

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR JAMES T. LANEY

Interviewed by: David Reuther
Initial interview date: March 26, 2004
Copyright 2011 ADST

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Born in Arkansas; raised in Arkansas and Tennessee	
Yale University	
US Army, Korea (Counter Intelligence Corps)	
Syngman Rhee	
Korean politics	
Yale Divinity School	
Marriage	
Wallingford, Connecticut: Methodist Minister	
Choate (Rosemary Hall) School; Teacher	
Yale University: Korean language study	1958-1959
Seoul, Korea: Methodist Minister; Yonsei University campus	1959-1963
Duties as Chaplain	
Students	
Syngman Rhee ousted	
Political oppression	
Elections	
Insurrection	
Park Chung Hee coup	
Chargé Marshall Green	
Missionary community	
USAID programs	
Japanese	
President Eisenhower visit	
Living environment	
“Veneratio Vitae (VV)” Club	
Student Movement	
World Vision Korea	
Speaking engagements	
King’s College, Cambridge, England: Korean Culture studies	1963-1964

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut: Doctors degree study	1964-1965
Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Kentucky: Professor President, National Community Relations Council Demonstrations	1966-1969
Emory University, Atlanta: Dean/President Woodruff Gift University activities Organization (President) Carter Center Association with President Carter Relationship with Korea's Yonsei University	1969-1980
Overseer's Committee, Harvard Divinity School Yale University, University Council Task Force for Korea China visit Korea Kwangju Rebellion Personal assessment of Korea for President Carter Suggestions of Ambassadorship Carter withdraws US troops Korean Intelligence Service Warren Christopher Selection as US Ambassador to Korea Announcement of appointment Relations with Emory University	1981
Seoul, Korea: US Ambassador Comments on Clinton White House Jakarta, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting Ambassadorial preparations Confirmation proceedings Jesse Helms North Korea Nuclear issue US-Korea military relationship Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo Concept of nuclear bombing of North Korea Radio and TV interviews Seriousness of North Korea issue Bob Gallucci Aborted Nunn/Lugar North Korea visit Threats of North Korea	1993-1996

Nervousness in Seoul	
Kim Il Sung invitation	
Ex-President Carter visit	
President Kim Young-sam	
President Clinton visit (Cheju)	
Yongbyon nuclear facility	
Korea Energy Development Organization (KEDO)	
Carter's reception in Washington	
Possible evacuation	
Four Party Talks	
Kim Young-sam Washington visit	
General Luck	
Agencies in Embassy	
Embassy operations	
Environment	
Public speaking	
Kwangju visit	
Blue House	
Korean Universities	
Visits to Washington	
Relations with Korean government	
DCM Charles Kartman	
Intellectual property	
Trade issues	
Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)	
Commanding generals	
US-Korea relations	
Resignation	1996
Post Retirement	1997-1999
Liaison between President Clinton and Lee Teng-hui	
Lee Teng-hui meeting	
Kim Young-sam meeting	
Quemoy and Matsu Islands	
Council on Foreign Relations	
North Korea	
China	
President (S. Korea) Roh Moo Hyun	

INTERVIEW

Q: Good morning. This is Friday, March 26, 2004. I'm David Reuther with the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training. This morning we're going to interview James T. Laney, who served as Ambassador to Korea; but Dr. Laney has had an enormously interesting career prior to and after that, and we hope to ask him about some of those things.

Ambassador Laney, could you give us some appreciation of where you grew up and what your early years were like?

LANEY: Well, I grew up in a small town in eastern Arkansas, right along the Mississippi River, sort of Mark Twain country, and had a very uneventful childhood. My parents and grandparents also grew up in eastern Arkansas, and went to Methodist founded Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. My grandfather was a Methodist Minister and my father owned a small air conditioning business.

Growing up I had a series of different jobs - selling popcorn, working in a drug store, working in a grocery store, running a service station, things like that - and found that was as much a part of my education as formal schooling. I learned how to be a self-starter and a hustler and to take responsibility and all, and I enjoy that very much. The summer before I was a junior in high school, my parents moved to Memphis, Tennessee. I was an only child. In Memphis, I had the privilege of going to the Memphis Central High School, which was a sort of a college prep, and there, because I played football, even though I was a new comer, I sort of stood out, and that propelled me into a certain prominence in the class, and combination with my grades, enabled me to win a scholarship to Yale University. At that time Yale had just started what it called the regional scholarships. It was an attempt to broaden the base of admission across the country from the Eastern Seaboard.

Q: I would say, that doesn't exactly fit our stereotype of East Coast Ivy League recruiting at the time.

LANEY: Well, you know, I consider myself one of the earlier affirmative action beneficiaries...[Laughter]...because they were really trying, at that point, to get a broader base, economically, socially, and geographically. Of course, I found myself in New Haven in 1945 with an awful lot of prep school boys, whose work was in advance of where I had been in high school.

My real desire had been, because the war was going on, to go to West Point, but I was only able to get an alternate appointment there; so I took second best (it's what I thought at the time) and went to Yale. Actually one calendar year later, in the summer of 1946, after being in the accelerated program in which I finished three semesters, the draft was still on for World War II; and a whole clutch of not only my classmates, but of my age group, who were then 18, were facing an imminent draft; and we were induced (I won't say seduced) to join the army for 18 months and get the GI Bill of Rights, which included education benefits when we returned.

Q: The G.I. Bill passed Congress in 1944, I think. Were you already seeing the G.I.s flood back to the States?

LANEY: And absolutely! As a result, I was a World War II veteran, even though I saw no action. But, and this is the real point of it all, I was sent to Korea in January of 1947, when we were occupying Korea, having taken over from the Japanese in 1945. Not long after I arrived I was transferred to the Counter Intelligence Corps and made, without any training whatsoever, a special agent and given a shoulder holster and revolver. This is one of the most remarkable things - and allowed to wear an officer's uniform without insignia, which was supposed to keep us incognito. But, of course, it was so unusual that everybody, all the Koreans, knew exactly who we were, and they called us "CIC," [pronounced she-I-she].

But that was a real introduction to Korea because I got to know the politics. I worked on three major assassinations that took place while I was there.

Q: Politically motivated assassinations?

LANEY: Right. These were all potential rivals to Syngman Rhee, who later would be the first president. On Friday mornings another fellow, who had also come from Yale and who was to later be my roommate, and I would visit Syngman Rhee (and at that time he was simply one of the aspiring politicians), and interview him, and write it up as a summary of information for the commanding general. So in fact, in that sense, we were like reporters.

Q: Did you understand at that time that, in fact, Rhee had been working with the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) for some time during the war?

LANEY: No, I didn't know that.

Q: Yes, this was mentioned in Maochun Yu's book, The OSS in China.

LANEY: I did find out that his henchmen were behind the assassinations. The word from higher up, G-2, as it was called at that time (this was the 24th Army Corps under Lieutenant General John R. Hodge), the G-2 had Colonel Robinson when we finally broke and got a confession out of a couple of the actual assassins for some of these killings and laid it very close to the door of Syngman Rhee. This was dropped. It was not an acceptable - I mean, you know, it just didn't work. They had to protect one of the guys to survive in order to have a president! So that was my introduction to high-level state politics. I don't want to go on record as saying that Syngman Rhee himself ordered this, but it is curious that no subsequent political rival ever lived through election day, and that's after he was president, when he came up for reelection. So there was a long history of - it was a high mortality rate, let us say, for the opposition.

Anyway, that was my introduction to Korea, and I became deeply touched by it all, not just my experience in the CIC (US Counter Intelligence Corps), but also I was able to meet local people, which most of the Army people could not. There was a kind of a cordon around them. They didn't want them to socialize; the U.S. command had put into place anti-fraternization rules.

But for us, our CIC work required it; and we were involved with Korean counterparts, not only in the constabulary, the National Constabulary, and the Seoul National Police, and so forth, but also with many people of rank, education, and all. This was a very powerful experience for a young non-com from the South whose only venture out of his region was to New Haven, to find oneself in another culture at that age of 18 and so forth, I guess it was sort of an early Peace Corps experience. That literally put in train a series of events that subsequently had a profound impact on my career, because I went back, and returned to Yale after I got out of the Army, and finished my undergraduate career as an economics major...

Q: Now with the GI Bill helping you out -

LANEY: ...helping me was the GI Bill, and was sort of planning to go to Wall Street. I had investment banking in mind.

But my senior year, after I had applied, I think, to Merrill Lynch and several other places, I decided I'd go to divinity school, as did a number of other of my classmates. In the class of '50 we had quite a contingent that went to Yale Divinity School - the president of our class, and well, not my roommate, but some other friends of mine. Anyway, we went to divinity school, and that was a big shift, obviously, away from New York City and investment banking.

Q: Just for background, when you were in Korea doing the counterintelligence job, were you liaising with the embassy, or -

LANEY: There was no embassy. It wouldn't be set up until 1948 after the elections. Korea was under a military government.

Q: But were there Foreign Service people in place?

LANEY: Well, there were political advisors to the commanding general and things like that.

But that was a very dicey time, and I don't mean physically dangerous, but there were - for example, there was a Lieutenant Leonard Bertsch, B-E-R-T-S-C-H, who had a law degree, who had an enormous amount of power there, working with the city government or whatever and under the authority of the commanding general. It was a very interesting time, because there were so few people that understood anything about Korea, that those

who found themselves with certain sure footedness were immediately catapulted into a degree of authority that would have been inconceivable back home.

Q: Well, and it's also true that the Americans and the American military force had never been an occupying power before.

LANEY: Of course, and the commanding general had been a battlefield general, you know, and so forth.

Q: The only uniformed service that had that kind of experience was the Marines out of Latin America. In fact, they wrote the book on sort of urban security issues and when you were in Korea the Marines were in northern China performing a similar function.

LANEY: Well, it was catch as catch can obviously. I think, you know, there were, as I say, a number of books have been written about the period. I met someone who had been very scathingly critical of how we handled the occupation. I'm less critical, but I know there were some very serious deficiencies. Of course, you know, at the age of 18 you do what comes to your hand, and this was just an opportunity, and we were working hard.

We were also working against a Communist insurgency. I mean we personally didn't, but while we were there a Communist underground army in South Korea was uncovered, and I went down to Pusan on the train to bring back the two ringleaders that had been captured. Politically, there were all kinds of shifts; I mean the political realignments and all that. It was a very fluid time, and it was also a very difficult time economically.

But it was a marvelous - I mean for an 18- and early 19-year-old, it was an extraordinary opportunity just to learn about the world, and life, and government, and the underside as well as the upper side of a society.

I would underscore that looking back on it, this may be through the romantic lens of age, but I'm not sure I've ever had as much unbridled power as I had as an 18-year old Counter Intelligence agent in Korea in 1947 – 48.

Q: Being a college president doesn't quite cut it? [Laughter]

LANEY: Or an ambassador! [Laughter]

It was a heady time, and you know, I was not really aware of, and I certainly wasn't aware of exploiting it; but it was an extraordinary range of opportunity and freedom, and looking back on it, I enjoyed it a lot; I didn't see it as a hardship posting at all.

Q: Going back to Yale now, you were preparing yourself for this potential career in investment banking, but shifted to the divinity school. Now that requires some explanation.

LANEY: Well, I had a grandfather, a maternal grandfather, who had been a Methodist minister, and I was very much influenced by him, while it had not been anything very conscious; I'm sure that played a role.

