INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 26, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: HARRISON SALISBURY

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE MULHOLLAN

PLACE: Mr. Salisbury's office, New York Times, New York City

Tape 1 of 1

M: Let's begin by simply identifying you, sir. You're Harrison Salisbury, and you've been with the New York Times for at least all the years of the Johnson Administration and--

S: Yes, indeed.

M: --many years before that.

S: About twenty years.

M: I know you're primarily connected with foreign news. Did you cover Mr. Johnson at all closely before he was vice president, back in the Senate years?

S: No. I've never covered Mr. Johnson, actually. I was not in Washington during the period very much, except occasionally during that period. I was abroad most of that time. When I was in Washington, it would be on foreign policy things, basically, rather than domestic politics. However, I did cover the 1960 campaign; I covered President Kennedy, I covered Mr. Nixon alternately, and I covered Lodge. But I never covered Johnson.

M: One of the four you missed out on.

S: The only one I missed.

M: Is it fair, at least in your impression at the time being a foreign correspondent and concerned mostly with foreign policy, [to say] that it was accurate that Mr. Johnson simply wasn't very interested in nor very close to foreign policy decisions at that time?

S: This was certainly my understanding. While I was actually in this country most of the time beginning from 1960 on, except for occasional trips abroad, it didn't seem to me that he was participating very strongly, except for occasional projects which the President, Mr. Kennedy, sort of set Mr. Johnson on. I didn't have a feeling that he was a participant in the foreign policy field particularly.

M: You weren't involved in any of his foreign trips, by any chance?

S: No, I was not.

M: Either to Vietnam or to Berlin?

S: No, no.

M: Your most famous association, of course, is the one that came in December of 1966 in connection with your visit to Hanoi.

S: That's right.

M: I know that you've written a full book as well as your dispatches, and you've testified before the Foreign Relations Committee.

S: That's right.

M: I don't intend that you duplicate a lot of what you've said then, but I think this is an important episode. Were there any special conditions of your issuance of visa that you haven't reported?

S: Not particularly, but I might recast it, because it is interesting in retrospect. I went out to the Far East in the spring of 1966

accompanied by my wife. We left the country toward the middle of April, I think it was. This was designed to be a lengthy trip in which I would try to go all the way around the periphery of China writing stories, basically about China and what you could learn from it from the vantage point of a whole series of different countries, which is an interesting operation. Because so far as I've been able to find out, nobody has ever attempted it before or since. Now that was the primary purpose of the trip, but there was a secondary or equally important purpose. It was to attempt, by means of contacts in the various countries that I hoped to visit, to get into China if possible or lay the groundwork for getting into China. Then a third purpose, but this was really tertiary, was to see if it would be possible to get into North Vietnam. A fourth and very minor purpose was the possibility of getting into North Korea. But this really didn't interest me very much.

So preliminary to that trip and before going abroad I had the State Department clear my passport for travel to China, North Vietnam and North Korea. Mrs. Salisbury's passport was similarly cleared. That was all that there was of a preliminary nature concerning this particular trip. At the time this was done by the State Department it was done very routinely, just as they have done this, I suppose, hundreds or certainly scores of times for other correspondents going out on similar ventures.

M: Nothing in the way of briefings?

S: No, nothing. There was not back and forth between the department and

myself since this was just a gleam in my eye, which they very well understood. The trip progressed more or less according to plan. I did go all the way around China, didn't get into China. So far as Vietnam was concerned, when I got to Cambodia, to Phnom Penh--this would have been early in June 1966--I met with the North Vietnamese diplomats there in their embassy in Phnom Penh and made a formal application to go to Hanoi. I got a very favorable reception from them. They said that they thought that it would be possible, might be possible at any rate, that we could go into Hanoi right then, within the next couple of weeks. I was terribly heartened by this. They had to communicate with Hanoi, of course, on this question. So Mrs. Salisbury and myself spent about ten days seeing the sights of Cambodia, just wasting time really, waiting for a response to come back from Hanoi.

Well, when it came back toward the latter part of June it was negative. They said they were terribly sorry, but because of circumstances which they didn't describe it was not possible to do it at that time. But they hoped that it might be possible at some future date. I interpreted that actually as a refusal, although they were being polite about it, and I frankly had very little hope that anything was going to be forthcoming in the future. So we went on and continued our trip around China, coming back to this country in August. When I got back here I sent letters to Hanoi to Pham Van Dong and possibly Ho, I can't remember at this point. This is sort of a customary exercise in correspondence which I conduct all the time

with various countries which I'm trying to get into--the same with China and even with North Korea, although I don't pay much attention to that--just to sort of keep the iron in in case the situation might change. There was no reaction at all from them then nor later during the fall. I don't recall now whether I communicated with them; I think I did again perhaps send a cable in October just saying, "We'd still be delighted to come."

