your job like?

P: I had a series of information assignments. I did writing basically. One of the first things I did was I produced a series of short, one-reel movie documentaries for use in Vietnam, a three-part series on the Viet Cong, that had just been formed. That was the genesis of my

interest in the subject. Nobody in Saigon knew anything about these guys, so in order to write the script I had to do some research. [I] collected propaganda leaflets and talked to a few defectors. This got me interested and I stayed interested in it. Almost all the jobs I had in Saigon involved Hanoi watching in some form or another. Later at the Policy Planning Council in Washington I was still a Hanoi watcher. My last assignment in Saigon was to head a special inter-agency committee, people from MACV, from CIA, and the embassy. We were a Hanoi-watching group. This committee met almost every day. We did a lot of work--Frank Snepp was one of our members--much like a political section of an embassy would be in Hanoi, if we had [had] an embassy in Hanoi.

G: I see. But you're sort of having to work using what John LeCarre calls back direction finding. That's not the right way, but what he means is you're working by inference rather than being able to simply ask--

P: At a distance, right. Although later in the war we had many Chieu Hoi ralliers or defectors and POWs. They were an enormous source of firsthand information.

G: But you were a State Department man--

P: I was a Foreign Service information officer, right.

G: Okay. Were you connected with any of the State Department's white papers on the insurgency?

P: I worked and helped. Bill Jorden did the first of those. He came out on temporary assignment to collect documents, and I helped, because I

had gotten into the captured document business early. I remember seeing some of them in rough draft. He collected a lot of captured documents, talked to a lot of people, and then went back to Washington and produced the first white paper.

G: Some of those came under a lot of criticism later from opponents of the war.

P: One of them was a black document produced by the GVN, we found out later. A South Vietnamese intelligence officer had taken it out on the battlefield and put it on a warm body of a dead North Vietnamese, where it was found by an American.

G: On the body of a North Vietnamese.

P: A North Vietnamese officer.

G: Not a regrouped southerner perhaps?

P: The way it appeared was that the American officer found this North Vietnamese officer who had just been killed, and he had this document. It seemed genuine so it went into the white paper. In the early days that could happen, because we were very green at spotting forged documents, phony documents. After you work with captured documents a while, it's almost impossible for this to happen. You see so many of them that you develop a sixth sense. I've seen black documents since then, some the North Vietnamese forged, some that the GVN tried to fake, but you know they are phony--it just leaps out at you. It's hard to explain, but it's--

G: What was the motive, do you suppose, behind this particular document that you're--?

P: I think they were trying to build a case or help us build a case about Hanoi. In those days the big question was whether North Vietnam was involved in the war. It seems rather ridiculous today, but it really was a hot argument at the time. There were people who firmly maintained that the war in the South was strictly indigenous, that all the North Vietnamese were doing was cheering them on, perhaps giving them a little advice, a few handbooks, a scattering of cadres, but the war was strictly a southern operation. That first white paper was designed to prove northern involvement. I don't think anybody today would argue there wasn't North Vietnamese involvement. To argue that now you'd have to argue against what North Vietnamese official histories said after the war, namely that Hanoi had been up to its neck in the war from the very start. They are surprised that anybody outside thought otherwise. A lot of us in Vietnam at the time knew this was not an arguable point, but it was argued widely.

G: So you regard the argument about the difference between northerners and regrouped southerners as being rather a straw man sort of affair, is that right?

P: In Vietnam one central fact of life is geographic regionalism: north, center, south; Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China. Where you are from in Vietnam is all-important. You can easily tell, by accent. Even an outsider can, the instant the person begins to speak Vietnamese; if you have any Vietnamese at all you can spot it. It's as important in Vietnam, I'd say, as caste is in India in shaping social values. The communists don't accept that; they consider geographic regionalism as

bourgeois sentimentality. But nevertheless it is a very real fact. So there is a kind of status among communists. It doesn't mean you can't bridge it entirely. If you are a so-called regrouped southerner, that is a person who fought for the Viet Minh, went North and then came back, the regrouped part doesn't matter--what matters is that you were born in Cochin China, and that tends to put you in a different, in some cases, a lower status than, say, people from Tonkin.

These are geographic stereotypes. In most countries you have a north-south stereotype. Southerners are dirty, lazy, anti-mechanical; northerners are crooked, money-hungry, so on. In Vietnam it's more complicated; there's northerner, southerner, and centerite. There are three divisions, not two. People judge each other by this and I think it is a fact within the communist--

G: They even had nicknames, didn't they, for the various stereotypes, at least in the army?

P: Yes, and also there are self-images. I mean, the centerite considers himself to be the only thoroughly cultured, educated Vietnamese. A southerner will consider himself to be in harmony with nature in kind of a Jean Jacques Rousseau pastoral sense. A northerner will consider himself to be modern and progressive and technologically competent and so on. Even Americans there any length of time got caught up in this.

G: There's often a grain of truth in these kinds of stereotypes, isn't there? Is there something to be said for them in this case?

P: Well, I suppose in any country there are certain cultural characteristics that are induced by climate, producing subcultures. If you grow

up in New York City you are probably going to be a somewhat different kind of a person than if you grow up on a remote ranch in Texas. No matter your heritage, there is cultural influence.

G: I don't think there's any question of it. When did infiltration get to be a problem? I have gotten a lot of opinions on that from, rather surprisingly, a lot of people who I thought surely were going to give me the same answer, but they don't agree.

P: The objective of the North Vietnamese in the war was unification of the fatherland under their banner, or takeover of the South in pejorative terms. The basic strategy was called people's war, meaning to get the people in the South to fight the war by themselves and on as much of a self-contained, self-supporting basis as possible. In this the proper role of the North was to assist in such ways as was necessary to keep the struggle for reunification going, but not to do anything for the southerners that they could do themselves.

G: Can I ask you right there, is that what the southerners thought they were fighting for?

P: Many within the NLF or Viet Cong said, "What we're fighting for is in effect a monopoly of political control. The NLF is the sole legitimate representative of the South Vietnamese people." That was the slogan on their letterheads. What they were fighting for was political power in South Vietnam, not for unification. Now some hard-core cadres from the North, all regrouped southerners in the Viet Cong, they were fighting for unification. But most were fighting for political power for the Front. These are parallel objectives, but obviously

not the same. You could reach a point where they crossed, and several times did cross. A very large defection from the NLF took place after [Ngo Dinh] Diem was overthrown, because to many NLF people, and particularly the Cao Dai members, revolution meant getting Diem, and when Diem was gotten, the revolution was accomplished. The northerners were saying no, it wasn't. But there was a mass defection at that point.