But it was also that, on looking back on it more and more, I've seen the experience in Korea as being very pivotal for me personally: not only that I returned two more times, but it also changed the character and direction of my life, that experience, and I felt at the time - at that time Yale Divinity School was just a stunning place! It had a marvelous faculty, and a bright, eager student body, and so forth. So it was almost like three more years of undergraduate work, but just at a more intense level.

Q: Who were some of the professors there? Wasn't...

LANEY: Well, Richard Niebuhr was there and Roland Bainton, and Robert Calhoun, and Liston Pope. I mean the line was just - these were people who were leaders of the world church. I mean they had great stature. I was taken under wing by Richard Niebuhr, and you know, there was a wonderful sense of being sort of mentored by these people who really took an interest in you.

At the same time, after a couple years in school, while I was still a student, because by then I was married and was beginning to have a family, I took a small student church in Wallingford, Connecticut, which is about 15 miles north of New Haven. And then after a few months I was also appointed chaplain of the Choate [Rosemary Hall] School, which is in the same town there, which was a school that (President) John Kennedy went to and (unsuccessful Democratic Party candidate for President) Adlai Stevenson, a very distinguished preparatory school, and I began to teach there; and that gave me a feeling for teaching and for the academic side, which then I later went into.

By that time I was very much involved with the personnel committee of the board of missions of the Methodist Church in New York, because they had known I had been in Korea, and they were eager to try to get us to go back and work on a college campus in Seoul.

So after a few years we, my wife and I, and by now with three children, agreed to go back to Seoul, and we were on the Yonsei University campus. Our house was right there on campus.

This was 1959. We were there five years, and it was then that I learned the language, began to speak in it, lecture in it, and so forth. And many of my students, when I later came back as ambassador, were heads of institutions, or in the government, and so forth. So that was an interesting, constant recycling back, and also, of course, there were some people that I'd known when I was there in the Army.

Q: We in the Foreign Service like to see that. You go to a post as a young officer, and you meet your young colleagues in the other government, and then the two of you grow up together, and then you have a ready access when you return on a future assignment.

LANEY: Yes. Well, for example, when we went back, when we returned to Korea as ambassador, there was a big reception for us thrown by a number of our Korean friends and students. And this occasioned, by the way, some interesting criticism in the newspaper, because they said, “What kind of nonsense is this, that all of these different organizations, groups, and people, including one cabinet member, would have a party for the arriving American ambassador?” [Laughter]

Q: Prodigal son returned?

LANEY: Well, something like that.

Q: You were saying that with the move to Yonsei University in 1959, you began to study the Korean language?

LANEY: Right...well, no. Actually, we'd gone back to Yale in 1958 – 59 and took a year of intensive language before we went out. But I continued to study all the time when I was there.

Q: I mean a real year of intensive language, nothing but Korean for a year?

LANEY: Nothing but Korean, that's right.

Q: Ah, well, that's...that's very Foreign Service! [Laughter]

LANEY: Well, it was...I've often said that was probably the most miserable year of my life, not so much because it was learning the language, because we were totally cut off from all communities of support and friends. I mean, you know, we just picked up, and put into language school, and spent all our days [laughter] immersed in the language.

Q: Well, Yale was actually...had been used during the war; especially for Chinese

LANEY: This was a continuation of the same program. It was called the Institute of Far Eastern Languages. Right. They had the Chinese, and Mandarin, and Korean, and Japanese at least; I don't know what else. By that time that was my third time to go back to New Haven. I was yet to go back one more time later [laughter] on for a Ph.D. (doctor of philosophy), but that's a later story!

Q: So it was the board of missionaries that encouraged you to take this position at Yonsei? Or was there a position, and they wanted you to fill it?

LANEY: Ah...both, yes. Right. You know, they supplied the personnel, and the institution had approval authority; they would negotiate, "Is this person acceptable to you?" you know, that sort of thing.

Q: Was Yonsei University itself set up by the missionaries?

LANEY: Right, it was. It had been founded right after the turn of the century, in the early 1900s, by a Horace Underwood, whose brother John Underwood founded the Underwood Typewriter Company in Utica, New York. John Underwood largely financed his brother's work in Korea, and so they had some resources that were denied an ordinary person, and they were able to develop a very significant college, which later blossomed into a full fledged university, and now it's the most distinguished private university in Korea and an excellent university. It was to that school in 1959 that I was attached. I worked there in a number of capacities. I had student groups that I met with; we had a world friendship group.

The students at that era in Korea were very idealistic. This was the early days of the democracy, and there was also a great deal of criticism of the Syngman Rhee's corruption and oppression at that time. It was the students, as you might recall, who in 1960 demonstrated, and a hundred and something of them were killed on the streets of Seoul by Syngman Rhee's army, and that brought down Syngman Rhee, and he was dispatched to Honolulu by the American ambassador, Walter McConaughy [Ed: served as Ambassador to Korea from December 1959 to April 1961]. McConaughy had to go to his house and say, "You're through. We have a plane ready to take you to Hawaii."

Q: Now you were there watching these events?

LANEY: I was there. I was there. Yes.

Q: It must have been a very heady time to talk to the students on one hand and see these things unfold.

LANEY: Well, it was a dicey time because we didn't know how things were going to turn out when they were unfolding, you know. It was bloody, it was an attempt at total suppression, and it was only the most egregious example of brutality on the part of the government, which was so public that the whole world was outraged. I mean it was the Tiananmen Square of Seoul in 1960. "Sa-il-gu" it's called, 9 April 1960. No...19th of April, that's it. I'll get it straight. It was just springtime.

Q: All these things happen in springtime.

LANEY: All the sap was bubbling, you know.

Q: We have May 4th Movement in China in 1919.

LANEY: Yes, right.

Q: Now, if the concerns and the idealism on the campus, were preexisting, with the students talking about corruption, or democracy, and whatnot, what moved them to then begin the demonstrations?

LANEY: Well, actually, what moved them was that the election of 1960 had been so corrupt that there had been demonstrations in Masan, which was down on the coast in the south, and the police suppressed the demonstration, and some people were killed, and a body of a student was found floating in the sea, and when that body was found, that ignited a great demonstration down south, and it gradually moved up towards Seoul, the demonstration, the sense of outrage and so they began demonstrating very peacefully in Seoul, that we can't have this. This is again a kind of problem that I was telling you about earlier, about Syngman Rhee never having a serious rival. They began demonstrating, and as the demonstrations grew and as it was clear that the general population on the whole was supportive, even if it was quiet, you know, it was the students doing the marching, the attempt to control it and keep it from getting out of hand grew more and more frantic, and that then led to the shooting of these students right on the main plaza of Seoul, just exactly like Tiananmen Square, but 29 years earlier.

Q: Because I lived through the same thing in Bangkok only the student demonstrators were moving from one location to another and the army shot them as they moved.

LANEY: Well, I don't know exactly the physical disposition of the students, except they were downtown, and they may have been trying to march on the Presidential residence. I'm not sure.

Q: But Yonsei, where you were living, was far enough away -

LANEY: Well, the campus was well removed from that by about 4 or 5 miles. But we saw that the students left our campus and marched right by our house, in front of our house, down the road, and it was a very...well, in one sense it was a tense time. We didn't feel any sense of danger, but there was an electricity in the air. We knew that things were coming to some sort of head. It was just...it was...it was unstoppable. The stories about the corruption of the Syngman Rhee regime were so rife, and then when they tried to strong-arm critics, it just was, you know, too much.

Later, after that, of course, after Syngman Rhee left and the interim government was instituted, there was a great deal of lawlessness, which often follows these things, with the fall of the government; and students became very arrogant, and they stood up in class and criticized their teachers. That sounded like China again. It sounded like the Cultural Revolution. Except this was before that, and it was not, as far as I know, had anything to do with Communism.

They also trashed several homes. One of them was the home of Syngman Rhee's vice president and his wife who had been a very powerful figure, and they brought out bolt after bolt after bolt of silk. It was almost like Imelda Marcos's shoes, you know and they laid them out in the mud in the street, and everybody trampled on them. It was almost like this was a mock assassination, you know, or trial and execution, and as a result, it was such a humiliating and devastating thing that Yi Ki-bung, that was his name, and Maria Park was his wife, those two and their two sons killed themselves in a suicide pact. It was a tough time.

Now it was several months after all that confusion that Park Chung Hee had his coup. He was at that time a colonel in the army. It happened that we were at dinner with the chargé d'affaires of the embassy, Marshall Green.

You know Marshall?

Q: We all knew Marshall very fondly.

LANEY: Well, Marshall was a Yale man, so we had gotten acquainted. *[Laughter]*

Anyway, we were at dinner, and all of a sudden a message came in [for] Marshall, and he and his DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) and his chief political officer immediately left, and they never returned! And it turned out that they had gotten word about the coup [Ed: General Park Chung Hee staged a coup on May 16, 1961], and they were terrified because of Park Chung Hee's history. He had been accused, and I think convicted, of having a Communist taint back in 1948, and so they didn't know whether this guy was, you know, for the North, or what. As it turned out, he was very much for the South, with a strong arm.

Q: You've introduced something here. I mean here you are in the graduate school of theology as an associate chaplain at Yonsei University. So you're part of the American expatriate community. Now, as part of that community, are you interacting with the embassy from time to time, or was your association with Marshall through the Yale connection?

LANEY: Well, it's social, through the Yale connection, just socially, and we were not all, you know, we didn't go to parties. It wasn't all that big deal, the social life, but occasionally we got invited. I can't remember now why we were invited there, but for example, this was a couple of years later when Sam [Samuel D.] Berger was the ambassador [Ed: Berger served as ambassador from June 1961 to July 1964]. I guess he followed Marshall Green. Marshall Green was never ambassador. He was chargé, probably from April to June 1961, and then he went to Hong Kong as the consul general.

But anyhow, when President Kennedy was shot, November 22, 1963, I led the American community service in a commemorative memorial service, where the ambassador was there, and then we had the honor guard and that sort of things. Later we had had Sam

Berger out for dinner at our house, and he had had us over for a swim at the embassy pool and things. But we were not intimate, but we were, you know, friends in an easy way. I never thought of myself as being inside, I was not in any kind of inner circle.

Q: Right. But I guess my point was the expatriate community would have some contact from time to time socially or otherwise, with the embassy. I mean you knew they were there.

LANEY: Oh, yes! And there were several people there that I had known, or known of, from Yale in the embassy. I don't remember now exactly who they were...but you know, we were a young couple in our early 30s, and I was particularly, along with a couple of other, in fact, other people from Yale who were there with me, had become noted for our fluency in the language, and this I think gave us a certain, maybe, notoriety or something. The reputation was greater than the reality. And I never tried to reconcile the two!
[Laughter]

Q: Well, there must have been something there. I just finished reading Chun-shin Park's, Protestantism and Politics in Korea, which discussed the Protestant missionary movement in Korea and why 40 percent of the Korean population is now Protestant.

LANEY: Right. Well, there was a big missionary community after the Korean War, because a lot of it was AID (U.S. Agency for International Development) programs and supplies and just meeting the physical needs of the people. But there was also a huge church and school building project. You know, they were doing this all over with American money, which was pouring in from the churches in the United States, and we were there at that sort of peak of that representation in the early 1960s. Very, very powerful - I guess certainly the strength of the missionary community and their abilities certainly eclipsed, at that time, the business community from the United States. You know, at that time there was not that much investment, and then there were just a few traders and businessmen. So the two major American communities were the official U.S. community, the military and the embassy, and there was a major missionary community. Because the missionaries stayed there longer and most of them had become, were becoming fairly adept in the language, they had far more access into what was going on among the people than even the embassy for the most part, because there were very few people at that time in the embassy that had any language skills at all.