M: We'd still be interested.

S: No response at all. Then toward the end or maybe the middle of November I sent either a letter or a cable, suggesting that if there was going to be another Christmas truce this might be a good opportunity. There was no response to that.

M: You hadn't been in correspondence with the State Department at all on this?

S: No, there was nothing, no correspondence whatsoever about any of this. That was where it rested until around the--I can't remember the exact dates. It's all in my book.

M: Yes.

S: Around the fifteenth or sixteenth of December I suddenly received a cable from Hanoi saying that a visa was waiting for me in Paris if I was still interested in coming over, which of course I was. I then went over and picked up the visa.

Now there's one other circumstance about this which is important, I think, to establish in the chronology of these events. When I got to Hanoi, where I arrived on the twenty-fourth of December--

M: Don't let me interrupt you, but the State Department did not brief you in any way before you left?

S: No, no indeed. We consulted here in the office, Mr. Daniel and Mr. Catledge, the managing editor and the executive editor, and myself, and Mr. Reston, who was still down in Washington, was brought in on this. We consulted about procedures on this, and we decided that it was preferable not to bring the government or the State Department in in any way, because this might give the thing some official aura which it didn't have. It was best simply to go off, keeping it purely a news operation, which, of course, it was. So there was no consultation.

M: There was no fear that they might try to either restrain you from going . . .?

S: No, obviously not. Since the position of the department had been made very clear on a number of occasions, that if you could get a visa to Hanoi and your passport was cleared, why, that was perfectly all right with them. So it was no concern on our part in that respect. It was simply a matter of not getting it involved in official policy and not turning it into a quasi-diplomatic mission of some kind, in which we didn't want to involve ourselves. And I'm sure the government wouldn't have wanted to either.

M: Did you consider yourself as having a particular viewpoint on the general Vietnam involvement at that time?

S: No. No.

M: Okay.

S: My mission in going out there, and the whole project, of course, had been discussed by our top management before I ever went out to the Far East in the spring, was that if we could get a reporter in. . . Actually, I was not the only one who was applying for Vietnam. Seymour Topping, our foreign editor now, but who was then our correspondent in Hong Kong, had engaged in a parallel series of negotiations, which is again, I might say, customary procedure around here. There are always two or three of us attempting to get into China, any difficult place. Anybody who has a chance of getting in, why, that's fine, that's what we like to do. So, as I say, I went on out there.

But what I started to point out was this: several days after arriving in Hanoi, when I was having lunch with the head of the press department, he said, "Mr. Salisbury, we're delighted to have you here, particularly because we thought that you had lost interest in coming to Hanoi." I said, "Why did you think that? I sent you many communications." He said, "Well, because you didn't respond when we cabled you about the visa." I said, "I certainly did. I sent you a cable immediately as soon as your cablegram was received in the office. I came in that morning. It was waiting for me, and we immediately drafted a telegram and sent it right back." "Oh, yes, but that was the second cablegram we had sent to you." I said, "I don't know what you're talking about. I only got one cablegram." He said, "We sent you an earlier cablegram a couple of weeks before we sent the second one, and we got no reply to it. We thought this meant you were not interested in coming. Then we decided to send

another cablegram just to be sure, because we didn't get any response from you."

I said, "Well, where did you send this cablegram?" He said, "We sent it to the address of your newspaper in Paris." At this time, the Times was still publishing an international edition in Paris. I said, "What address did you send it to?" He had a copy of the international edition there, and he opened it up and said, "Right here." What they had done was to send the cable to me at the cable address in Paris that we use for receiving subscriptions and advertisements. What in heavens name ever happened to the original cable I don't know. Because as soon as I got back to this country, I immediately called up Sydney Gruson, the publisher of the paper, and said, "For God's sake, Sydney, I almost didn't get to Hanoi because the first cablegram these people sent me never was received." I explained to him what had happened, and he said, "Oh, my God!"

M: Hanoi probably got a subscription to the international edition of the Times.

S: So he immediately launched an investigation. He never could find this cable. Now this is just a sidelight, except for one circumstance. You'll find in the book which the Washington Post correspondent and the Los Angeles Times correspondent wrote about Marigold, the secret negotiations which were handled largely by Ambassador Lodge, an assertion there, somebody from--I think they don't name the person--the State Department, saying that my mission to Hanoi wrecked the

Marigold negotiations and that the Vietnamese were not interested once they found that I was coming out to Hanoi, or once they decided to invite me. Recently, three weeks ago, I was in Paris, and I was talking to Ambassador Lodge. He said that he had an interesting observation that he wanted to tell me about. He had been told by a very highly placed communist, it was from a highly placed communist source, this same story.

M: He didn't say what nationality?