Support by the North then, Hanoi thinking, the Politburo thinking, was "we stand ready to do whatever is necessary to keep the struggle for unification going. If the cause needs guns, people in the South should capture them in the South. But if they can't or they need special weapons, we'll get them to them. If they need technical advice, sapper training or something, we'll give it to them. If they need men"--and that's what began the infiltration--"we'll give it to them."

The rise in infiltration rate initially was low, a very low flat curve in, say, 1959 and 1960; it stayed flat past 1963. Then it began to climb somewhat. It began to increase very sharply in 1965 when the Americans and other foreign troops began to arrive. The balance of forces was getting out of balance. So Hanoi had to increase infiltration, ship more forces from the North to keep the balance, otherwise it would get clear out of whack. Still the rationale at all times was "we don't send anybody South if we can help it; we send them South what we have to." Increasingly it became a case where they had to. We moved to the point at which, by the Easter offensive of 1972, about

90 per cent of the day-to-day combat was being done by PAVN, North Vietnamese in uniform, in the South. This had moved from almost 0 per cent to 90 per cent. The changed condition, in terms of northern involvement, was forced on the North. It was either that or lose the war. From Hanoi's view, it didn't have any choice.

G: You raised a point about the impact of Diem's overthrow on the NLF as opposed to the military units of the Viet Cong. I have broached that thesis to a couple of people who say they didn't know anything about that, didn't know that it had happened, and expressed a certain amount of disbelief. Now what I would like to ask you is was there an impact on the military side of the insurrection, of the fall of Diem?

P: In communist terms, what it is all about is struggle, or dau tranh, D-A-U T-R-A-N-H--that's a very important term. It's the key to understanding the mentality of the other side. [There are] two kinds of dau tranh or struggle: armed dau tranh, and political dau tranh. Armed dau tranh is not exactly orthodox military activity or even guerrilla war, although it includes that. It also includes things like assassinations and kidnappings not associated with organized armies normally.

G: This is what you call the violence programs?

P: Yes, that's right. The correct technical name is armed dau tranh. The important thing is to think of it as something broader than just guerrilla war. The first pincer is armed dau tranh. The other pincer is political dau tranh. This is not politics, but politics with guns, a gray area between politics and violence. It consisted of three

specific programs used by the Viet Cong. The orthodox theory is that both these pincers must be used. You cannot win with armed dau tranh alone or political dau tranh. You have to get the enemy between the two pincers. Hammer and anvil is another metaphor used.

In allocation of resources--and here is where the argument comes among communist leaders--how much money and cadres do you put into political dau tranh and into armed dau tranh? In the early days emphasis was on political dau tranh. Overwhelmingly, the number of cadres, the money, and so on, went to that. The armed dau tranh contribution was mostly providing a security screen; capturing weapons; advertising the cause; creating turmoil and social pathology in the countryside; just tearing things up. That doesn't deliver victory militarily, but it destroys stability and hinders the other side, the government side, from ongoing programs.

When the struggle against the Viet Cong got under way in about 1961, 1962, the concentration was directed against the political dau tranh in the pacification program. This was a series of strategic hamlets. Basically the concept was to separate the guerrilla from the environment and the rest of the society. It was based on the experience in Malaysia. The pacification program, the strategic hamlet program, was set up essentially for the benefit of Saigon and was administered in terms of pay-off for Saigon. It did not have any particular pay-off for the villager himself. Subsequent programs, the new life hamlet program and the revolutionary development program, tried to address that shortcoming, but in the initial strategic hamlet

program, there was very little pay-off for the villager. Therefore it alienated the villager. But in forcing VC regroupment and in cutting village ties with the guerrilla, it did emasculate the political struggle program and the political structure of the NLF. So in 1963 you had two processes going. One was the emasculation of the Viet Cong infrastructure; the other was the alienation of the villager. Same program was doing both these things. It was a question of which one would get there first.

Now, when the Buddhists challenged Diem, and Diem refused to settle with the Buddhists--beginning in May of 1963--I don't think we realized, anyone really realized this at the time, but that was the moment when the war went on the razor's edge. I think if Diem would have settled with the Buddhists, then the war as we know it would have been over by the end of 1963. It's a historical might-have-been. Nobody can say for sure. But from what I was able to learn afterwards--I don't think any of us knew this at the time, but in talking to Viet Cong defectors and so on in the subsequent years--they told us, "you were really cutting us up."

Before Diem was overthrown there were a large number of people who had joined the Viet Cong--particularly Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, esoteric religious sects--because they hated Diem. For them the name of the game was to get Diem. And when it was over, they defected, by Viet Cong standards, en masse. The reason this didn't really fragment the NLF was that they had anticipated it. A year earlier two pilots flew down in Norodom Street, bombed the palace, tried to kill Diem.

They almost succeeded. I think this created a shock--and this is what we got later from defectors--in the higher ranks of the NLF. They realized for the first time that Diem was mortal, that if anything did happen to Diem there would be a heavy fallout from loss of their supporters. So they began to weed out key figures that they thought were these bourgeois revolutionaries as they called them. So a year later when Diem did go, they had pretty well gotten them out of the upper reaches. There were still a lot in the rank and file, and they lost them, but they were prepared for that. So the NLF shuddered and cracked but it held together. Had that attack on Diem been successful a year earlier, I think it would have fragmented the NLF.

G: And of course the military side, the armed units--

P: There wasn't a great deal of armed struggle going on at this time. The whole burden of the war really was placed on the cadres in the political struggle. They were the hammer, and the anvil was simply the military struggle, the armed struggle. Later on this changed, switched way over to armed struggle [which] became increasingly important, beginning about 1964. It became very successful, incidentally. The war was almost lost in February of 1965 by our side and by the GVN. It's not really clear to me why it wasn't lost then. It came within a hairsbreadth.

But then with the arrival of the Americans we moved into what was really a small-scale limited war, main force unit war, big unit war, as the communists called it. The ideal or model armed struggle and political struggle tends to get shunted off. The war became a slugging

match in which mass and movement, firepower and mobility, the standard aspects of war, became dominant. Then at the end I think it went back to political struggle--definitely after the Americans left.