They had not started that program. It was amazing that even into the 1980s and 1990s - well, when you were there, you know, it was hard to find somebody in the embassy who was really fluent in Korean. Many of them had excellent command of Japanese or Chinese, but not Korean, you know. It had not become a priority in the State Department. Most career people didn't see a career in Korea. That's the whole thing. It seemed to be too insignificant and not - Korean doesn't lead to anything, you know.

And you know, I understand that fully. You know, as I was learning Korean, I thought, I'm going through a door into a small room. It didn't open up a huge array of literature

and culture and that sort of thing at that time, you know. This is changing. It has changed over the years.

Q: Well, that's an interesting career problem for the Asian part of the State Department in Asia and other region as because each of those countries has their own language. If you have Spanish, you can go to Latin and South America, and you can have a full career; they've got 31 countries down there. You've got it made!

LANEY: Or French, and the same, you know, in German, yes.

Q: Or French and work in Africa.

LANEY: But not in Korean. Korean is just for Korea.

Q: In Asia you also have a variety of languages.

LANEY: Right. So anyway...the work of, the growth of the church in Korea has been noted by many people because it's so far in excess of anything else in Asia: that one-half of one percent in Japan, which speaks of their insularity; China's a little bit larger percentage, of course, a huge number of people because any percentage in China brings you a lot of people! But Korea's really remarkable, and I think part of it was that in the 1920s and 1930s the American missionaries in Korea and the church in Korea, not just the missionaries, but the church, was one of the few remaining citadels of Korean identity that the Japanese did not tamper with initially. It was where they could still speak their own language, because the schools had gone Japanese and so forth, outside the home.

And so, as a result, instead of seeing the church as foreign, the church became Korean, and what was foreign was Japanese. So that, for example, when I was working among the students in the early 1960s and the Japanese got up and carried on about imperialism and colonialism, the Korean got up and said, "The only colonialism we know about is from you! It's not from the United States!" [Laughter] Oh! This was quite a shock!

But this sort of strange historical twist took away the foreignness of the church for the Koreans because they had appropriated it as theirs, and this is almost historical acts. It had nothing to do with the missionaries, except they just abetted it, you know, as best they could. As a result, the church did not have to overcome the sense of strangeness because they had crossed that barrier back during the Japanese occupation. It's a very interesting thing!

Q: When you were in Korea there is a change in America to the Kennedy administration. In your contacts with the embassy and the American community did you detect that the change in American administrations meant anything particular for Korea?

LANEY: Well, we were there when Eisenhower was still president, and he came out to Korea. He was precluded from going to Tokyo because of the demonstrations in Japan.

This was early 1960 [Ed: June 19 – 20, 1960], and he came to Korea and just an incredible sea of people came out. I mean the turnout was unbelievable! Millions of people in Seoul turned out to see Eisenhower, and there was a reception for him at the embassy, which we attended. I mean it was open; I mean this was not something special to us, and I remember that very well. Actually, my wife's uncle had been Eisenhower's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the mid-'50s, Admiral [Arthur W.] Radford.

Q: Didn't he go on to get an appointed position in...

LANEY: No. He had two terms as chairman. He had been the Commander of the Pacific Fleet [Ed: and High Commissioner of Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands], CINCPAC, in 1952, when Eisenhower was elected, and Eisenhower fulfilled his pledge, "I will go to Korea."

In that trip Eisenhower stopped off at Honolulu. Actually, Radford had led "the Admiral's Revolt" in 1948 against Omar Bradley, and they were called "fancy Dan's," and there was a big brouhaha because the admirals wanted to continue the aircraft carriers and naval air and all that sort of thing, and they had a big blowup. Eisenhower, although he was not, I think, in Washington at the time, his good friend Omar Bradley was there, and they squared off. So Radford was not particularly well thought of by the Army.

But then when Eisenhower went to Korea, he stopped in Honolulu and got a briefing and was so impressed with Radford that he said, "You come with me to go to Korea," and by the time they finished the trip, he had asked him if he would serve as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [laughter], which is an interesting 180 degree turn! So he, from '53 to '57, was the chairman.

By the time we got to Korea, he was out of the chairmanship, but he had been friends with, and of course, obviously, acquaintances with Syngman Rhee and Madam Rhee. So the Radfords came out a couple times while we were there. A few months after we arrived, we were living in a house that was so remote we didn't have a telephone, and it was only accessible by a rice paddy road.

So we were in language class at Yonsei University, and this person came in and whispered to the teacher, and they said, "We have a message for you." And I said, "What is it?" He said, "The Blue House," that's like the White House, "wants, is calling for you." "For me? You know, what have I done?" [Laughter] Well, it turned out, he said, "Your wife's uncle has arrived and wants to see you tonight." I said, "Oh, my gosh!" So Syngman Rhee, the president, sent a car. Well, he had such a hard time negotiating the ride that he was really upset, and he said, "Why are you living in this hovel?" and then would carry on like that, you know! [Laughter]

Q: Well, wait a minute now! Let's answer that question. Here you are, private sector, missionary out there. It must have been very basic living, or was this just during the language-training period?

LANEY: Well, it turned out that we did move after that because it was such a difficult home to live in. It had been built by the White Russians at the turn of the century and had not been lived in for...I guess since before the Second World War.

And it needed a lot of stuff! And it was also isolated. So after six months they moved us over onto the campus proper in a better house.

Q: But it came to the ownership of the missionary group or just some -

LANEY: No, it was a university house, actually. But it was way off to the side. Of course now the city's grown up all around it, but it was very isolated, and we went through a very -

Q: The joys of being a junior faculty? [Laughter]

LANEY: Oh! You wouldn't believe. We went through the most harrowing fall after our arrival. Our daughter almost died from a misdiagnosis of...what is this...strep [streptococcus] throat - not scarlet fever. We had a fire. We brought out, at that time, \$3,000 worth of groceries and basic items, you know, because we couldn't get them.

The very night that they arrived in our basement the whole thing was stolen! Obviously, this was an inside job from the port; you know, they knew that it was there, and delivered it, and they took it all away. So that would be, you know, worth \$25,000 today. That's a lot for a young couple!

We lost all of that, and you know, it was just one horrible thing after another. But after we got over those six months, it was smooth sailing the rest of the time.

Q: And those were six months. So you arrived in...1959?

LANEY: Arrived in July of 1959 and through December. It was a very - my wife had shingles. Oh Lord! She gave birth to our fourth child, and oh, my! It was just one really very, very difficult thing after another, you know, and all this time we were in language school. But the isolation, and the loneliness, and the series of very difficult -

Q: Now, once you get over language training, you go down, you move closer to the campus, and you are now...?

LANEY: Well, we were just adjacent in the campus in faculty housing. There are a number of Western-style houses that both Koreans and Americans lived in that are assigned to the university.

Q: Now on campus, your duties were to...?

LANEY: I had two, really three duties: I was associate chaplain; I was teaching in the graduate school of theology, which, by the way, was intended to be an international program, not just for Korea. The intent was to bring other Asian Christians into Yonsei's program; and then the third thing I was doing, I was working with some other Korean leaders of my age, my cohort, in establishing what we call a student Christian movement nationally. For this we designed study materials, we talked about nation building, we talked about ethics, we talked about institutions, what's required in building institutions, and all. This was a larger canvass on which I worked in terms of working with students, and I went around the country talking about these things. This was quite a marvelous opportunity.

At that time, as I mentioned, the students were not only idealistic, but, to get back to your question, 'What changed when Kennedy came in?' the most important thing that changed, at least from my vantage point, was he introduced the Peace Corps. Well, Korea was not at that time on the Peace Corps list, but the concept of the Peace Corps electrified the students in Korea.

I began working with a group of medical, dental, and nursing students who went out on weekends to a benighted village about 30 miles south of Seoul on the Han River, and they spent the weekend there holding clinics and classes and all sorts of things, and then on Sunday they had services, and then they had clinics again, and so forth, and then they came home. They did that every weekend for years! They called themselves the "Veneratio Vitae" (the Reverence for Life) Club after Albert Schweitzer; that was his motto - reverence for life. In the 1990s I was invited back to a meeting of the alumni of, they called it, the VV Club, and here were these doctors and nurses and dentists who were in commanding positions in Korea, in medical schools, and in practice, and so forth; and that was a formative period of their life, that club. I mean, of course, the school was, but in a way this focused their energies and gave an outlet for their idealism. So that was also what I was involved in, not just on the actual university campus.

Q: Which, when you abstracted a little bit, means that all these societies are progressing in a particular way, and if they're not at a particular point of modernization at some point in time, they might be in the future. I mean here the idealistic students have had their demonstration they've had the clash with the Rhee, people were killed, Rhee is removed, a short democratic period, and yet the military comes back. So you know, would we say at that time, well, Korea will never, ever -

LANEY: So then that sets a...let's see, I think...anyway, there were several books that came out about that time, in the late 1950s, from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and Harvard about nation building.

Q: You may be thinking of [Walt Whitman] Rostow's seminal book The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto].

LANEY: Yes, Rostow; and we translated that book and made it available; and we did not consider ourselves, in a sense, subversive to the government, but we were sure a leaven.

Q: Well now, the “we” that translates and publishes Rostow, that’s Yonsei or the missionary?

LANEY: No, not the missionaries; this is quite apart from that. All of my cohorts with the student movement were Korean, and these were very bright, able people who later took positions in government: one just finished a stint as head of World Vision Korea, which is an enormous thing for a North Korean; anyway, one was head of the New Village Movement. I felt so privileged to be a part of this group. We were otherwise all foreign nationals, but I was taken into their confidence and had a credibility. We felt like we were preparing a younger generation for leadership in a democracy. That’s what we really were working at, and we were very serious about it, and we had a lot of fun, and we had enormous sense of purpose and moral leadership. We felt we were making history!

Q: Very heady time. Now you were talking about being able to go around Korea and speak to groups.

LANEY: But also, not just go around and speak, but we welded this in the - we had groups on all the campuses, the student Christian movements. These were conventicles of their own clubs, as you might say, or chapters, or whatever; and you know, they were not, as I say, they were not attempting to do anything that was illegal or overthrow; they just were study groups and action groups; many of them were prompted just to do service somewhat on the order of this VV Club, maybe not as ambitious. The VV Club got such a reputation that the German government gave us a Volkswagen bus equipped to be a mobile clinic. [Laughter] You know those old fashioned Volkswagen buses, the tall thing?

It was all equipped with shelves and counter space and everything where they could take their equipment, and they drove out to this little village out there.

Q: Marvelous! I wonder how the Germans picked up on your work.

LANEY: Well, they found out through the church. They found out about what was going on and wanted to help.

Q: As churches talk about the various programs they sponsor -

LANEY: Right, right, right, around the world. And Korea was still seen as a needy country; it was still reconstructing after the war and all. But anyhow, that’s what went on.

So you know, we had five years after that miserable first six months. The rest were just wonderful!