S: He didn't say, but the implication of his conversation was that it was somebody from Vietnam. [The source said] they had broken off the Marigold thing because they decided to invite me to Hanoi and try publicity rather than the peace negotiations. Well, he may have been told this story, but it simply does not fit the timetable. Because the first Marigold meeting was set up for, I think, the fifth or sixth of December.

M: The sixth of December in Warsaw.

S: And it was broken off because of bombing raids that were the second and third of December, I believe, raids that were so inconsequential, as far as we were concerned, that they were hardly reported in the paper. I didn't even know about them when I went out to Hanoi. Then, as you know, on the thirteenth and fourteenth there were again raids, and the thing finally was killed. Well, the telegram citing that the visa was waiting for me was not received in this office until either the sixteenth or seventeenth, I haven't got the timetable right now.

M: But after, it was--

S: But it was after this whole sequence occurred. In other words, it is impossible to correlate these two things, that is to say my visit to Hanoi as having had any connection with the Marigold business, because the Marigold business was then off by the time the telegram was sent to me.

M: It wouldn't have been off by the time the first cable was sent to you.

S: It would have been off the first time around, yes. It would have been off.

M: Two weeks before? Back up two weeks from the sixteenth and--

S: Well, we don't know exactly--

M: --this was the second or third. You don't know when the cable was sent?

S: We don't know exactly what date the cable was, because we've never been able to find this damned cable, see. But in any event, so far as I'm concerned, as far as we've been able to discover, there is no relationship between the two things. And this is what I told Lodge in the conversation. I've pointed out, too, another circumstance which I think militates against that theory anyway, and this is that while I received my visa in the middle of December, I really was only one in a whole sequence of people who were receiving visas at that particular time. This did not include in December, well, it did include in December, two Americans. But the first person in the sequence that I know about was the correspondent from Le Monde, who came out to Vietnam at the end of October, I believe, and he stayed about a month. He was first in South Vietnam and then came

to North Vietnam. His articles were running in Le Monde when I came through Paris in December to pick up my visa and go on myself. There was also a German correspondent in Vietnam at the time I arrived there.

M: A West German?

S: Yes. He had come in like ten days or two weeks before I was there. Then, as you probably know . . . What's his name? Harry . . .?

M: Ashmore and Baggs?

S: Yes. They were engaged in this thing, and they arrived actually the same day I left Vietnam. This was early in January. So that to my way of thinking, there is a sequential progress of these visas which would indicate a decision on the part of Hanoi at some time considerably earlier, let's say in October, to admit a certain number of people from the West. From what I know of the way they are able to operate in the press department of the foreign office, it is inconceivable to me that they would be able to make a decision so quickly on one day Marigold is off, the next day they start inviting people. They just don't do things that rapidly.

M: Not that rapidly and decisively.

S: That's just a sidelight.

M: I think that's important, because the charge has been, you know.

S: It was made, and obviously someone circulated this idea around. I just don't think it holds up in the light, in examining the circumstances.

M: Did Hanoi understand, or the people you met there understand that your visit was entirely in a news sense and had no diplomatic

[purpose]?

S: Oh, yes. They most assuredly did.

M: They didn't suspect that you were--

S: Oh yes, they did suspect. Oh yes, they certainly suspected this. I suppose they continued to suspect it all the way through the visit, because it's inconceivable to them, and they're not alone in this in the communist world, that a representative of a newspaper like the Times is not in some fashion a government representative. All of us have encountered this many, many times. These people being more backward, more naive, and really with much less experience with anything about the West or newspapermen or anything like that, found it extremely difficult to believe that I could come out there without being in some fashion a representative of the government. I went out of my way repeatedly, in every conversation that I had with every official there, to attempt to explain that I wasn't a representative of the government, that my newspaper was not a supporter of the government policy on Vietnam, and that there was no connection between myself and the State Department or the newspaper and the government. But I don't think it would be fair to say that they really believed this.

M: If they had been talking to the American administration at that time, then they would have believed that a Times man had little contact.

S: But this just did not get through their minds. I think it's fair to assume that while a man like Pham Van Dong, the prime minister, certainly paid lip service to this, he didn't really believe it.

Consequently in his conversation, if not in the conversation of the lower echelons, he reflected an attitude that he was talking, at least, to an intermediary with the government.

M: Did you know about Marigold at the time?

S: No, I had absolutely no knowledge of any of that. I had not known of the bombing of the second and third of December at all; this had escaped me completely. I was only generally aware that there had been bombing on the thirteenth and fourteenth, which I knew Hanoi had contended had hit the city. But of course I had no detailed knowledge of that at all. This happened just before I left. There had been absolutely no rumors about Marigold or anything of that kind.