For the period of 1965 to 1973 the war was in essence a peculiar kind of small-scale war. And the Americans were very successful at it. That's the notable thing; you know, the American forces won every battle of any significance they fought in the whole Vietnam War. This is a record almost unparalleled in the history of warfare. If that war had been decided as wars in the good old days were decided, the side that wins the most battles wins the war, it would have been over by the end of the Tet offensive in 1968. But of course the meaning of Vietnam is if you win the battles, if you defeat the armed struggle you don't win, but if you lose the battles you lose the war. If you win, if you defeat armed struggle, you merely give yourself an opportunity to defeat the political struggle. And until you do that you don't win. It's not really a question of winning there, it's a question of succeeding or failing. It's win or lose in armed struggle, but succeed or fail in political struggle. We never really were successful in doing the latter. We weren't successful. It's not entirely clear to me whether we could have been. The question is, how far can foreigners, outsiders, go in a country in winning political struggle? How much simply has to be done by the indigenous? I think for too long we attempted to do too much on the civilian side. We debilitated the GVN by not forcing them to do more on the political side.

G: Why did the NLF go to a much heavier emphasis on the armed struggle, the big unit war in 1964?

P: Well, I think it's a reflection of a doctrinal dispute which you can trace back to the Politburo in Hanoi. There always was a doctrinal dispute between those who advocated primary emphasis on armed struggle. They all agreed you had to use armed-political struggle, but some like Truong Chinh believed in primary emphasis on political struggle; others like General [Vo Nguyen] Giap believed in armed struggle. We saw this dispute shift back and forth over the years. Mostly it was a function of one faction having its turn at bat; first one faction tried to win by political struggle for a year or so and was unsuccessful. That became a powerful argument for the armed struggle types to say "you've got to let us do it." So they would get their chance. Then it would go back and forth. We saw this begin with the battle of Ap Bac, with a shift back to political struggle. The Tet offensive in 1968 was a definite shift back to armed struggle. I'm oversimplifying, but there was a kind of trend. Tet was followed by a couple of years of primary emphasis on licking their wounds and trying to get on to the political struggle. The Easter offensive of 1973 was back to armed struggle. We saw these shifts as infighting at the Politburo level in which one group after another successively would come in with a roll of blueprints saying "I have a plan here to win the war." It's agreed they try it, and if it doesn't work then the alternate strategy would be tried--and back and forth it went.

Each side I think even at the end had complete faith in the efficacy of their strategy, and they're still arguing in Hanoi today as to who won the war. It appears on the surface that the armed struggle people did, because they smashed their way into Saigon with tanks. But the political struggle people would say that they didn't really fight any battles after Ban Me Thuot. There were maybe one and a half battles in the whole end of the war: one in Phuoc Long province, which was a small battle; one at Ban Me Thuot in the Highlands, and then nothing. The rest of it was just collapse. The South Vietnamese army, which had stood and fought under far worse circumstances before, didn't stand and fight at all. The political struggle people would take credit for that, say, "They didn't stand and fight because we did our job well. The armed struggle people just got in their tanks and rode to Saigon."

G: We had eaten out the core and the whole thing collapsed.

P: Yes. But on the other side, of course, the armed struggle people say: "We smashed them in earlier battles, we hammered them down. We defeated the Americans--drove out the Americans. Therefore we get the credit." It's not a question that anyone can answer with any absolute dogmatic certainty, although lots have tried. So much depends on how you posit the struggle to begin with. You can paint either one a victory, depending on how you write the preceding developments and describe them.

G: There's a lot of controversy over the quality of the intelligence that was being gotten out of Vietnam from various sources. It seems to

center around the fact that there was misreporting by CIA or the armed services, intelligence services, whichever was doing it. Now, in your position, which I think is a rather unique position, reading the enemy documents and so forth, did you ever have any input into this? Were you consulted? Did you see things happening?

P: Well, I think you have to look at this in two different levels. To me the only meaningful use of intelligence is at the tactical level, by units in the field. I never had very much direct experience with this, but I knew a lot of people that did, and I had a feeling that a system was never developed to the point where this mass of information was quickly processed, evaluated and used. I've seen hundreds of intelligence reports about X enemy unit is going to be at this spot on Y date--but unfortunately by the time we got around to it, it was two weeks later. In many cases that information had been available earlier, and if it had been acted on instantly it might have had a beneficial effect. This happened again and again. It was not a complicated problem; a lot of people were aware of it; a lot of people worked on it. But they never could develop a system whereby they could act quickly; one problem was they were inundated with information. It's kind of a pollution, information pollution. They got so much captured data, so many POWs, so many ralliers and so much information--99 per cent of it was just rubbish--the problem was to select out that 1 per cent and act on it quickly. It's a technical problem. You would think with computers and so on it could be done. It never was licked, I don't think. When the Americans left, the South Vietnamese were

totally unequal to the void. The Americans weren't very good at it either.

Now, on a broader level, in terms of trends and general developments, the record I think clearly was terrible, but then not being in the intelligence community, I guess I can afford to take a kind of jaundiced view towards this kind of high-level, strategic intelligence or social intelligence, however you want to call it. That is, where whole systems are going, whole societies are going, what things are going to happen? If you're a determinist you believe this is all predictable. But my experience in Asia--not just in Vietnam but throughout my whole life there, and I've lived in Asia most of my adult life--has been that it just is not knowable. Every major development in Asia since Pearl Harbor, and including Pearl Harbor, was largely unanticipated by anyone. Nobody really anticipated the outbreak and the course and the development of the Korean War. Nobody anticipated the Cultural Revolution in China. Nobody anticipated the so-called economic miracle in Japan--after the takeoff, yes, everybody could see it then, but I'm talking about two or three years before. Not the scarf-up of the Indonesian Communist Party. The outcome of the Viet Minh war--most people thought the French would lose--that's one exception. The course of the Vietnam War, the way it went, its duration--nobody on either side ever anticipated it. General [Vo Nguyen] Giap didn't have the faintest idea in 1959 when they passed the Armed Struggle Resolution in the Fifteenth Plenum that by 1975

they'd still be fighting in Vietnam. I mean, he didn't know that. Nobody knew that.

The point of this is that the intelligence community should not be blamed. It's simply that these kinds of developments are unknowable and we ought not to kid ourselves into thinking that you can predict them. So it never really bothered me that developments in Vietnam broke and I was surprised by them. I lived in Asia and I was always being surprised. I found that other people, whether they admitted it or not, were being surprised. Go back and try to see who called the shots in the Cultural Revolution, who called the shots in the Indonesian communist butchery or the Japanese economic [recovery] --government people, academics, journalists--you can't find in their writings predictions of these things. It's only the intelligence community that feels guilty about not being able to foresee the future--and the rest of us don't think it can be seen. I'm not a crystal ball gazer; I don't make any apologies that I can't foresee events. I don't know what's going to happen in Vietnam a year from now or two years from now and I don't pretend to know. Fortunately I'm not in the business where I'm being paid--as are unfortunately people in the intelligence business--and expected to foresee the future.