You know, I spoke to three or four thousand students at a time in Korea, in their chapels and assemblies and stuff, and they thought it - back then, it was so remarkable to see an American speak, you know. Actually, my accent was far better than my real command of the technical language, so I had to work hard on what I said, but my delivery was good; and they were just, they were really quite taken with my efforts [laughter].

Q: That was the experience I had in Thailand! Constantly surprising people, just aghast that you would know the language.

LANEY: Yes. and you know, in Korea there just weren't that many people, Westerners, that were speaking the language. I once heard a story, it was not my experience, and I don't think it's apocryphal; I think it's real. This American was out in the country, spoke marvelous Korean, and he stopped an old man who was a country fellow, you know, no experience with foreigners or anything, and he asked him, how do you get somewhere. The fellow said, "I don't speak English," in Korean, and the fellow nodded, and he said, "Okay, shall we speak in Korean?" He said, "Yea!" So he repeated the same question in the same language [laughter], and he said, "Oh, yea!" [laughter] and gave him instructions. But at first it was blocked out. He couldn't hear him. [Laughter]

Q: I think students of each of the Asian languages has a similar story. But as part of the expatriate community in the Seoul area, the embassy would have July 4th parties, and would this be an occasion for the American community whit large to -

LANEY: Uh, uh. Well, the missionaries were never included in, and we were not given access to the PX (post exchange or a commissary on a U.S. Army post) or anything on the army post. So we had to live off the economy.

Q: Which probably, as a community, brought you very close to the Korean community.

LANEY: Right. Yes, well, and of course, you know, the great part of our lives, other than our collegueship in the mission community, was with the Koreans; that's where we spent our time. My friends, and they've been lifelong friends since then, were the colleagues on the faculty and on this student Christian movement.

For example, one of my colleagues, who was a law colleague, a graduate of Yale, a Korean at Yonsei, later became ambassador to the United States, and he came to Atlanta when I was president of Emory, and we met and had a wonderful time. So you know, it just, it was all over the place.

Q: Living in the community I suspect you might have had the same reactions as your Korean colleagues as political events in Korea unfold - the removal of Syngman Rhee, and then the arrival of the military governments. Well, as you saw those events unfold, did they really impact on what you were doing? I mean you see -

LANEY: Well, yes; the course it did, particularly...well, all of it did because both the tragedy and then the headiness of what we call the student revolution, and then the oppression, the growing oppression of the Park Chung Hee regime, in terms of they had the KCIA (Korean Central Intelligence Agency) infiltrate the colleges and report on people who were criticizing the government or being too...of course they always called such critics as Communists. [Laughter] I mean if you criticized the government it was because you were a Communist, not because the government was really vulnerable to criticism. So there was that sense of pressure - I don't want to quite call it oppression, but pressure - on the students.

But...you know, I was rather probably callow at that age and felt like it was my calling to beard the tyrant, you know. I was very outspoken, and I'm sure that I became a vicarious mouthpiece for a lot of people who wouldn't say the same thing because I could do it with impunity. I was aware of that! I didn't have any illusions, and it was because, in some sense, it was an arrogant American approach. I could say these things critically of the government because they couldn't do anything about it, or you know, later on they did; they deported missionaries later who were critical. But at that point, they were uneasy to be that hard-nosed, and you know, I wasn't gratuitously public about it.

Q: But after five years in Korea, you did return to Yale, as you said, for the third time?

LANEY: Well, I knew that from my interest in teaching there and from my interest in teaching at Choate and all, I knew that I wanted to be in an academic setting. So I wrote to some friends in Cambridge, England and was accepted at King's College for a course of study in Korean culture and American, you know, sort of democratic critique, and so forth. But then as our families, who hadn't seen us for years, began to put pressure on us, we realized that that would be in yet another foreign country for three years, or something like that, with the children, their grandchildren, and it became too logistically difficult; and so my friends at Yale on the faculty persuaded me to return to Yale for the umpteenth time [laughter], where I did a Ph.D.; and I did it in record time because they helped. There were no corners cut, it's just that they facilitated the movement, the bureaucracy of the thing, and I had a glorious time there for two years, and got my Ph.D.

We were fortunate; we were able to rent the house of the associate dean of the graduate school, a big house (and we had now five children) right near the campus, and he was in Washington with, I think, the Fulbright Commission or something like that, or on leave. So the house was furnished in every regard, including linens and silverware, and that was perfect for us coming back from Korea, you know.

So we settled in and then while I was there, Vanderbilt University gave me an appointment, offered me a job as an assistant professor, which after some, you know, considerable thought and all, we decided to take.

Q: Now, you're coming back to Yale in 1964, and this PhD program takes you through 1966, yes?

LANEY: Right, and I took the job in Nashville from 1966 through 1969. I was there three years. I was teaching in the divinity school at Vanderbilt.

We had a good time there. We had some friends there, and again, we had family connections there. My wife's grandfather had been mayor of Nashville way back, and so forth, and so, you know, it was a nice time, but -

Q: Well, this was also the Vietnam War period. Was any of that leaking into the campus?

LANEY: Oh, yes! That was very much a part of Vanderbilt and, of course, the civil rights movement... we had been totally removed from the civil rights movement in Korea. We read about it and of course Kennedy's assassination and all, but while we were at Nashville, [Dr. Martin Luther] King was assassinated [April 4, 1968], and Bobby Kennedy was assassinated [June 5, 1968]. I mean it was just a chaotic time! And while we were in Nashville, I was president of the National Community Relations Council, which is, of course, focused on biracial issues, you know. So I was in the center of the storm, in a real sense; and in the whole community, not just on campus! I think I probably tested my political skills there as much as anywhere.

Q: Well, what kinds of things might come before the Council?

LANEY: Well, we had a lot of open forums and there were some real firebrands. I mean it was tricky to hold things and keep them from getting violent, or getting out of hand and that sort of thing, without, you know, selling out, in a sense, and just not doing anything or meaning anything. So you had that -

Q: Now your presence came from your position at Vanderbilt or...?

LANEY: No, I don't know how I got elected...

Q: Oh, it was an elected position?

LANEY: Yes, it was an elected, right, president of the National Community Relations -

Q: Somebody either liked you or didn't like you! [Laughter]

LANEY: Yes, I don't know. As a result, my third year there, at that time the schools in Nashville were just on the verge of being integrated, but had not yet, I guess; and the Cameron High School was still an all black high school, and the Cameron High School gave me their citizen of the year award, which they had never given to a white person before.

Q: Because of your work on the commission?

LANEY: I'm sure that played a role. But you know, I think part of it was my experience in Korea and my ease in moving out beyond my own cultural familiarity. I just have a - I'm neither deterred nor put off by cultural, large cultural, differences or strangeness, that sort of thing. This is not a virtue; it's just who I am, and I think, you know, that facility to move in across the lines gave a certain impunity to my actions and words. I don't know. There were some difficult times; there were some hard, hard encounters, but none of them turned out to be either disastrous or anything like that.

Q: Because there would be people in these decision-making situations who had a very tight sense of their own identity and weren't about to share -

LANEY: Oh, gosh! The egos are terrific, you know. You know, color doesn't have anything to do with ego! I remember there was one demonstration. It was supposed to be peaceful, up near...Tennessee A & M, which was a historically black college, and demonstrators surrounded a block. I was not in charge, but I remember being concerned about keeping it from getting out of hand, you know, just becoming too loud. All of a sudden a student from Africa who spoke in a clipped British accent jumped on top of a car with a bullhorn and started shouting, "Do not panic! Do not panic!" I thought, "God, take that away!" Everybody said, "Panic? Why should we panic, you know?" and there was no reason to panic.

That's the sort of thing that I was always concerned about in Korea along the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). You have all this capacity. It's like an electric charge; it's just waiting for something to let it explode, you know, and I always thought about that guy getting up [laughter], in a sense, I think, probably innocently, and yet it could have devastating effect, and...that's another issue we can talk about later.

Q: After Vanderbilt, you come to Emory as dean of the School of Theology? How does that appointment come? I mean you're obviously beginning to be well known in certain circles.

LANEY: Well, you know, I don't know. They were looking for a dean, and the previous dean had been elected a bishop, and somehow my name got to the search committee or something, and I think my experience, both in Korea and as a younger person, was appealing to a large number of the faculty at the time. They wanted some fresh, you know, just fresh, more energetic leadership.

Q: Because again, we're in the Kennedy/post-Kennedy Vietnam. I mean we in the Foreign Service and the country in general felt that there was a need to let a new younger generation come forward.

LANEY: Right, right. And you know, I think...right. I hadn't thought of this before in the sense of the parallel, but it's like my move from Arkansas to Central High School in Memphis. Coming in as a stranger allowed me a freedom of access. Sometimes it blocks it, you know, because you just can't get in, but it gave me an access. I didn't have any

history with those people, and I immediately surfaced as a leader. Well then, being a total outsider to the campus at Emory and being fresh blood and all, they could all project their hopes on me without knowing what would happen. It wasn't just that I was not a known quantity; it was that I didn't have any hostages. You know, I hadn't made any enemies or anything, and here was a possibility, in a sense, to start new, even though you say it can't be done, there's still a certain degree of innovation and all.

And we began a terrific life. We had a great time at the School of Theology.

Q: And what kinds of movements were...what did that involve?

LANEY: We'd appointed lots and lots of new faculty. I got the university to agree not to subsidize us, but if they didn't subsidize, let us keep whatever we raised. So that way I thought, "Well now, we could keep our tuition, and we could keep our gifts." And so I went about increasing tuition and gifts.

Q: And you thought you weren't going to get into investment banking!

LANEY: [Laughter] Right. Well, I tell you, many people have that very sense. You used your Wall Street smarts very well.

But anyhow, we added a lot of faculty. I got word that the Hartford Seminary Foundation was maybe going to go out of business, and they had a magnificent library up there of about 250,000 volumes. We purchased the library - lock, stock, and barrel - which is the largest transfer of books in American history. There were four and a quarter shelf miles of books we bought from Hartford. The reason why that library was so significant was because a man named Case, a rich Hartford businessman, in the 1800s had gone every year to Europe and bought books, and he bought some of the most astonishing things. We have the best Martin Luther collection in North America: many incunabula, books printed within the first 50 years of the Gutenberg press; and a whole range of all kinds of specialized stuff; and for the study of the social history, culture, and sociology of Africa, the missionary letters of the nineteenth century are the prime source.

They were the only ones there. We've got all that stuff. So here, all of a sudden Emory went from nowhere to being the foremost theological library in North America, ahead of Harvard and Yale; we did that in one fell swoop. Of course I had to raise a lot of money for that!

One of the men I got money from was Stanley [S.] Kresge of the Kresge Foundation. I didn't know him, but somebody organized a phone appointment for me, and a friend got him on the line, and I said hello, and he said, "Well, I know why you're calling." I said, "Yes?" He said, "You bought a library, and you want me to pay for it!" [Laughter] I thought, boy, this guy's will be hard to deal with, you know. [Laughter]

Oh, my! But anyway, those are some of them. We built a new building; we built the new library. I had Paul Rudolph, who was dean of the Yale School of Architecture, design our library. His father graduated from the School of Theology.

So he had a personal interest in it. Then Harvard wanted me to become dean of their divinity school. So that propelled me -

Q: They wanted the library back.

LANEY: Right - propelled me into visibility for the trustees at Emory, which then led me to the presidency, out of all that.

Q: These are great examples and illustrations of networking, and it's other people that you know, who can speak and carry the word for you, and about you and are aware of these other positions coming up.