In retrospect, the only clue that I had was one reference which Pham Van Dong made in the course of the long conversation that I had with him, which must have been on the third or fourth of January. In the course of this talk, I forget exactly how the subject came up, I was talking about the possibility of secret, private negotiations, which I believed then and always have thought was the basic way to approach this kind of problem. I said that I thought that obviously through that route each side could feel freer to express its views and try and reach some understanding. He answered a little bit sharply on this and said that if I knew what he knew I wouldn't speak so optimistically on that particular subject. That's the general sense of his words. You'll find it in the text of the interview. I didn't know what he was referring to. Later on, much later on,

because Marigold didn't surface for a year after that, as soon as I heard about it then I realized that it must have been a reference to what had been going on just prior to my visit.

M: You didn't pursue it at the time?

S: (Laughter)

M: I know exactly what you mean. I listen to these transcripts, and I see a point where there's an obvious question that I should have asked somebody that I didn't do.

S: Well, I didn't know what he was talking about, so I had to pass it by.

M: Did they make it clear that the bombings of the thirteenth and the fourteenth in their opinion--did they hint at least that they might be political? The curious nature of the targets is what made me wonder about that. You mentioned in the Senate hearings, I believe, that they were reasonably inconsequential targets. Well, the bridge wasn't--

S: Political in a general sense. Their attitude at that time, as I recall it, in discussing the bombings was that in their view they were designed to affect their morale more than to actually cause severe military damage. This was the line they were putting out. They were taking the attitude that their morale could not be affected by this kind of thing. I don't think that they advanced the theory that we had some broad political motivation there. I don't recall it if they did.

M: Was there ever any mention about earlier peace initiatives that are now known about that occurred prior to the Marigold?

S: No, there wasn't. But I did know in general something of the efforts in 1965.

M: Yes.

S: That would be the time of the long halt. That was 1965?

M: Right, 1965.

S: I knew in general about that, but there was no reference to that, no detailed discussion of it. There might have been a casual reference, but nothing of any consequence about that.

M: Did they have anything to say about what their personal impression or their personal belief about Mr. Johnson was?

S: Yes, they did. In that respect there is something interesting that I haven't reported, although I may, I'm thinking about writing perhaps a little piece for Foreign Affairs, to put on record some of the off-the-record things that were told me by Pham Van Dong. He was talking about Mr. Johnson. In speaking of him, and I quote his words in general, and this is almost exactly what he said, "I'm sorry to say this, Mr. Salisbury, but we've come to the conclusion that we cannot always believe Mr. Johnson. We can't always believe your President. He does not always tell the truth." He said this with an attitude of seeming, you know, more in pain than in anger, though I heard very harsh things said about Mr. Johnson in their propaganda and their under officials. But he made this statement in those terms. Then the ground rules under which I talked to him were that I would write my story about this talk and submit it, and if they had any objections they would raise them. I included

this direct quote, his characterization of Mr. Johnson, and that was cut out by his secretary or by himself. He didn't want to put it on record.

M: He didn't indicate a specific instance where he [thought Johnson misled him]?

S: No, he didn't. I would have to go back to my notes to make certain of this, but I believe that it came in rather close conjunction to that remark that he made to me, if I knew what he knew I wouldn't be so sanguine about the possibility of settling things through private talks.

M: Are you fairly determined that you're going to write this article?

S: Yes, I think so, because I think enough time has passed now. I might say that I gave a full report of all of this detail to Secretary Rusk.

M: You're anticipating one or two questions down the line.

S: But I've never published it, and I didn't consider that it should be published since Pham Van Dong put these various most important parts of the conversation off the record. So I never did refer to them except to Rusk. But I think enough time has passed and people are now interested in reconstructing the record of just what was going on at that particular time. So I think it's worthwhile.

M: Did Hanoi send what you thought was a message back with you due to their suspicion that you must have something to do with the government?

S: Yes, in effect they did exactly that. I was certain that that was

what Pham Van Dong was doing, and then my certainty was confirmed when he promptly took it out of my story.

M: That was a good check. Was that a hopeful message that he sent back, in your opinion?

S: Yes, it was, in essence, I don't want to go into detail on this now until I've made up my mind about publication.

M: Well, you can hold this off as long as you want.

S: I realize that. But I don't have the texts here with me, and it's better not to talk about it precisely without the text. But the essence of it was that they were in fact prepared to begin secret conversations in spite of all the things that had happened. They were prepared to do it immediately and without any preconditions, which was pretty important.

M: Yes, pretty specific, too. Then you came back, and you say you talked to Secretary Rusk.

S: Yes.

M: Was that the first debriefing, or did you go up the line?