G: In what way was the fall of Diem critical in the development of the NLF?

P: I see the end of the Diem regime as simply the victim of the NLF as an organizational steamroller. Its chief power was its ability to form

organizational structures at the village level and enmesh villagers and people in rural areas in this struggle against the GVN. What was required was a counterorganizational effort. You had to counter the workers liberation association with the trade union; you had to counter the farmers liberation association with a farm coop system, or fishing coop. Also youth organizations, women, students and so on. It was an organizational struggle. I wrote and felt from the earliest days that victory in Vietnam would go to the side that gets the best organized and can most successfully disorganize the other side and stay organized itself. Diem simply didn't have the organizational skills that were necessary to win. He was up against Ho Chi Minh, an organizational genius in terms of forming, slaying, merging and using organizations as a kind of weapon.

Diem managed to stay in business until he began inadvertently and in other ways to alienate one segment of the community after another. He alienated the leftists and the Marxists and the communists very early, of course. He alienated the sects in his war against them in 1956. He alienated rural people with the strategic hamlet program, then alienated students and intellectuals in the cities, one social group after another. I can remember in August of 1963, which was three or four months before Diem was overthrown, a South Vietnamese army lieutenant colonel that I knew very well, a very respected combat soldier, came to me and said, "Diem's police have just arrested my sister. She's eleven years old." She'd been out at a Buddhist demonstration. He said, "What should I do?" Well, I said, "It's up to

you." But when the alienation starts reaching the field grade officer corps--I mean this guy had a legitimate grievance, I felt; his sister wasn't that political and the police were wrong when they just scarfed up everybody. Well, Diem's policies alienated one group after another and finally there wasn't anybody left.

The coup, if you call it that, was an open thing. All ARVN general officers were contacted in advance. When the actual coup came, Diem was in his palace, with two radio systems. One was run by power generated on the scene and couldn't be cut off. The other, of higher strength, had power that came in from the main line. In the middle of the coup, Diem was broadcasting to the military to come in and put down the coup. Word of this went to Big [Duong Van] Minh saying, "Shouldn't we cut this guy off the air? We can do it by just pulling a switch." And he sent back word "No. Let him talk. Let him appeal, because nobody is coming." And nobody did come, not one general officer raised his finger to help him. The alienation was simply complete. Now, that to me wasn't really a coup. It was just a collapse of the Diem government that had successively alienated one element after another until there was nobody left.

G: What would you say to the suggestion that you hear from time to time that Diem was such an effective anticommunist that his overthrow was a great tragedy for the anticommunist cause?

P: He wasn't. What was required was either a person of great organizational skill, such as Ho Chi Minh, or a person of enormous--and this is questionable, whether it would work in Vietnam--but a person of

enormous personal integrity and magnetism such as a [Ramon] Magsaysay in the Philippines. I've heard it argued that Vietnam needed a Magsaysay type. Diem wasn't that type, he was very cold and aloof. I've also heard it argued that the Vietnamese aren't Filipinos and that kind of personality wouldn't have been effectual.

G: It's interesting you bring that up, because he did have Magsaysay's adviser for a while and tried to get him back, Edward Lansdale.

P: Yes. Lansdale's basic thesis was a call for a charismatic leader. The question is, would a charismatic leader have succeeded? It depends on the psyche of the Vietnamese. I personally don't think so. I think that Nguyen Cao Ky had all the charisma needed, and all he evoked among the Vietnamese was plots to gang up against him. The Vietnamese instinctively move against somebody who's trying to accrue power, the power that you have to have to govern. The more charismatic you are, the more dangerous you are because the more people you can convince that you must have this power.

G: What was [Nguyen Van] Thieu's secret then, do you think?

P: Well, I think Thieu and Ky made a very good team in that Ky did have the charisma and he had the indifference to power. He gave the indications that he didn't care that much by threatening to resign constantly--which was a very good gambit, because you can't believe a guy is really trying to grab power if he keeps talking about quitting, offers to quit, has to be talked into not quitting. Thieu, on the other hand, had considerable skills as an organizer. He was no Ho Chi Minh but he did have many of the characteristics needed.

Unfortunately he lacked vision. He was shortsighted in vision. He was also very flat in terms of charisma. He wasn't a person that engendered loyalty and great admiration. But I think he was better, at least compared to Nguyen Khanh and Big Minh and General [Tran Van] Don and the ones that went before him in that period--when we went through government by coup d'etat in Saigon--they really were a bunch of stumblebums, most of them. Some of them were good, personally nice men--but they just didn't have what it took to be a leader under extraordinarily bad conditions. It's hard to be a leader under any circumstances, but few can lead when the place is being torn apart by professionals that know how to tear it apart. To govern then, there isn't one leader out of a hundred and forty countries in this world I think that could handle this challenge. So it's no wonder that the leadership was not very successful. All things considered, Thieu did pretty well.

G: It sounds to me as though you're saying that the Viet Cong, the NLF, could organize and knew the principles of organization that were appropriate in Vietnam, and the GVN didn't. I know this is oversimplifying but--

P: That's basically true. Also of course it's a lot easier to be a spoiler and a social saboteur than it is to try to keep things going--it's easier to criticize the way Reagan is running this country in terms of economic problems than to come up with a program that will work.

G: That thesis I think Walt Rostow proposed some time ago, that this is what makes the guerrilla's job so easy, all he has to do is break things up.

P: Yes.

G: Now, an alternative--I should say an antithesis--has been propounded, which is that the real secret of the NLF is they built a better structure than the GVN was able to build. In other words, they were not destroyers, they were better builders than the GVN was.

P: They were. In their own liberated areas they did an effective job of organization. This was the Dan Van program, as it's called. The GVN did not do adequate counterorganizational work in those areas. Mostly it was because they were on the defensive too much.

G: What role does ideology play in this model? Is it not really very important?

P: Ideology, Marxism-Leninism enroute to Asia underwent a sea change that emptied it of its content. This is true in China, too--Mao Tse-tung's little red book sort of thing. In Moscow if you master Marxism-Leninism you are infallible in terms of interpreting social phenomenon, history, and so on. It's a basic thesis. Asian communists don't believe that; they don't believe a lot of ideology. I've spent countless hours talking to party people, Vietnamese, about this. They simply don't believe that nothing is inherently unknowable. They don't believe in dialectical materialism. They don't believe that religion is the opiate of the people. They don't believe the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of the class conflict.