LANEY: Well, you know, by that time I had a lot of friends who - in fact, the chairman of the board was very much sort of my elder brother, and he had become a very good friend. This was Henry Bowden, who was a lawyer here in town.

But of course the power behind all the moves in Atlanta at that time was Robert Woodruff, the legendary chairman of Coca-Cola, and I'd gotten to know Mr. Woodruff, and so I became his candidate to be president. Well, it would be hard for the university to turn down that recommendation. [Laughter]

Q: And you got to know him through the divinity school -

LANEY: Well, later. Yes, in the latter years, and I just made of point of becoming acquainted with him because I recognized he was an influential person in the community, and then after I got to know him, we really became friends. It wasn't a question of becoming acquaintances; it was a question of enjoying each other. We talked, and I became, I think, a kind of a confidant and that was a wonderful experience. Of course, a couple of years later, he gave us the largest gift in American philanthropic history at that time. Meanwhile, it's been eclipsed dollar wise, although the appreciated value of those three million shares of Coke, which is what it was, are now worth \$2.2 billion. So I don't think any single gift has ever equaled that!

Q: Now you're coming to Emory again during the Vietnam period, how did Vietnam affect Emory? This is the American South. This is not the University of California, Berkeley.

LANEY: No. There were some demonstrations, and there were some sit-ins, but the president had decided that the demonstrations would not suspend classes. This was in the spring of...I guess, 1970, when things were heating up. I decided to suspend classes at Candler [Candler School of Theology at Emory]. We had a teach-in. You know, this

wasn't uncommon across the country, but it went against the grain of the university, and I probably annoyed the president because it might appear I broke ranks.

But the teach-in was very important, because I felt that the theology students should deal with these issues in the most fundamental way, that it was part of their education. This was not just politics. This was the issue of the social good, and the purpose of the country, and so forth. Of course, it probably split the faculty. The Young Turks were all for it, and the old timers felt this was inappropriate and were probably nervous with it, uneasy with it. But we did it, and we didn't have any lasting effect either on me or on the faculty; and I think it gave us a certain respect on campus, because as opposed to the law school, or the business school, or the college, we were the ones that did it.

I'm not speaking now from real knowledge. I'm conjecturing. You know, always on a campus the theology school, certainly in a university, is the tolerated younger brother, or the distant cousin, or something. Its legitimacy is often suspect, or the appropriateness of a university having a theology school or something confessional is always under a certain cloud of pressure and suspicion. I think to not only have it achieve a certain intellectual prominence, but also to show a certain moral courage is very salutary within the university. And that was of course not in my mind when we did it - that we did it because I thought we had to. I mean it was just -

Q: I mean you authorized this. You were one of the speakers.

LANEY: Oh, yes. Yes, oh, yes. Yes, and you know, I'm a little hazy on this now, more than 30 years ago.

Q: I don't know. I remember it just as yesterday. [Laughter] Well, as you and I both know from working on campus today, one is working with people who were born after these events. So for them it's all incredibly ancient history, whereas -

LANEY: Yes, oh, yes, gosh! You know, we're talking about students whose parents weren't even in school when Kennedy was shot. [Laughter] That's really...that's sobering.

Q: You were mentioning the civil rights movement, which continues to bubble through this historical period.

LANEY: Well, yes, and to put it into perspective for example, I appointed the first African-American tenured professor in the university; I think this is in 1970. There had been other appointments, but this was a tenured. You know, this sounds like I'm making a big thing. I don't mean to at all. It just was so appropriate, no end -

Q: But that's just it. It was what the times were and these were the issues.

LANEY: That was a fact. We were only very marginally integrated because there is a major Methodist black seminary across town at the Atlanta University Center, you know, where the cluster - Spelman, Morehouse, and all - are. There's a seminary there that has five constituent parts, five different denominational participants, and one of them is Methodist. So the church had another Methodist seminary across town. But we did have a lot more relationship with the black churches in Atlanta while I was there and had classes take place at some of them, you know, integrating it that way. You know, there were interesting incidents, but they're not earthshaking.

Q: But as the head of the theology school and sitting here now in Atlanta, you're meeting these other people, like Mr. Woodruff and others, and it comes to their attention that Emory needs a new president. And the search committee selects you. It must have been very exciting.

LANEY: Well, yes. One of the contenders for the job, or one of the people that Emory looked at, was Frank Rhodes, who later went to Cornell, or that year went to Cornell. And ironically and interestingly, Frank's going to be down here next Friday for the inauguration of the new president at Emory. So he and I will be there. I was the one that came to Emory and he went to Cornell.

There was some real resistance on the part of the faculty, particularly Arts and Sciences, about the possibility of having a theologian, but worse, an ordained Methodist minister, as the president. This seemed like a throwback to the early twentieth century and it didn't seem appropriate, and they felt like it might be a drag on Emory's attempt to move ahead, and I can understand that position. I had no problem with it. I don't think it turned out to be the case, but I can see why they felt it could be, particularly for those that did not know me personally. I suppose the issue could have been put, what does this mean for Emory to have a Methodist minister as a president.

Nevertheless, in 1977 it came about. And for a year or so, really for a year or two I was sort of on probation. Then when we got the Woodruff gift, all of that dissipated! [Laughter] Nothing like having an enormous fund of money to win friends and gain patronage!

Q: I suspect being a university president is demanding in that one is adjusting to the social changes which are afoot while seeing that staff is getting paid and the campus has enough parking spaces, a lot of very basic administrative decisions.

LANEY: Well, ah...before we got this gift, we had had a Phi Beta Kappa symposium (I guess it was the 50th anniversary of the Phi Beta Kappa at Emory); and we decided to have a topic of intellect and imagination, and got some of the most distinguished people in the country to come for a series of lectures, dance, art, and so forth; and Dædalus, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences agreed to publish. We decided to do a joint issue together on our symposium, and that created a lot of real interest and sort

of all of a sudden people realized that things could...we could be at the center of a lot of intellectual activity.

We had the symposium in the early fall of '79. The Dædalus issue was published in the winter, and in the summer of '80 I was at Bellagio, [Italy] at the Rockefeller retreat center [Rockefeller Study and Conference Center] there. We invited Barbara Tuchman to come to our meeting; she happened to be there. I guess it was on the Fourth of July, and so we were having a picnic. So Barbara Tuchman came, and when we met and she found out I was president, she said, "I have that marvelous issue of Dædalus in my briefcase with me, and I'm reading it." [Laughter]

And I thought, wow, I could have died and gone to heaven there. I mean to be in Italy in Bellagio at the Rockefeller [Center], and have Barbara Tuchman comment on what we had just done in the previous fall was just a wonderful affirmation. So anyway, that was the beginning of my presidency.

But the next move after we got this gift was to...and by the way, the gift didn't come out of the blue. I set forth a series of priorities to convince Mr. Woodruff that this was an investment worth making. But I appointed an outside advisory committee to visit a number of times and give us advice on what we should do, what kind of initiatives we should take. The chair of the committee was Howard [R.] Lamar, who later became president of Yale briefly [1992 – 1993]. He at that time was dean of Yale College, and a marvelous man, and an Emory graduate interestingly.

Yes, so he had a built-in interest, and [C.] Vann Woodward also is an Emory graduate, a Southern historian.

But anyway...we had scientists, and humanists, and we had Stanley Cavell of Harvard University's philosophy department. They came a number of times, and they made their recommendations, and we followed them very carefully. I mean they weren't just something received from outside; we'd discuss them. But the net result of the interaction between the committee and us was that we adopted these things and did them; and then seven years later, we had Howard Lamar come back and assess this for our board of trustees, how we'd done, and he was very complimentary of our progress in making strides toward those goals.

But the most important thing I did, and this is out of my investment banking: I decided that the Woodruff fund would be kept separate from the university endowment - I mean it would be a part of the endowment, and we could use it as an in-house foundation.

Q: What advantages does that purport?

LANEY: Well, it meant that we did not roll anything into the budget, that we allowed funds to be used from the Woodruff fund to start things like a venture capital foundation does, but then we'd back out of it. In other words, it could have gotten eaten up very

quickly by just rolling it into the budget: we'll do more of this, we'll do more of that, and we'll pay for it with the Woodruff fund, and then it'd be over. I mean it would have given us a jolt, but by keeping it free...for example, we increased our undergraduate scholarship budget twenty fold. That wasn't easy, but I agreed to do it only when the dean said, "We will back out at 20 percent a year. In five years we'll be back, and you'll have the freedom of that." So we agreed to do it, and he did! And we would do buildings, and we'd say we will provide half of the building, and that would be a match, would be an inducement sum.

Q: Sort of matching grant and -

LANEY: So all this way, and then we did this with the faculty appointments and everything. Some of it we did make permanent: that is, for the Woodruff professorships we would allocate that money to that purpose. But we tried to keep it as much unencumbered as possible so that we had freedom for continuing initiatives that way, and it didn't become a crutch - well, we can just do this and blow it, you know, just blow it. That was a Wall Street move.

Q: It was very exciting. The Woodruff grant would have, again, put Emory on the map. What I'm intrigued with is, you mentioned that you start dealing with President Carter about this time, don't you?

LANEY: Right. Well, in 1980, summer or spring of 1980, Hamilton Jordan called me -

Q: Ambassador Laney, you were saying Hamilton Jordan called you.

LANEY: Right. When he came down we talked, and through that I began to talk with some of the Carter people, such as Charlie Kirbo [Charles Hughes Kirbo], about the possibility of putting Carter's presidential library at Emory. When Carter left office, the more we talked. We hit it off personally, and I think, he was ready to join up with Emory, and he saw Emory as having both a trajectory toward growth and, I think, distinction, as well as having some resources. I felt that Carter was the only president that Georgia had ever turned out. Now when he came home, he was not lionized. I guarantee you, he was almost a pariah!

He had been so brutally defeated by Reagan and humiliated by Iran. A lot of people, even on the faculty, didn't really think seeking a presidential library was a big deal. So this was not a slam dunk for Emory, although it's turned out to be a marvelous thing, because the Carter Center has just emerged as one of the really distinctive institutions in the United States, and Carter's presence on campus is still electrifying.

Anyway, I arranged to appoint the former President, almost immediately upon his return, as a distinguished professor. Jordan was just with us a year, and we began talking and dreaming about the Carter Center. His ambitions and visions for that were so far in excess of anything I had been planning that I was aghast at the sheer bravado of it all! I just...at

the time I couldn't believe that he was going to build something. I thought we were going to build a library [laughter].

Q: Now a Presidential Library, operating under the National Archives, is an expected part of a post-presidency.

LANEY: Yes, and here he comes and says, "Oh, we'll have a center, and we'll do this and that," and I thought, "Good heavenly days!" The library is not built by Congress, but maintained by Congress. But everything else has got to be built and maintained separately. They don't maintain centers and stuff.

So I had said, "Look, we'll build you a library on campus. We'll do that! We'll just build it!" But he had more grandiose plans than I had in mind! So I went with him to New York, and we'd meet with foundations, and you know, he got a very respectful welcome; but you know, I could read the tea leaves. This was not going to be big money, and I went with him to Japan. We had dinner one night with Lew Wasserman in LA (Los Angeles), you know, the big media mogul, who died not too long ago [June 3, 2002], and met with [Walter H.] Shorenstein in San Francisco, I mean all the big donors.