S: I'll tell you what happened. Shortly after I got to Hanoi I made contact with the British Consul there. I met all of the diplomats there, the French and the Indian and the Russians and whoever was around, the Canadians of course. But I particularly sought out the British Consul, because I thought it might be useful to have a channel of communication which I could use if I needed it for some reason. I had no idea what might happen in this situation. It was really very funny, because this poor fellow was all alone--he ordi-

narily had a clerk to help him--and my arrival in Hanoi was just like having a blizzard descend on him. Because the cables just never stopped coming in from the Foreign Office, reporting on what was going on. He had to decode all of this and then encode all of his material himself, and he was unable really to leave the code room of this little rabbit warren where his consulate was. But anyway, after I had been there for about a week or so he got a message from Rusk, forwarded through the Foreign Office from Rusk, suggesting that if I wanted to use this means of communicating with him, that it was open to me. Well, I had already opened it up myself, but anyway, this was Rusk--

M: They were watching?

S: Yes. He was asking if I had anything I wanted to send back, to send it back that way. Then, before I left I got another message. Rusk actually was attempting to communicate in several different ways. He got in touch with our publisher, with Punch Sulzberger, and raised the question with Punch as to whether or not I was asking the right questions in Hanoi. He didn't elucidate what the right questions might be, but then Sulzberger and Reston consulted on this, and they sent me a cablegram which suggested some questions to raise. They were all questions I had raised, but it was phrased in such a way that I understood that this was in essence something that Washington had initiated.

M: These are questions regarding the intentions of holding talks?

S: Regarding their attitude, position, and actually the number one question which was always on Rusk's mind: were they willing to admit that they had troops in the South. So then before I left I got another message through the British Consul, suggesting that if I wanted to I could stop off in Hong Kong and talk to the Consul General there; if I had anything important he would relay it back to Washington. Actually, I came out of Hanoi about the eighth or ninth of January of 1967, and I went down to Phnom Penh, coming out with an ICC plane. I stopped over there for about forty-eight hours, really to write, because in addition to spot stuff I was writing a series of seven or eight pieces, too. I wanted to get this done as much as possible before I surfaced anyplace where I knew I would be subject to a barrage of interviews. So I got most of the writing done there, and then I went up to Hong Kong and stayed another forty-eight hours to finish it up. I went over and saw the Consul in Hong Kong and told him that I did indeed have something I was going to tell Rusk about, but I preferred to wait and tell him personally because there were a lot of nuances that went with it.

M: You had not cabled that message at that point?

S: No. It would be preferable to talk to him personally about it. Then I continued back to the United States and got back without talking to the press about any of these things.

Then I arranged to go down and see the Secretary, I believe, let's see, two or three days after I got back, as soon as I could conveniently do it. This was rather interesting, because it had

been arranged through Scotty Reston that I would come down and talk to the Secretary. My understanding was that this would be completely confidential, because it was confidential information that I had, and I had no desire to make it public. Well, there was some kind of fluttering around down there about how confidential it would be. Rusk seemed to be afraid that if I came down and talked to him that it would become known in Washington in some fashion. Somebody would see me coming into the department or something like that.

As it turned out, I went down and went to the department, and nobody saw me arrive at Rusk's office. But lo and behold, I found that the press officer of the State Department was going to participate in this discussion along with the Secretary and Bill Bundy. The meeting started out with Rusk saying, "Well, we ought to have an understanding about the ground rules." I said, "I don't think we need any ground rules, because this is a confidential discussion, and I don't think it should be given any publicity." He said, "But it already is known publicly, at least a couple of people from the Times know about it." He meant Reston, I suppose. And I said, "Yes, but we're not going to write anything about it."

He seemed to be quite surprised about this, and there was some back and forth about it. But I was very firm about not having anything said, so the press guy then left the meeting. Rusk and Bundy and I went on with our conversation, which was basically on two or three important points. One was my overall impression of their situation, both militarily and psychologically; [another was] the

effect of the bombing on their war effort and their general posture; and then [a third was] the essential ingredients of the Pham Van Dong talk which had been put off-the-record by him, which constituted in essence the message which he wanted me to convey, obviously, to Rusk.

M: Are you doing most of the talking at this meeting?

S: Well I did, except for an odd circumstance that the Secretary, whom I've known for many, many years and I knew very well, seemed to feel that this should be a debate between him and me. He kept sort of making speeches about various things, which I didn't answer because I was not interested in debating the Secretary about our Vietnam policy. I was trying to deliver my impressions and the message, because it was very important for him to know this. He seemed to be kind of puzzled about that. I didn't pick these things up and argue with him. I was not there to argue, I was there to report on these things. So after several of these sort of incursions, in which he was giving me information that he had about what was really happening down there and so forth and so on, which I said was very interesting, he finally sort of came off of that and listened to my conversation with Bill Bundy.

Bill Bundy was very much interested in all kinds of operative questions, and we had a very good exchange about, I think, all the important things that there were to talk about as far as the Vietnam situation was concerned. I had the feeling by the time this meeting was over that Bundy had a very clear picture of what there was to know

that hadn't been reported and how that fitted in with the general overall business of my dispatches.

M: Were they critical of those dispatches during the conversation?