The whole notion of Marxist class conflict depends on an egalitarian basis that you just don't find in Asian societies. So what you're dealing with in Vietnamese and Asian communism is a kind of paradox. A person says he's a Marxist and is willing to fight and die for it, yet you sit there saying to yourself he isn't; he doesn't know anything about Marxism-Leninism to begin with, and when I tell him what it is he doesn't accept these things as truth.

G: What does he believe then?

P: Well, I would say to one of these Vietnamese, "Are you a member of the party?" and he would say yes. I said, "You actually took the exam?" "Yes." "Well, how did you pass? You don't know anything about Marxism." He said, "Well, the cadre told me in advance what the questions would be and what the answers would be." I said, "Well, don't you think that's kind of unethical?" He would say, "No." I don't know how many times I've heard this: "You do not have to know anything about communism to be a good communist." Now that's quite the opposite in Moscow. They would say, "It's obvious you have to know you have to absorb it, it's a body of knowledge that you have to learn." So here was a guy who said he was a good communist, but for him it was an icon on the wall that he would fight and die for. He didn't know anything about it; he argued he didn't have to know anything about it. There's no intellectual content. I write about those people and I don't know what to call them, are they communists or aren't they? Sometimes they say they are. If they say they are, that's it, I can't argue with them.

G: This is a conundrum to me. Here's a fellow, as you say, who doesn't know anything about communism, except he belongs to the party and he's willing to fight and die for that. What is he fighting and dying for?

P: Well, I've heard parallels drawn to religionists in the West, people who say "I'm a good Christian," or "[I'm] a good Catholic," or a good whatever--and others say about them, "No, he isn't, he's a lousy Christian." You reach an abstract level and you're talking about an abstraction to begin with. It's a metaphysical thing almost. You say you are a Christian and you believe in cannibalism or something, who am I to argue with you? Say your religion doesn't preach that, and you'll say, "Well, my religion does preach it." I have just come back from three weeks in Moscow and a conference with some real Marxists. There I was dealing with people who are always interpreting Lenin and quoting [Leonid] Brezhnev and so on and are committed to a kind of dogma and a doctrine in a structural view totally different from Vietnamese. There may be some at the top in Vietnam who believe, but it's just that the mind of the Asian and the mind of the Vietnamese is quite different from westerners.

G: This seems to me to be a related question. In the summer of 1963 some Buddhist monks burned themselves to death in the streets of Saigon--and I guess elsewhere, too--and this was looked on with horror here in the United States and taken as a measure of the repressiveness and therefore the reaction to the Diem regime. How did you see it from where you were?

P: Self-immolation is an ancient gesture in the Buddhist religion as a protest against actions by the state seen as against religion. Buddhists did this against the French, they did it against the Chinese a thousand years ago. They're still doing it in Vietnam today; every now and then a refugee will tell me about having witnessed a self-immolation. The Buddhists that did this believed that Diem and the GVN were engaged in programs that were harmful to Buddhism and the practice of their religion. Diem was a Catholic, of course. So self-immolation was a form of protest. Within the Buddhist religion, life here and now is held to be unimportant; this is basic Buddhist philosophy, that on the great wheel of karma whether you live or die isn't as important as if you didn't believe this. So it's an honorable thing, it's not suicide as we would look on it. It's not a kind of horrible form of suicide. It's an ennobling gesture and guarantees that you'll be reborn again on a higher plane.

G: Some Americans who had reason to know some of the inside story tend to downplay the whole idea that Diem could have been persecuting the Buddhists as a religion.

P: I don't think he did persecute them in that sense. The confrontation came in the town of Hue over the use of a radio station for broadcast of some messages prior to a very religious day. The station manager refused to allow the broadcast when a week earlier he allowed Catholics on a very holy day there to make some radio broadcasts.

G: There were some flags involved, too, weren't they?

P: There were some flags waved and a grenade was thrown by someone. That's what triggered the confrontation, although the ill will had been existing for some time. At that point the Buddhists became politicized more than they had been. They came up with their "five demands," which by objective outside view were very modest. The toughest one was the fifth one, namely that Diem apologize and indemnify victims of the radio station killing. He claimed that Buddhists had thrown the grenade or the Viet Cong had thrown it. Nobody knew, not even they knew who threw it. Our view was it didn't make that much difference; he had to settle with the Buddhists. That was our feeling. He couldn't fight the Viet Cong and the Buddhists and the Americans all at the same time. So it was strictly a question of strategy. You see, Diem's more intimate advisers--Ngo Dinh Nhu, his brother, and most importantly probably Madame Nhu--were the ones that were counseling smash the Buddhists.

G: Why do you say "more importantly Madame Nhu"?

P: Because she was very persuasive. Her main argument was--this was in 1963--she said, "You remember back in 1956 when the sects, the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao, the Binh Xuyen armies were in the streets of Saigon and the Americans were saying 'you've got to settle with these people' and we didn't settle, we smashed them? Well, same thing here. The Americans are counseling that you settle with the Buddhists and I say smash them!" That was what Nhu was saying. That's what Diem decided. And that's what destroyed Diem. He had really nobody to thank but himself for the way it went. He could have settled with the Buddhists.

They weren't even trying to bring him down; they felt they were protecting their religion. They had these five demands that were not all that unreasonable, and Diem should have acceded to them.

G: Is that in fact all the Buddhists wanted, do you think, were the five demands?

P: Buddhism in Asia has been in two mainstreams through the twentieth century. Some believe in other worldness, that a guy can be dying of hunger out in your gutter and you have no need to help him, no social responsibility, because it doesn't matter whether he lives or dies, it's all transitory. That's one kind of traditional [Buddhist thought]. This began to be challenged in this century by social conscience, when many people, Buddhists, were arguing that you did have an interest in helping him, here and now. This division tended to go by country. In some countries, being a Buddhist meant being politicized; in Sri Lanka or Ceylon, a monk shot the prime minister; that's about as far into politics as you can get. While [in] other countries, Thailand, for example, Burma, the other worldness prevailed.

In Vietnam you had something of the same struggle, dominated mostly by the other-world and nonpoliticized. What Diem effectively did was to shift and increase this political process. So throughout, the political monks like Tri Quang really wanted to get into politics, did believe in social activism, and became stronger, even after Diem was overthrown. They had been created and they continued. The split was 20 per cent sort of the Tri Quang activists, An Quang pagoda type

Buddhists and maybe 80 per cent were the more what they called the quiescent pacifists--passive Buddhists.

G: Who were the Buddhists speaking for? The reason I ask this is because I've heard it alleged that there were thousands of people perhaps in the streets in the so-called Buddhist demonstration, and it's really a misconception to think of them all as Buddhists.