But nothing much happened. I mean Shorenstein gave us a \$100,000. This is not, you know...this isn't going to build a center! Then we flew to Japan, and we met with this group of the heads of the major corporations, so it got its own name; this kind of controls, you know in an informal way, what they do together. Again respectful, Carter was better thought of in Japan than he was here, as a matter of fact, at that time. So during the meeting Carter said, "I may meet with Sasakawa." Now [Ryoichi] Sasakawa had made an enormous fortune in Japan, but he was known for his gambling - that is, his fortune was made *in* gambling, not as a gambler, in motorboat racing and stuff like that, which in the upper rarified reaches of Japanese leadership was not considered to be quite the, you know, acceptable thing. In fact, there were some -

Q: It's not what proper gentlemen did! [Laughter]

LANEY: Right. It had the aroma, in a way, of a kind of gangsterism; and I could see immediately this chill go around the room with these corporate heads, and they said, "Oh, President Carter! If Mr. Sasakawa is going to assist you, I'm sure that will be enough." I thought, "Boy! This is bad news." I had called a friend of mine in Japan. I said, "Get me news about Sasakawa, you know, quietly." Then he told me all this stuff! He said, "Oh Lord, you don't want to get hooked up with this guy!" Well, we did it, and he gave a lot of money. He was after the Nobel Peace Prize, which he never got; he died; but he set up his foundation, and there have been a lot of robber barons. You know, after you're dead, and you have a lot of money, and then you try giving it away to good things, your name gradually gets vindicated.

A halo effect! But that trip to New York and San Francisco and LA, man! This is an uphill battle!

Q: What time frame is this?

LANEY: This was in 1981, in the months right after he left the White House. But he was dogged, and little by little he raised the money, and we gave him several million dollars. He was able to construct the presidential library, and he dedicated it in 1986 with President Reagan present. I'm not sure, but I think I was the master of ceremonies or something; I didn't speak, but I was in charge I guess, at...

Up until then, Carter had met with our faculty a number of times, and lectured, and the faculty was still looking at him a little askance, wondering what role we played, where does Emory fit in, and that sort of stuff. But after the Center became established, his programs became so self-justified in terms of their value to humanity that his reputation just began to soar. He used to get annoyed at my tongue in cheek introductions, "This is the first president to use the White House as a stepping stone!"

He would respond, "Dr. Laney thinks being a professor at Emory is the highest position in the U.S." [Laughter]

But anyway, we got along famously, he and I did; we could speak frankly. I mean I was always respectful; you know I never took liberties with him. But we could nevertheless talk, and that, I think, was an important part of the partnership.

The Carter Center, and President Carter himself, who has been involved not only in doing good, but in validating his career, has not always been in sync with Emory. He has a certain impatience, if not disdain, for the academic enterprise. He keeps saying, "I don't want the Carter Center to be a think tank that churns out reports that sit on the shelves and nobody reads." He said, "I want us to *do* things!" And finally I began to say, "Well, you know, President Carter, we can do things; but the best thing in the long run is to teach other people to do things. Then you're not just giving people fish; you're teaching them to fish." And I said, "You know, that's what the educational institution's all about." "Well, maybe you're right." So we've had that ongoing discussion. It isn't resolved yet [laughter], by the way!

Q: [Laughter] Well, he is a very energetic man and has put his fingers on a number of very interesting projects. That's for sure! So you began to have this very close association with the Carter Center which is actually some distance from Emory physically.

LANEY: Right. So, you know, this put me in...I got used to seeing a lot of people, talking with them, and not only dealing with President Carter, but also with Secretary [Cyrus] Vance, and [Henry] Kissinger had come down once or twice, and you know, all these people, and this gave me and Emory considerable exposure in the field too.

Q: Did you have much time with Secretary Vance? I was his staff assistant once and quite enjoyed the gentleman.

LANEY: Well, yes. I wouldn't say a lot of time, but some time; and then I was with him in lunch in Korea. We had been there a month maybe, and he was out there for... well, I guess on private business, and we had lunch.

I always was critical of Vance because he resigned. I felt like when you're... I didn't have any problem with his disagreement, and I didn't have any problem with eventually resigning. I felt when he resigned was... he exploited for himself the moment and rather than trying to be think about the country. I thought it weakened Carter, and at that point, he really disagreed on or weakened the president. He could later have resigned and made the same kind of statement. So I never, I never forgave him for that. I don't mean I personally wouldn't. I'm more harsh on him than Carter is; Carter and I have talked about this. But anyway, that's that.

Q: Oh, really? President Carter, what was his response to the Vance resignation, did he discussed it with you.

LANEY: Well, he said, "Well, I respect Cy's reasons," and then he doesn't go into it any further. "He doesn't go there," as the kids say.

In these few discussions I wasn't trying to get him to agree with me. I was just telling him I think in terms of the larger sense of vocation means that you don't indulge even your own sense of moral rectitude at the expense of your country; you do that at a more opportune time. I'm not saying he could never have done it, but that was not the right time. I thought it was self-indulgent.

Now he did... I think he did it out of pique because he wasn't notified, and you know, I understand that.

Q: But that's an illustration of some of the things that you get into when you're in those positions, is which level of analysis, which level of responsibility -

LANEY: Yes, right, and you know, to me that showed a real weakness in his larger vision of statecraft. Now that's my personal feeling, you know.

Q: Fair enough. So starting in the 1980s, you have this very close association with Carter and the former Carter administration.

LANEY: You know, we had an ongoing problem of how to recruit leadership for the Carter Center, who would be the director; and we had some hits, and we had some misses. Also, there was a continuing issue about how faculty related to it. Carter tended to see the faculty as his staff - [Laughter] and they didn't... they bridled at that. So we might have very distinguished people come in, and after a year or two, they decided they would

return to their previous post. They didn't want to do that anymore. But it's worked out, you know, given all things.

Q: But as you were saying, Emory itself is really a major player in the academic world, certainly in Georgia, and the Center now brings all these other people to Emory, and I think you mentioned that Senator Sam Nunn was a trustee of the Carter Center.

LANEY: Also of Emory University.

Q: So I mean you're living in a work and social situation where you exposed, if you will, to some very considerable players in the American political system.

LANEY: And all this time, of course, I chaired the Overseer's Committee at Harvard for the Divinity School for five years, and was on the University Council at Yale, which is their counterpart to the Overseers in a way, academic counterpart, and served on the commission for America and the New World hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations. I think this was after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990-91. Winston Lord and Morton Abramowitz were the co-chairs of that.

And then later I thought it was interesting; Morton and I then co-chaired the Task Force on Korea for seven years! It's the longest running task force in history!

Q: Speaking of Korea...we haven't mentioned Korea for quite a while...but while you're president of Emory, did you develop a relationship, a formal school relationship, with Yonsei University -

LANEY: Yes. We also did that with Peking University.

I went to China in 1981, as a guest of Peking University. We were there three weeks, and traveled around, and came back, and we began bringing people here. In fact, the president of Beijing Medical College, which is now folded into Beijing University, was a research professor at Emory for two years, and then every summer since then. He's a cardiologist, and he'd come back and do his research here, and his wife Yuan Ming is a major player in the Center for International Studies [professor of International Relations and director, Institute of International Relations] at Beijing University. I've kept up with her; we were at a conference in Salzburg, at the Salzburg Seminar last December.

Q: This period coincides with our formal diplomatic recognition of China, the negotiation of various Science and Technology Agreements as the U.S. government tried to create ways to hook up American institutions with Chinese institutions.

LANEY: Well, I enjoyed that very much. We had a number of exchange students and graduate students and all that sort of thing. It's harder to get our people to go over there.

We used to stay at the Friendship Hotel. Boy! I tell you, they left something to be desired! Let me tell you!

Q: A very basic, Soviet style hotel, right?

LANEY: Yes. A couple of times when we...I think we were in Shanghai, we stayed in the guesthouse that Zhou Enlai had stayed in. It was very nice, real rococo, but very nice. But boy! The Friendship Hotel was something else! Oh, Lord, they were bad!

Anyway, in Shanghai we stayed in the guesthouse. As you may recall in 1981 things were still very primitive and the government was very suspicious. I tried to give my little Walkman to - we had two people that went with us all around the country - tried to give it to him, because when he heard it his face was transported to hear a symphony just explode in his ears, you know, this little thing. So I gave it to him. When I got ready to leave they said, "Where's the Walkman?" I said, "Oh, I lost it!" They found it on that guy, and they made him give it back! And I thought, you know, I may have caused that guy real trouble, but they were that tricky then. It was that serious!

Q: Yes, because both sides, while starting out anew, were encumbered with old stereotypes.

LANEY: I have to tell you! When we flew from Beijing to Xi'an on the Chinese Air, we got in our seats, the two seats right in the middle of the plane; and before we took off, the woman came and pulled a curtain, like a shower curtain, all around our seats, so we were totally cut off; we were enveloped by this shower curtain! I said, "What is this?" She said, "You first class." [Laughter]

Q: These are great vignettes, but you do set up an agreement with Yonsei University.

LANEY: Yes, actually we did in 1990 I believe it was. Right, and we'd bring ophthalmology professors over here to do a year's research; there's one a year that comes over from their ophthalmology department and has a whole year of research here. Our ophthalmology is very, very good, and they're pleased to have both the year off and also the research opportunity.

These relations have continued, and now are relationships with lots of other places as well, as most colleges do. Of course, that's the one that's close to my heart!

Q: The Clinton administration takes office in the 1990s, and we get into the process of how you come to be ambassador to Korea.

LANEY: Well, there's an interesting story there. In 1980 I ran into Charlie Kirbo downtown. Charlie Kirbo was close to Carter and was a man who didn't want any office; he was a prominent lawyer here in town; older, sort of a father figure for Jimmy Carter. Kirbo would often go up and stay in the White House and come back and he'd offer

advice; but he was someone who was totally without any hooks or ambitions about the presidency; and so Carter and he were very, very close.

I ran into Kirbo going into an office building, and he stopped me. Now this is in the summer of reelection, of 1980, and he said, "Jimmy and I've been talking and we want you to be ambassador to Korea." This is 1980. And I said, "Well, that's very heady," and then that was the end of that. Of course, Carter wasn't reelected, and that was no more. Now, regarding Korea, in 1991 Carter received an invitation from Kim Il Sung, the head of North Korea at the time, to visit, and so he said to me, "Let's go." Well, it turned out, as I checked into it, South Korea was having an election or something, and the time just didn't fit. Then the next year we were having - I mean whatever it was, he wasn't able to use that invitation until 1994 when I invited him to go up to North Korea for that resolution of the nuclear thing.

Yes, that was the same invitation. This is all to say these are the things about Carter with Korea. Of course he knew my interest in Korea, my history there and all.

In 1980, Korea had had what they call the Kwangju Rebellion, where hundreds of students had been shot by the military government commanded by Chun Doo Hwan, who later became president.

In fact - Kwangju is the name of the city; it's the Cholla [Cholla-namdo] Province. And this is where Kim Dae-jung was from; that's his home area. But there was a lot of criticism in Korea of the Americans, partly because Chun Doo Hwan put out the word that he was operating under the authority of the Americans when the violence occurred - they tried to pass the buck!