S: No, there was no criticism of the dispatches. Even the Secretary, who certainly was critical of the dispatches, didn't express any criticism. As I say, except he attempted to engage in some debate of fundamental points about Vietnam policy, which I didn't engage in. Because, as I say, I didn't expect to change the Secretary's mind, and I didn't think he was going to change mine. But there was no criticism whatsoever and no critical remarks. It was an informational discussion, and I was well satisfied with what I had been able to outline to them. I was not satisfied with the Secretary, because I had a feeling that he himself was so preoccupied with sort of the debate over Vietnam that he wasn't really interested in the very important information, and it was important information, which I had brought back to him.

M: But Bundy, you think, did get it?

S: Bundy got it perfectly well, listening with all his ears.

M: He's a very impressive man. I had a very long session with him, extremely able.

S: I saw him just last week. He was just leaving the department for M.I.T.

M: Yes, on the way for a summer vacation in British Columbia on the way.

S: That's right.

M: It sounded pretty nice to me. It was ninety-three [degrees] that

day, or something.

S: He seemed to be in very good spirits.

M: Right. Did you talk to anybody from the White House, on the White House staff?

S: No. This is an interesting and I think rather sad thing. I thought that I should talk to the President, because it seemed to me that I had information that would be useful to him regardless of how his emotions might have been aroused by the trip. After all, he should want to know what the hell things were like from somebody who had been out to see it. This was Reston's view as well. He immediately got onto Bill Moyers about this. Well, Bill thought this also. Unfortunately, this came just in the last--I forget whether it was the last couple of weeks of Bill's tenure in the White House, but it was just coming up to the time he was leaving. And I don't think his relations were too good with the President at that particular time. In any event, he put the thing up and got a negative back from the President.

Scotty then tried again to set something up, I think working through Walt Rostow. But all this produced was that Rostow said he would be delighted to talk to me but the President didn't want to talk to me. I said I wasn't interested in talking to Walt because I knew perfectly well, I know Walt very well, that it would be <u>him</u> telling me what was going on. It was just a silly exercise. So we made another pass, after a couple of weeks, at trying to get something done with the President, but it was obvious that he just didn't want

to do it.

At that same time, Fulbright and his committee got to me and wanted me to come down and talk to them. I was a little reluctant to do it, but then decided that it was probably sort of the kind of thing you have to do in the national interest. So I did go down and talk to him. I talked to his committee, and while I was down there he raised the question about the President and whether or not I had talked to him. I said that unfortunately I had been unable to get to him. He fussed about that and said he might do something about it, but nothing ever came out of it. So the end result was that I did not see the President, and I think this was very unfortunate.

In this connection, when Baggs and Ashmore came back they came back right on top of me and actually were down in Washington going through much of the same sort of rounds, although they never talked to Rusk. They talked to Bundy, and I guess they talked to Harriman; I don't remember really who all they talked to. But they wanted to talk to the President as well and got nowhere. The White House didn't want to see them. These fellows, who were both I guess active Democrats as well as editors, both knew Johnson. I didn't know Johnson of course. They felt kind of upset about that, and they went up to talk to Fulbright. Bill told me, and you might want to, you probably will check these things out with Bill--

M: You are talking about Bill Baggs?

S: I'm talking about Bill Baggs. Fulbright said, "Well, you ought to go and talk to the President. He just ought to talk to people who

have come back from Vietnam, whether he agrees with you or not." They said they would like very much to do it. And he said, "Anything I can do, I will try and do it." Then Fulbright was in the White House a day or two later, apparently, for some formal occasion, and he did have a chance to talk to the President; at least this is what Baggs said. He raised the question with the President, and he said, "Look, here's Ashmore and Baggs, who went over to Vietnam, and these are fellows you know. They're good Democrats, and they worked for you and all that sort of thing. You ought to have them down here to the White House." The President said, "Well, gee, Bill, I'd certainly like to see them, but I just can't see everybody that comes back from Hanoi!"

M: That was three by then, right?

S: Well, that may be an apocryphal story, but it's a pretty good one.

M: It sounds like it's probably accurate!

S: In any event, he didn't see anybody who came back from Hanoi.

M: Fulbright's influence wasn't the highest at the White House at that point.

S: It was not terribly high at that point.

M: Fulbright's my senator, and I know him pretty well, too; I understand some of his difficulties about that point. Did you ever get the idea that some of the now-surfaced talks or attempts at talks that happened immediately after that, particularly in early February, had anything to do with what you had brought back?

S: I don't know exactly what went on in early February. I know there were some efforts to get things going. And of course I know, as everybody does, about the Kosygin business and the Wilson business in London, which I thought fitted the whole pattern of this thing. Actually, Baggs and Ashmore had much the same kind of information as I had. I don't think it was as precise as mine, but it was in the same general pattern.