P: No, I think they were all Buddhists and they all believed in what they were doing. I think they argued among themselves whether a Buddhist should be in politics as a Buddhist or not. I would argue with them, I argued with Tri Quang a number of times, about the imperative nature of secularization of politics. Politics had to be secularized; they can't be sacred based. God knows, Iran today is a classic example of what happened with sacred-based politics, where government policies are according to what the Koran tells you or what God tells you. It's not against people being religious but as in our country, if you're President John F. Kennedy, you're a president first and a Catholic second, and you don't decide issues on the basis of your religion, you decide them on the basis of the politics and state interest, national interest.

So the notion that Buddhists should be in politics as Buddhists I think is dangerous, as it is in any society where you have sacred-based politics. You simply can't run a government today on the basis of sacred-based dogma. That isn't to say that you can't have ethics, you can't be a religious person, a devout churchgoing person who is in

government, but you're in government as a secularist not as a sacred-based thinker. It's hard to divide these things. That was the great danger with the Buddhists, I felt, plus the fact they really were no equal to the communists. They had a kind of contempt for--Tri Quang had a kind of contempt for communist thinkers, dismissed them as sort of Johnny-come-latelys to the world of ideas. Compared to this great soaring religion of Buddhism, what are these people with their silly little ideas?

G: I gather you think that was a rather dangerous notion.

P: Well, now he's in house arrest, I'm not sure what he thinks about it. He thought he could outmaneuver them, that's what I think he thought; he thought he was smarter than they were.

G: Did Quang want to be in office or did he want to be a kingmaker?

P: No, I think he just wanted to be an influence. I think he wanted a government that would never make any sort of major decisions without first sort of clearing it with him or consulting him.

G: Why did he lose his base? What happened to the Buddhist movement, would you say?

P: Well, he remained--that 20 per cent-80 per cent shift remained basic, though the 20 per cent maybe dropped to about 10 or 15 per cent, mostly because Thieu I think shunted off some of the hostility that the government had exhibited for Buddhism and for the inept way they had handled it. So they cooled the Buddhists off. And then when the communists won, they disbanded these. They knew, same with the Catholic Church--they didn't go after the religion itself, they went

after the organized structure. They don't really care, I don't think, if you're still a Buddhist in Vietnam, or a Catholic. What they don't want is you to be a member of a well-knit, tightly organized, hierarchical entity that could possibly be a base for a resistance group.

G: And in the case of Buddhism this means the pagodas, is that right?

P: Yes. So they disbanded the pagodas. The Buddhist pagodas existed traditionally in Asia only at a kind of low level; there wasn't a great hierarchy like there is in the Catholic Church or other [religions]. What you have is a series of pagodas, some of them still operating, with fairly small numbers of Buddhist monks still in them. They don't represent much of a threat to the regime.

G: Does anybody represent much of a threat to the regime today?

P: Montagnards some. Hoa Hao some. The resistance in Vietnam is ubiquitous--it's all over, but it's very low grade, it's poorly organized, poorly led, terribly poorly led. And they're up against organizational experts, people who will form ostensible resistance organizations, recruit people, who will be run by the Vietnamese KGB. It's a good way of--George Orwell suggested it in 1984--you run both sides. You run the government and you run the resistance to the government.

G: And you keep the resistance defused by--

P: Well, you keep them in business doing harmless things just so you can keep your eye on them. I mean, you don't scarf them up. There are certain energies they have to expend, so you can use these to your end. You can have them do things that are very bad, like blow up a bridge that's not very important but inconveniences a lot of people,

and it turns the people against the resistance movement, a lot of things like this [inaudible].

G: What was the NLF, what were the North Vietnamese trying to do in the Tet offensive?

P: Well, I think the Tet offensive--the Tet offensive was part of what they called the 1967-68 winter-spring offensive. It was a nine-months campaign; it was divided into three separate phases. Phase one was October-November-December 1967, and that was the so-called independent--I mean concentrated fighting methods technique, attack on fairly small or medium-sized GVN or U.S. installations up the mountain chain, Duc Son, Con Thien, Loc Ninh. The idea was you try to take these out with hard blows, not a decisive battle but a kind of punitive one.

Then phase two, which was January, February and March of 1968, was called the so-called independent fighting method, lots of small operations, not very big, thirty-five of them all told. Less than an augmented company in Saigon, a squad, hit the American Embassy. But you do this all over the country. The whole country is sort of brought into the armed struggle, ablaze in armed struggle activity.

Then was to come phase three, which would be April, May and June, which was to become the kind of capper, the psychological capper. The code word in their traffic was called the second wave. It was to be a major attack against a fixed installation. It would be a kind of psychological backbreaker. It could have been Kontum, it could have been Khe Sanh, it could have been Hue, it possibly could have been Saigon. We don't ever know what the second wave was; we have never

been able to find out because probably only a couple of dozen people knew it. It never came up because in that third phase, you take these two concentrated and independent fighting methods and put them together. You build, as they say in the theater, and then you sock them with a Dien Bien Phu. That breaks their back. That was the scheme.

But the first phase did not go very well. They didn't win these battles the way they were--there was a certain punitive success and I think they felt enough to begin phase two, which turned out to be terribly bad judgment. They lost the cream of the PLAF in the streets of Saigon and the streets of--to no good end, I mean they had nothing to show for it. So then there never was a second wave, or the third phase, because it didn't develop properly. Now this was advocated by the armed struggle types and the irony is it was opposed I think by the Troung Chinhs in the political struggle as being costly, wasteful. It will gut your southern military structure and your cadre structure, which it did, but it brought down the President of the United States, it got him to throw in the towel. And so you can almost hear Troung Chinh saying, "You see, it's what I mean. You're not going to win militarily on the ground in the South. You've just proven what we've said; the way to win is in Washington."

G: There were a lot of spokesmen, including a number of military spokesmen, at the time who said that the great offensives against the cities and towns around the first of February were a sort of Battle of the

Bulge, the last throw of the dice, a desperation gamble. What do you think of that thesis?

P: Well, I don't think they were seen that way by Giap and company. I think they thought that this would kind of light the fuse. You had sort of socked them in these fixed installation battles. Now the whole country was [going to be involved in] armed struggle; there would be a general uprising, the people would rise up. And then you put all of this together and you hit them with a Dien Bien Phu and it just breaks their back and it's all over. I think that was the mental picture they had. And it's not all that out of touch with reality; it simply--it didn't work. Like a lot of things that don't work, those of us who come after say, "How in hell could they have been so dumb as to do it?"