Q: Be careful of your friends? [Laughter]

LANEY: And there was a lot of confusion as to where the commanding general was in all this, the Commander of U.S. Forces, Korea. So I was going to the Philippines, to Manila, for a meeting of the International Association of University Presidents; and Carter asked me to stop by Seoul, knowing my history and interest in Korea, and do a personal assessment of what I could find out; and so I did. I took several days. I talked, of course, to my friends who had been my friends when I was there as a missionary. Then I talked to people in the embassy, and...

Q How plugged in did you find the embassy?

LANEY: I was really disappointed and angered by the embassy. They tried to stonewall me.

Q: In setting up appointments or briefing you?

LANEY: Well, they talked to me, but the briefing was so perfunctory and they just dismissed all the issues that were highly charged! Well, if an issue's highly charged, it may be convenient to say, "Well, no, there's nothing to that!" but that's not an answer, you know; that's not dealing with the issue.

I left, and I make no pretense of having plumbed the depths of these events, but I left with a distinct feeling that whatever his role in the situation, General Wickham [John Adams Wickham, Jr., commander in chief of the United Nations Command and commander of the United States Forces and Eighth Army, Korea, 1979–1982], who was the commanding general, had been compromised by the whole affair, whether wittingly or unwittingly. And I recommended in a notation - personal memorandum to Carter - that it would be good to go ahead and make a change. Don't dismiss him and don't make any kind of...pass any judgment, no reprimand, nothing. Just have a rotation maybe six months earlier. Just get him out of there because he was a lightning rod!

Carter sent me back a copy; maybe it was the same one that I'd sent him. He'd written notes, you know. He wrote on there, "This does not accord with what my advisors are telling me." I thought, well, why did you ask me to go in, you know [laughter]! I mean after all, he wasn't committed to taking my advice, but I thought, you know, this is what's going on.

I still think that a more proactive approach in 1980 could have averted a lot of continuing anger and resentment that festered for many years, still festering when I was there as ambassador, of the whole incident and America's role in it. They had a white paper that the State Department presented, you know, looked into it, and they exonerated [Chun] Doo Hwan himself. When I was ambassador I looked into it, and there was very clear evidence that the white paper was not really as even-handed as it ought to have been; in other words, it wasn't convincing to the Koreans; and in the long run, if you can't...it's one thing to satisfy yourself, but if you can't satisfy the people that feel aggrieved, and I don't mean cave into them, then you haven't really succeeded very much. So that was an issue continuing, and in fact, I had an -

Q: Of course that's difficult because that would put you in the position of pointing the finger at their own leaders, who were in part creating this image. I mean you -

LANEY: I think that sort of thing ought to be done. I don't think you should allow yourself to be a patsy.

Q: To your own allies and -

LANEY: Right. I mean, what - unless you totally patronize them and you treat them like children, I think that in itself is demeaning. I said, "Okay. I want to tell you how it is now buddy, and this is because we're partners. You want to be partners? This is the way partners act, you know!" But you've must have a certain purchase on that. You know, you have to have a standing to be able to say that! The problem with a lot of the people there,

they had no standing to be able to say that. So they just had to try to figure out how do we get the most out of this with the least amount of damage. Of course, this doesn't solve the problem.

Later on, this came to haunt me when I went down to Kwangju. I can tell you about that later when we're talking about the ambassadorship.

Anyway, this is all background - that he used me as a separate set of eyes and had at least apparently told Kirbo he wanted me to be ambassador. Carter and I never talked about that; that was Kirbo. But I don't think Kirbo would have hazarded this without some reason to think, and this must have meant that my memo was better than I thought it was [laughter] even though he didn't take my advice!

The other thing was that we had this ongoing discussion about going to North Korea. Those were the two Korea-related things that kept coming up.

Q: Of course, in the early days of the Carter administration opened a very significant discussion about withdrawing troops from Korea. In fact, I think [Don] Oberdorfer in his book on Korea [The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History] kind of starts off with the Carter administration and that issue.

LANEY: Right, right, and that riled the conservatives in Korea greatly because troops there are a symbol, as well as a reality. The reality is, of course, not only does it give them a greater sense of security, but it also saves them billions of dollars a year on budget because they don't have to replicate what we would take out, and it also is a source of enormous amount of money and connection. The power base ran through the military for so long, the power base of Korea. It was very important for the main people to be seen eating with the commanding general occasionally. There was a profound permeation, you know, all through the military government and all: if the military government ran Korea, the United States military ran the military government. So that was part of the heritage.

And Carter, of course, ran afoul of all of that by saying, "I want to withdraw all these troops;" and he did it, of course, in his usual way of just saying, "Well, I've decided to withdraw the troops!" no preparation or anything. It's not really a matter of being a politician. He's not a diplomat, in the sense in which he tries to prepare the ground so that when something happens, there's receptivity to it. He's an engineer, and he thinks that if this angle should be there, then you strike it on paper; that's it. Sad thing is people aren't the paper, and they're not the pencil.

Q: I would suspect that a college president would understand the issue of preparing the ground for people, especially before you spring a request for money! [Laughter] I mean a sophisticated college president prepares the ground in the same way as any diplomat, and we ought not to see these as two different worlds. They're very similar skills.

LANEY: Oh, I'll tell you, I do! It wasn't an easy thing for me because I have a certain degree of impatience too. And you know, learn to see around corners or be totally surprised.

Q: So how do we get to the Clinton administration and the suggestion that Jim Laney ought to be the ambassador to Korea?

LANEY: Well...of course I didn't know Clinton, but I'd shaken his hand once, that's all. But I was known to both [Georgia Senator] Sam Nunn and to Jimmy Carter as having Korean background. I think...I don't know the discussions that took place with Warren. Of course, Warren Christopher was very close to Carter at that point.

Carter had often said Christopher was the best public servant he'd ever known, and Christopher was very active on the Carter trustee board, and he was head of the transition team for Clinton.

Q: Oh, I guess that was because he was Deputy Secretary of State -

LANEY: Under Carter. Right. As trustee of the Carter Center, he and David Hamburg, who was a scientist in New York, and I think Hamburg was head of the National Science Foundation under Carter or something like that [president and then chairman of the board of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and president of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences from 1975-1980]. He had some important scientific post, and he may have been president of the Rockefeller University; I'm not sure, something like that [president emeritus at Carnegie Corporation of New York].

But anyway, David [Hamburg] and [Warren] Christopher came to Atlanta to see me in December, and we had a private dinner, just the three of us, to discuss the future of the Carter Center and things like that. This was in 1992...yes, like December of 1992. And my relationships with Christopher and Hamburg were good; I mean it was just easy and so forth. I think Christopher had taken a liking to me; he doesn't say much, but I think that. I think as they were casting about for the next headmasterships and all, I think there was a real desire - my predecessors had been Don Gregg and Jim Lilley; well, and for that matter, before that had been Dixie Walker [Richard Walker]. All three had been CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], that is, former CIA officers. Certainly with Don Gregg and, as far as I know, with Jim Lilley, that really didn't signify anything, but it carried a certain kind of an aura, halo, or as they say in Korean, "namsa" (smell). You know, it was ineffable.

Q: Right, the selection of a politically-appointed ambassador can be to deliberately send a signal by using somebody with a certain background. .

LANEY: Exactly. Well, and you can see, apart from...and I don't question their integrity at all, but the association carries the lingering wonderment, if not suspicion - was there

still a link? This is complicated by the fact that the Korean CIA, which is in some sense modeled after the American CIA (but it has domestic as well as international responsibilities), was so feared it was used as a political arm; and that means that a lot of Koreans in knowing this, there's mystery - are you who you say you are? And even if you are, how do you disprove the suspicions that attach, you know.

In any case, having said all that, I've already said more than I think is warranted, I think that Clinton wanted a fresh approach. I don't think he wanted something that carried associations like that and all. He wanted somebody that at least had some experience with Korea, and I think for Carter and Nunn, my name came up in that regard, you know. They had come to respect me at Emory and know me and trust me, and I think they felt, well, you know, let's try this! Then Christopher had come to know me, and so that, you know, I'm not privy to what went on and how my name got there. All I know is Christopher tracked me down in Europe and said, "The president wants to appoint you ambassador to Korea." And I said, "Well, I need a few days" -

Q: So he got to carry the message.

LANEY: "I need to think about this a few days." The next day it appeared in the New York Times that Mondale and I were going to be going to Tokyo and Seoul respectively [laughter]. This just kills me with the trustees, because I had not been able to prepare them, and it comes out ...in the Times when I'm in Europe, you know. This is terrible!

Q: So much for preparing the ground [laughter].

LANEY: But you know, that's as far as I know.

Well, the only other thing I know about it: Carter did ask me, I think, once, "Would you be interested in going?" and I said, "Well, it'd be hard to turn down." I had no interest in being an ambassador, just quasi ambassador; you know that wasn't anything I wanted to do.

But Korea's different because I love Korea, as you can tell, and this is a different matter. I had real feelings about the issues, and you know, Carter had mixed feelings about me, "Well, what's this going to mean (for the Center)?" and so forth. I was in a budget hearing in, I guess, March of 1991 and Sam Nunn called from Washington and got me out of the budget hearings. He said, "I need to know whether or not you really would take this job if it were offered." And I said, "Well, I can't really answer that Sam. But you know my great interest and commitment to Korea. That's all I can say." And he said, "Well, I don't...I'm in...I'm in a bind because I don't want to get across purposes with my fellow trustees at Emory." [Laughter]

I heard nothing else until Christopher called me and told me that the president wanted to employ me.

So that 1991 conversation was the only one I had where it was specifically asked would I be - didn't say it's being offered, but would I serve, or take the appointment.

And you know, as a result of all that, I felt an enormous degree of freedom. I didn't feel like I owed anybody anything except to do a good job, and that really made a difference in my inner feeling about it. I had great freedom with regard to the Clinton White House. It was not always appreciated [laughter]!

I remember last night I was watching this Democratic [Party] unity meeting in Washington, and there was Terry McAuliffe; and I turned to Berta, my wife, and I said, "You know, within three months of my arrival in Seoul, Terry McAuliffe visited me. And I said, 'Terry, the White House is in a mess! I've never dealt with anything that is so screwed up!'" He was appalled, "This was lese-majesté." [Laughter] I said, "I know Clinton's smart, but I'll be damned if I can figure out what he wants or where he's going." And I said, "You know, I can't get any clearance or any clarity about anything in the State Department! I'm out here, you know, flying by the seat of my pants!" And I said, "This is a big time issue!"

I'm sure Terry went back and told Clinton [laughter], because he would look at me a little bit, you know, like, "Can I trust this guy?"

But then at the 1994 APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting at Jakarta, Indonesia; I remember we were all sitting around, and I was sitting here, and (President) Kim Young-sam was sitting there, and Clinton was sitting there and all the advisors; and we were just kind of chatting; and all of a sudden Clinton turned, and he said, "President Kim, is Jim Laney doing a good job for you out there?" This is the damndest question I ever heard of! And he turned, and he said, "Oh, sir! He's doing a most excellent job. He could not be a better ambassador!" "Okay!" [Laughter] I thought, you know, "What's going on here?" Probably giggling me, I guess.

Q: Tell our audience something about the world of being a political appointee. Here you're off and you've gotten the call. What happens to you, now? You have congressional hearings, State Department briefings. How did all this organized and scheduled?

LANEY: Well, at that point, I said, "I can't do anything for another two weeks. I'm on this three week trip with some other friends, and I'm going to finish it out!" So I didn't come home for two weeks.