M: Of course, we can't, unfortunately, check with Baggs anymore. We will be seeing Ashmore.

S: That's right. You can with Ashmore. Ashmore has the record of it. Perhaps they've even published it. I'm not sure.

M: Yes, they have already published it.

S: But then from some other source, much the same kind of information came through, I think, at about that same time. But it was my feeling that in evaluating this. . . And I did talk to Bundy several times on the phone; I didn't go down and see him again, but I talked to him two or three times in the immediate weeks thereafter as various things came on. He called me up or I called him. I had the feeling that the President undoubtedly was getting some of this, it was coming through to him. But at the same time he was also getting a line of evaluation from the military which was evaluating this information in a negative way so far as negotiations were concerned. That is to say, and I actually did talk to a couple of military myself and I heard this evaluation, that if indeed it was true that they were prepared to have secret talks, no conditions, no holds barred,

this had to mean that they were really on the ropes, they were about to cave in. Therefore, "Why bother? Just give them another big slug, and we won't have any problem."

M: Fifteen minutes more.

S: That's right. I had a feeling that this was sort of what was going on behind the scenes, but I can't really confirm it.

M: How much of the critical outcry that greeted your dispatches do you think originated with government sources? Do you think there was a systematic attempt to discredit you?

S: Oh, I don't think it was too systematic. But certainly Art Sylvester at the Pentagon, who was the guy who was really on the spot, because it was the Pentagon's version of the bombing which had suddenly blown up in his face, was certainly looking around frantically for any kind of counter to soften the blow that had come their way. It was he who initiated the line about my not having sourced some of the casualty figures in Nam Dinh, which then was blown up and beaten around quite a bit.

M: An entirely specious distraction as far as--

S: Well, it was a very amusing thing in retrospect. Because about a week later Sylvester was, after he looked to see what the casualty figures actually were that I used--found him in an answer to somebody or other pointing out that, "Well, this just goes to show how accurate our bombing is, because there were only sixty-one people killed in Nam Dinh in a period of eighteen months. That's how far this is off." But anyway, he and I guess a couple of his aides were the

principal instigators of the sort of counter wave of propaganda.

But I don't believe, I may be mistaken, that this came from the White House or from the State Department. I didn't see any comments of that nature. There were some private comments, I know, from some of the people in the department, and perhaps there were in the White House, too. I've heard that the atmosphere was really very thick over in the White House, and some of the New York Times correspondents were not too welcome for a while. But I don't believe they said anything publicly that added to this thing. I think it was almost entirely Sylvester in the Pentagon.

M: Was there any, from your knowledge, what was just outright dishonesty used in trying to counter your dispatches?

S: I wouldn't say it was dishonesty, I think it was deviousness. It was, you know, looking for any kind of a debating point. I regard that as fairly legitimate public relations practice. If you're in a corner, as Sylvester was, you've got to do something to get out of it, you see. And certainly I left him a loophole, so he used it.

M: Where did they think that a Hanoi byline's documentation was going to come from?

S: That was our answer to it, but it didn't [help]. You know, people who didn't want to believe this [won't]. There were plenty of people who later came to believe it, you know, but they didn't want to in that first shock. They were delighted to have some kind of a rationale that would enable them to be mad at the guy who had brought the bad news.

M: What about the reaction to your book when that came out? Was there another round of [criticism]?

S: No. By this time, and this is a fascinating thing about public opinion in this country . . . I wrote the book very rapidly, and it came out with great rapidity, too. I think it was out in April or about the first of May of 1967. And as soon as I got it done there were a million people who wanted me to talk. I went out and must have given fifty or sixty talks all over the country in the six weeks following. This would be, say, in March and April. I noticed that I could even see in that period of time, from the beginning to the end of that period, the dimunition of the critical remarks. At the start there would be somebody in every audience who would raise the question about, "Why didn't you source the casualty figures? Don't you think you were playing into the hands of Hanoi's propaganda?" These were the two principal questions. But by the end of that period, there were many talks in which these questions were not raised.

I do a lot of lecturing anyway, and I continued to do it because of the interest in Hanoi. I was talking about Vietnam most of the time, went on during the summer, and then by the fall this had practically vanished from the public consciousness. It was quite obvious that opinion in the country had simply moved along so far that people were not challenging this kind of thing at all anymore, at least the number of them was radically diminished. It was quite a striking thing to see how quickly, in essence, the country sort of moved out in this direction.

M: But you didn't get any flak from the White House again?

S: No, no. I never got any flak from the White House at all, really, in any form, directly. The only thing that I know of that the Times ever got was some kind of wry grins and wisecracks made by a few people, and a coldness. But, you know, the President was not very fond of the Times anyway.

M: Yes. That didn't start with you.