But it didn't look that dumb on the drafting boards to start with. It was a high risk, bold gamble, but there's been a tendency--and I think I've even tended to do this--you approach that phase two in terms of people's war on standard sort of Maoist [terms]. And Lin Piao [at] almost this same time had written a piece in China called "Long Live the People's War," which was seen as a criticism of the way the Vietnamese were fighting or the communists were fighting, before the Tet offensive. You could almost hear Lin Piao, like the general at the charge of the Light Brigade, saying they're dying in the streets of Saigon, it's magnificent, but it's not people's war. You just don't send the cream of your crop of your troops in to fight house by house in a guerrilla war against superior firepower and

greater mass. It's just stupid. I think the Chinese, the Lin Piaos, couldn't understand what in God's name the Vietnamese thought they were doing there, because the whole thinking--this is a real parochialism on the Chinese part--was that they're doing everything wrong in Vietnam in terms of fighting a people's war. And I must say, in time there were many instances where I came to the same conclusion and [was] bothered with the same puzzlement.

In Dinh Tuong province, for example, there was a canal that went through the province that all traffic, including military traffic, moved over. This canal silted in, and so they had to have people that went up and down the canal hauling this muck out and throwing it on the bank. These were very poor workers, doing terrible work--they didn't get much money. They would sleep along the canal at night in Buddhist temples and wherever they could. They didn't have the money for anything better. The Viet Cong in Dinh Tuong decided the canal was a main line for military traffic; it was, and also a main line for everything else. They decided to discourage it by going into a Buddhist temple one night and machine gunning about thirty of these workers. Can you imagine Lin Piao saying, "You go into a Buddhist temple, of all places, and you kill thirty proletarians, of all people, and you call this a people's war?" The Viet Cong would have said to Lin Piao, "You don't understand how it is here. This is what we have to do to end this war." So there was a certain talking past each other.

Increasingly as the war went on that is what happened, they got further and further away from their original strategy, from their original ideals, from their original dogma, and more and more the war just passed to the North Vietnamese, who simply saw themselves fighting to win the South, for reunification of the fatherland. That was all there was to it, at the end.

G: Some people have speculated at Tet that the decision makers on the communist side were taken in by overoptimistic field reports about the ripeness of the situation.

P: Yes, we captured a lot of these after-action reports over the years. There was no doubt that--there was a good deal of that on our side, too. It wasn't outright lying or falsification of data, but it was putting a very rosy cast and picking the best possible interpretation to how things were going. It's a very common thing I think in governments all over the world.

I think it was even worse if you can judge by the stuff that we intercepted. They did create in the minds of the people in the North a very strong view that anti-Americanism was on the rise, which it was. I mean, we were charting this ourselves. It wasn't as bad as was being reported; it was being laid on thick. But the real mistake was in assuming that anti-Americanism equates with pro-Viet Congism. So a lot of people don't like the Americans and if you give them a chance for a general uprising, they won't take it. I mean, they're anti-American, they're anti-Viet Cong, they're anti-GVN, they're anti-everything else, and this is not going to translate politically--

that's the mistake the North made. I'm not sure how much of the cadre reporting was responsible for that or how much they were kidding themselves in Hanoi. Another phenomenon we saw here in Washington were people who kidded themselves about Vietnam by reading into the reports what they wanted to read and ignoring the rest of it.

G: Why did the Viet Cong attack everyplace except at Hue? It seems to me that the North Vietnamese troops went into Hue, didn't they, and stayed?

P: When, in 1968?

G: In 1968, yes.

P: Yes, there was a kind of uprising. I did the monograph on the communists at Hue, because their behavior was in some ways out of phase with what they'd done before. I was trying hard to figure out just what did happen in Hue, the massacre and everything. As far as I can tell, the communists went into Hue originally expecting to stay briefly, just in and out, a momentary occupation. Maybe some of the rank and file thought there was going to be a general uprising, but most didn't think this. They thought that they were going to be driven out or simply that casualties would be so high that it wouldn't be worth staying and [they'd] withdraw. That estimate lasted for about a week. Then the conclusion developed that they were going to stay, that this was the end of the war. Exactly why they came to that conclusion in Hue and not anywhere else isn't clear to this day. The Viet Cong I talked to afterwards said that they did think that but they weren't sure why, that it seemed like they were there and weren't

going to be driven out. Then of course they were driven out. But their behavior was different as a result. Behavior [is] different if you're going in and know you're going to leave, and if you expect to stay. They were executing some of their own supporters from the universities in that second phase. The only explanation for this was that now the new order is being established and we don't need these guys, sons of wealthy landowners, who are merely left wing and supported us. We used their support until we won, but we don't want them around once we're in power because they will turn against us eventually.

G: This is called regularizing the structure?

P: Yes.

G: Why were the North Vietnamese troops at Hue and not VC like there were everyplace else? Was there any significance to that or was it merely a tactical thing?

P: No, they did use what they had within the area. They were thin in the region, in the city. All of their infrastructure came out of the woodwork. I know a doctor in Hue who told me that his next-door neighbor whom he had known for years turned out to be a cadre. He was totally surprised by this--the man was a deep penetration cadre--and the doctor never dreamed it possible. The VC had never done anything that could be interpreted as subversive--he was a pharmacist. He had always been very careful to keep good records on his drugs so as not to be accused of supplying the Viet Cong with drugs. Of course, that's why he did it. He had to avoid suspicion. In Hue they used

North Vietnamese troops unlike the rest of the country, where the North Vietnamese sat out the Tet offensive, sat on their hands. Of course, a lot of Vietnamese believe that the North Vietnamese did that deliberately--

G: What do you think?

P: --to emasculate [the NLF]. Well, it's a little paranoid I think. But, you know, given that society, I guess it's not beyond the realm of possibility. The rationale would be that the NLF was too strong and too effective, and therefore Hanoi had this offensive to kill them off and so they won't challenge Hanoi when it wins. I don't really believe that. At the end of the war I could believe it. But they were so far from victory then [in 1968] that--I don't know, there might have been some who. . . .

G: A lot of people wonder why the--well, there are two connected questions. One is, this is a brand new move, to move in and to attack the towns and the cities on such a scale and to virtually ignore the countryside. The connected thing is, what--?

P: It had been anticipated though in a book that Giap had written a year before called Great Victory, Big Task, which if we'd only read it more carefully we would have anticipated the offensive. I read it, but I didn't read it the way I should have. You go back and read it now and it's all there, practically a blueprint of the Tet offensive.

G: Well, when you read communist documents it's sometimes a little difficult to pay attention to the key words.