S: You would probably notice that. So this simply, really, sort of reinforced the kind of convictions he already had. But the President in his relations with the Times, as in his relations with everybody, might be sore as hell, but you know the next day there might be something or other that would cause him to just turn on the old charm and be on the telephone to Reston and, "Gee whiz, Scotty, why didn't you ask me about this before you wrote that column? Call me up anytime!"

M: Was there any government responsibility or activity in the affairs surrounding the Pulitzer Prize award?

S: No, I don't think so. That was a straight reaction on the part of people who had positions on Vietnam and who voted their positions.

M: But no government pressure that you know of?

S: I don't think so. If there was the hand did not appear anywhere, and I've never heard it suggested that there was any deliberate effort by the government to do anything.

M: You mentioned the President's reaction towards the Times two or

three times. Kind of a general question, but I know they talk down there a lot about the Post-Times-Newsweek axis. How much truth is there in that? The administration seemed to think that the Post-Times-Newsweek was out to get them, or something comparable to that. Do you think that there is a kind of establishment press that had a position against Mr. Johnson that was important?

S: At that time, certainly in this particular time we're talking about, the Post was in Mr. Johnson's camp, so far as my mission was concerned and as far as the Times position on Vietnam was concerned. This changed as time went on, but at that particular time the Post, because of its competitive position I think, really, with the Times, was absolutely delighted to pick up any kind of a rock and throw through our window. They wrote two or three really nasty stories about me and about the Hanoi coverage, and editorially speaking they were very much on the negative side. Before the year was out this had changed, and the Post had come over. I think that after that you could probably talk about an establishment attitude, but at that time the Post was in Mr. Johnson's corner.

M: Did they make it hard for you to collect news, because of their anti-Times position?

S: Well, those things are damned difficult to put your finger on. They certainly didn't make it easy. That is to say, there are some cases where you just need a little bit of cooperation, and it was not forthcoming. But honestly, our reporters tend to work in an atmosphere of some hostility always. This is sort of the ground rules in Washington.

There are people who will call you in and give you a story, but most of the time you're working against the mainstream. I don't think that it could be documented that the Times encountered any material difficulties as a result of its attitude. Sure, nasty remarks now and then; sure, Dean Rusk, you know, laying it on the line with somebody. He did that with lots of people on the Times, and he made remarks that hurt people's feelings. I don't think their feelings should be that tender, but he did. But I don't think that there was any serious feedback to the Times, not really.

M: You've watched a number of administrations on foreign policy from the position of the Times here. Was the credibility of the Johnson Administration substantially worse than you found it, say, under Kennedy or Eisenhower or Truman?

S: Yes, I think it was. It got worse. Every administration has its credibility problem, and it's just basic to the position that it's in. But Mr. Johnson's position became attenuated because, really . . . Just to take the flak over the main observation that I reported from Vietnam, which was that we were hitting civilian objectives and killing civilians. Now I think anybody in the military would have said from the beginning, "But of course. It's inevitable, if you're going to drop 'X' tons of bombs you're going to kill some people, and some of the bombs will fall on houses." Any rational person would assume that.

But an irrational position was taken for propaganda purposes, that we were bombing steel and concrete and so forth and so on.

This was a position which I'm sure Mr. Johnson encouraged his propaganda people to take, because it fitted the image which enabled him to go farther with less opposition from the public. This is fine up to a point, but once people see that this is not really so you're really out on a limb, and somebody gives it a little shake and you fall down. There's just no place to go but down. And here, I think, is where the problem lay. I know this particular one intimately, because I was involved in it, I simply reported what any ordinary, rational military man could have told any reporter in Washington.

M: Or a peacetime soldier like myself.

S: That's right. Anybody who had been in World War II, and many of us had been, know that the Air Force is never as accurate as it contends. If they drop thousands of tons of bombs, they're going to kill some people in the process.

M: Do you think most of that was Mr. Johnson's personal fault, or was he badly served by certain people?

S: I think that it was his super ego, really, that did this. Not knowing the man, and never having conversed with him in my life, and getting it all secondhand, you get the picture of a man who is such a dynamic personality that he really swamped everybody around him. He wouldn't swamp Bill Moyers, for example, and this is why I suppose Bill eventually left. Bill wouldn't play that game, and this is one of the reasons why, in my opinion, there began to be a parting of the ways between Moyers and Johnson. But he did have this tremendous force which really drove people right down the road that he wanted them to

go, and it was not for his own good. He would have been much better served if he'd had some people who'd sit up and say, "Look here, Lyndon, for Christ's sake, let's get back to reality," you know. But he just wouldn't do it.

M: You've been very helpful and patient and articulate. Are there any things you'd like to add that I haven't known enough to ask you about?

S: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I've talked a great deal about things that I don't really have very intimate knowledge of.

M: Well, you've been most helpful on a very important episode, I think, and I certainly thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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