P: That's right. There's so much verbiage and hype in them.

G: What happens in the countryside after the Tet offensive had died down, after the second wave was passed?

P: There was another effort, a kind of last hurrah, in June, the so-called mini-Tet. There were a number of military incidents--some by North Vietnamese. But in overall terms, what happened was the tempo of the war slowed down and stayed down for almost a year and a half. The instructions from Hanoi were to regroup, retrain, re-equip, learn the lessons, get ready for the next hurrah. That's where we should have followed up. We didn't have the national will to say "All right, now all-out air strikes in the North. Now we're thinking of invading above the DMZ, maybe taking out Vinh." It would be only a lot of big talk. But I think the political struggle types might have been strong enough in the Politburo to argue they should find out what our price for settlement would be. They wouldn't surrender, no capitulation. Rather they would tell themselves they must switch way to the most extreme kind of political struggle strategy, to get off this. . .

G: How easily did we find it to move into the countryside after Tet was over? A lot of people said that pacification is wrecked or at least set back for two years and so on.

P: There was considerable disarray. But I don't feel--it's a question of judgment--that the Tet offensive really had that much socio-political effect on the villages. The major population centers, district towns in some instances, took the brunt. The villages were just bystanders; they just sat the thing out.

G: I think it was R. K. G. Thompson who said he was astonished at the ease with which the ARVN moved back and found a vacuum in many places.

P: I don't see why he'd be so surprised. The PLAF had just been gutted. PAVN, the North Vietnamese, had never really operated much in Delta villages anyway, but certainly not in the IV Corps. To tell you the truth, I never thought much about this. I've always seen the Tet offensive, phase two, as being essentially an urban operation--that's where the action was and the villagers just were the onlookers. Much of the cadre structure in parts of the Delta weren't used in the offensive, they were still there afterwards. Nothing much changed. But the whole system was weakened. There was the VC estimate, it had to regroup. So there was retrenchment. Any area that was shaky, they pulled back from. They didn't pull back from real tough liberated areas, but even these did not stand and fight for them.

G: Was the so-called Phoenix program facilitated by the surfacing of the cadre or were they able to get most of their people out before the Phoenix people got them?

P: I'm not sure if I know how to judge that. I had nothing against it in principle. I don't see anything immoral in a war about killing people who give orders to other people to go out and die. If we could have killed the whole central committee, it would have been perfectly legitimate. As if we could have killed Hitler in 1930. I don't think there's anything immoral about doing it. Those leaders sent a million North Vietnamese down the trail never to come back. Why should they be sacrosanct? Just because they order other people to

die doesn't mean they're immune. So there's nothing wrong in principle. Also it is sound strategically if implemented right. Phoenix was based on the experience in Malaysia where they went for the head. The British had a card file of all the communist terrorists--CT--leaders. They knew where they were, and they tried by all means--bribe them, buy them out, get them assassinated--to get them to quit. They wanted to cut off the head of the snake. That was the principle in Phoenix. I think it had some effect. I think it's very hard to come to an objective judgment on this. Ralph Johnson, who is here in town at G.W., is doing his thesis--he's an ex-CIA guy who was in the Phoenix program, and he's doing what I think will be the definstudy of the Phoenix program. I look forward to reading it.

G: Is it George Washington University?

P: No, he's at American U. Unless he takes some courses at G.W., I've seen him over there. Anyway, he's doing a very long work on it.

G: Did you ever hear complaints that Phoenix was going after the wrong people?

P: Well, yes, especially when it was turned back to the Vietnamese. When the CIA was running it, as I understand, they built in every protection that they could think of to prevent it from being used by somebody on the GVN side as a device to get rid of political opposition, a province chief who wants to get rid of someone who's not a Viet Cong. That's the danger, of course, in that kind of a program; it is potentially subject to enormous abuse and disservice, and I have no doubt that there were instances where this did happen.

G: The same charges were made about Diem's denunciation of [the] communism movement, weren't they, in the late fifties?

P: And the same thing was used on the other side to party people that would get rid of factional bondi [?], what they call faction-bashing [?], on the grounds that they were Diem agents or CIA agents. You know, you could secure a district or a province level security official who for some reason wants to get rid of another guy, and he just fakes the evidence against him. Then the charge is made and he denies it. Who knows for sure? It's a very shadowy world in espionage, intelligence, counterintelligence. You're never sure who's on what side. It's simply subject to a lot of potential misuse.

G: You noted in Viet Cong--I'm switching a little bit here--that one of the things you wished you'd been able to address but didn't have any evidence on was the business of how internal conflicts in the NLF were resolved, or concerning the nature of the conflicts themselves. Have you learned any more on that since then?

P: Well, I think they made an effort there and in the North later and today to have what we might call consensus policies or collective leadership in which the ruling group, the seventeen people who run Vietnam today, the heart of the Central Committee in the South, maybe six or seven people during the war on the nonmilitary side--the military command in it was excepted. But on the political struggle decisions, it was run by six or seven people that would never take a decision that was a total anathema to any one of them. They all had to agree to go along. One guy might not like a decision very much,

but this wasn't a personal thing, it was mostly his constituency. He represented certain elements and he had to go back to them and defend this policy. Some things he'd just say, "They won't buy it. I just can't sell it. So we can't do it." He'd try and make an adjustment. Or there would be a tradeoff. "You agree to this and we will agree to that later," or "we'll give you this," so he could go back and use that as a tradeoff.

G: That sounds remarkably like the process in the administration back in Washington of getting people aboard before we make a [decision]. You have to have the Joint Chiefs aboard, you have to have [Robert] McNamara aboard, and so on.

P: Yes. Well, I've even heard it likened to the so-called Calhoun Doctrine in the U.S. Senate, which was operative after the American Civil War, namely that even though the Senate had the votes on race matters, or things involving blacks, and could have rammed laws through the Senate, it was the sense of the Calhoun Doctrine that because you got the votes you could pass laws which the southern senators don't like and denounce and get bitterly angry about, but not those a total anathema to them. I mean, they can, on the bottom line, live with it. If it's beyond that, you just don't do it. You know, it's not an unusual principle in politics.

The thing is that the NLF and the Viet Cong, as the war went on, began to count for less and less in the scheme of things. They didn't make the decisions. The whole emphasis on what counted in decision-

making shifted to the North. That's what we were trying to understand there and still are in my mind.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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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, Douglas Pike of Berkely, California do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted on June 4, 1981 at Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

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

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

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

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

Douglas Pike
Donor

JAN 24, 1986
Date

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

2-21-86
Date