And then...I recall I had to go up to the State Department, and of course they had to vet me for security. They had the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), you know, look into me, and that took time. As you recall Mondale and I were nominated together.

Q: Well, where we were...I was seeking a description from you of the experiences you go through before you walk into that door of the embassy.

LANEY: Okay, I had to go to ambassador school. There was a week of protocol - how does an embassy run, and all that. That took place in State Department itself, yes.

Q: And it's you and...

LANEY: Well, in this case, the whole tranche of new ambassadors. There were about...whether they were career, you know, Foreign Service or not. There were about 25 of us. There was Mondale, and Holbrook, and me, and a whole, you know, just a whole range of folks, such as Swanee Hunt who went to Vienna.

Anyway, that went on for a week. Then they had some sort of parallel program for wives. It wasn't quite as heavy, but it was an attempt to, you know...

Q: So what kinds of briefers were in these? Were they all-day sessions for a week?

LANEY: All day sessions for a week, yes; and they have people coming in from different things, like the security and that, people about budgets and about offices back in the State Department, and about how State Department and the government are organized. I don't remember, but it was the usual stuff, you know. You're coming into a system that is working. How do you get into the system, and how do you work it, you know, with the least amount of pain, and so forth. Then the next week we spent being briefed, I think, out at the CIA. I know we were flown down to Fort Bragg to see the Special Forces operations.

We were flown down and flown back in the same day, and we were told under what circumstances these could be requested, and how they could come in. It was very, very, you know, highly, highly restrictive. In fact, their very existence for a long time was even denied! But we saw all that, and briefed with the Pentagon, you know, all that stuff, Treasury, you know. I went around and saw the Commerce Secretary, and then I spent a lot of time - now this was before my hearing.

I spent time meeting with various senators, and so forth. In fact, John Negroponte and I had our hearing together. He was on his way to the Philippines.

Q: Your hearing was on September 14, 1993.

LANEY: Right, that sounds right. Sam Nunn introduced me, and he was a very complimentary. Prior to the hearing my Department handlers held what you call the murder boards, where they get you and prepare you for the worst kind of questions prior to the actual hearings.

And John and I had gone through that. I remember -

Q: Now that's something the State Department does for you?

LANEY: Yes, right, yes, in a special briefing room, which I spent a huge amount of time briefing. I met with Bob [Robert L.] Gallucci on nonproliferation and you know, just all that stuff. I can't remember. Peter Tarnoff was a friend, and so was Winston Lord. Winston was the Assistant Secretary for Asia and the Pacific, and Peter was Undersecretary for Political Affairs, and so I spent a good deal of time in Washington during that period getting myself sort of orientated and so forth, and really liked Bob Gallucci. We hit it off, and had several lunches together, and so forth.

As I say, I spent time on Capitol Hill. There's a political liaison in the State Department that makes the appointments on the Hill and takes you up there. They escort you.

Q: Yes, the Bureau of Congressional Relations, I think, yes. And that's as much a courtesy, to get you known before the hearings, I would assume.

LANEY: Right. Well, it's partly to let them know you. I remember my meeting with Jesse Helms' staff. I met with his top staff person, and I could see "dismissive" written all over him, and here was this softheaded Clinton appointee. [He said] "I understand you're a minister and are now president of Emory." And he said, "Well, you don't know much about the armed forces, do you?" And I said, "Well, yes, I served in the Counter Intelligence Corps in Korea." "Oh!" The whole atmosphere changed! You know, it's amazing.

That was a good coin, I could cash in there. From that point on we had a good...even though he - and he didn't oppose it at all, my appointment. There was a problem because somebody, it may have been Helms, but somebody held up about 20 appointments. You know, any senator can hold them up without any explanation.

And he just had a whole group that was held up, and finally Nunn persuaded them to break my name out so I could go on. He said, "Look, you know, we got business over there. This is silly." So I was broken out by myself and went on -

Q: From that sort of initial class?

LANEY: Right, so I could get a vote and get confirmed.

This was after the hearing. The hearing itself was, I think, very standard. You know, they asked about the usual questions, about my background, about North Korea, and about, you know, what I thought we ought to be doing, and stuff like that, and I'm sure there was some naïveté. I mean, you know, the difference between even somebody who is familiar with a country and not having actually assumed any responsibility vis-a-vis the country, and going there and being responsible for it is a big change!

You know, I got worried. I thought, my gosh, I had not used my Korean for 35 years [laughter] - which is a long time. Then to add to that, my hearing had decreased badly, as you can tell. I keep asking you what you said. So it's hard to get diphthongs and

consonants; I'd miss them; so it was hard for me to pick up things. So my facility in Korean was greatly reduced, but I could still speak. So I practiced on the way over, on the plane, my arrival speech to the press, and when I got off the plane I spoke in Korean for about four or five minutes, and that made an enormous impression upon the press. Unfortunately, it gave the impression to everybody else that I was completely fluent [laughter] and therefore they were disappointed when they found what we'd done [laughter]! But my return, while I was familiar and can read that, you know...but of course, most everybody I dealt with could speak English, except for the president himself; and at that level I didn't trust anything but absolute clarity, you know, so I was glad to have an interpreter.

Q: Back in Washington, did the Korean embassy in Washington have a reception for you or sort of acknowledge you on your way out to take up your position?

LANEY: They had a dinner, they did. They had a dinner, a nice dinner, but it wasn't too big; I mean it was maybe 20 people.

Q: To introduce themselves to you basically, again.

LANEY: Yes, and they had the head of the State Department's Korea Desk and some local people. But more interestingly, the ambassador invited me, on one of my trips to Washington, to stay at the embassy, which I did. I was not yet the ambassador. So one of the newspapers in Seoul had a cartoon the next day, and it showed a double bed and two people lying there, and one of them said, "Laney" and one of them said, "the Ambassador Han Seung-Soo." And they said, "Bedfellows?" [Laughter] It was not necessarily caustic, but it was raising an issue.

Q: Yes, a perception. Perception is reputation. And reputation is power.

LANEY: Yes. So anyway... But I enjoyed it. I got the feel of Washington. Of course, I met with people in the White House. I met with, of course, a lot of people in the State Department and was briefed at great length for a whole day, I guess, at the CIA, which I found to be an absolutely useless briefing. Their knowledge of North Korea was just nil. I mean they had all the stereotypes, you know. No problem with that, but that's all, you know; and then they said, "Now the invasion is going to come down through the Chorwon Valley. Okay."

So they've greatly augmented and strengthened it since then; it's much better now. I've lectured there several times, which has helped them.

Q: So you get these briefings; you've gone through the Congress; you got tangled up in Jesse Helms's black listing.

LANEY: Right. But that didn't last too long, maybe a week; and by the way, I got clearance, zip on the vetting from the FBI. They checked...God they checked even some of my high school teachers.

I guess it was to see if I was telling the truth, you know, and whatever when I was there.

Q: Well, that's a long form too, that has to be filled out.

LANEY: And of course, I had to fill out all those financial forms. And get approval, get approval from them on any investments that I still held and all that sort of stuff. But you know that's just bureaucratic stuff. That's no big deal; it's just something you have to do.

Q: So now you're prepared to actually take your post. When do you arrive at post?

LANEY: In...I know it was somewhere around October 20th or so in 1993.

Q: Now who's backstopping you in Washington? Who's at the Korea desk?

LANEY: Charles Kartman. But he had left a couple months earlier to go out to - I'd chosen him as my DCM. So he had preceded me to Seoul.

Q: Aha! How did you get the opportunity to choose him as your DCM?

LANEY: Well, because I'd met him and liked him, and I'd been given several names, but after I met him and saw his capacity, I was happy to appoint him, and he was eager to go. So we worked that out nicely.

Q: Because that's a pretty standard procedure, isn't it - a new ambassador can pick his DCM or...

LANEY: Yes, yes, well at any time...I mean not total freedom, but I mean among those who were eligible.

Q: Here's a list of guys we have, yes. You went through the ambassador's course. There is a DCM course, you know, and it tells you what to do when the new ambassador comes

-

LANEY: How to keep him out of trouble; keep him from stepping in it.

Q: What did you see were the main issues that you might be dealing with? What's in your mind as you're walking in the Embassy door?

LANEY: Well, of course the big issue then was already North Korea because the nuclear thing had surfaced again, before, in the summer before I got there; and Bob Gallucci and I had had a luncheon in which I suggested why don't we offer to substitute light water

reactors for their nuclear plant, and it turned out that's exactly what we did. I'm not trying to claim credit for it. I'm just saying that that was how early on we were talking about things like that.

This anticipated what would happen in another year, and almost a year and a half away...but the nuclear thing, and of course, there was always trade.

One of the major interests of any ambassador in Seoul has been a relationship with the military command, U.S. Forces, Korea (USFK), and immediately I struck up very good relations with General Gary Luck, who was the commanding general. We would meet every week for breakfast; we'd alternate his place and my house; and we would have no one else there. This was just the two of us, so we could really talk; and that did more to establish a bond and the kind of ease where we could pick up the phone and talk to each other. I mean I was happy with that, and when the crisis came six, eight months later, that turned out to be very worthwhile because we knew each other, and we knew that we could really listen to each other and trust each other, and I knew how I could trust him, and I think he knew how he could trust me.

So it's the command, and the nuclear issue in the north, the economic trade issue, which was a big one because we were running a deficit with Korea. This is always an issue though, how you get them to buy more.

You had all these people coming around trying to get contracts. And then of course, there were things that were more niggling, like the problem with the visas, because there were so many more people wanting to come to America than we were willing to grant visas. Then there was my responsibility to get acquainted with and reacquainted with...I'd already met - in fact, Kim Young-sam had visited me in my home here, and I'd had a luncheon for him. So he felt good about the appointment; he felt like he knew me.

But I needed to establish cordial relations with him and his principal advisors so that - and it turned out the foreign minister, Han Sung-Joo, who is now the ambassador in Washington, was someone with whom I struck up an immediate affinity, and we just met all the time and just really...he and I really worked out the policy that we followed, and when push came to shove, he would get Kim Young-sam to finally go along with it, you know. Washington never even resisted one of them. They were either so preoccupied elsewhere, or they didn't have a clue, so...

I don't think any ambassador's ever had a freer hand to call the shots, I once ruefully observed that Christopher had gone to the Middle East 32 times and he'd come to Seoul twice in his term.

I said, "You know, this is just something wrong with this picture." I mean here we were really seized by the North Korean problem. That's why when I told Terry McAuliffe, "They don't know what they're doing."

Q: Getting to that developing North Korean nuclear problem which flows from the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) inspection of the North Koreans once the North Koreans signed on to the Nonproliferation Treaty. But, in the wake of the First Gulf War, the argument arises that the IAEA is surprised that the Iraqis had gone as far as they had so the consequent reaction is that everybody should be stricter with the next guy, and the next guy happened to be the North Koreans.

LANEY: Yes.

Q: So North Korea received the benefit of a more intense -

LANEY: Well, they got the benefit of it, and of course North Korea kicked the IAEA out.

And that's what brought it to a boil, you know, so that in early January 1994, things were really heating up. In early January, and I don't remember the dates, but it was sometime after the first of the year, Sam Nunn and Dick Lugar came to Seoul and stayed with me. Actually Sam was chairman of the Armed Forces Committee of the Senate, and Lugar was the minority chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I had tasked my staff, particularly a young man named Danny Russell, whom I dubbed my "intellectual sparkplug," because I tasked him to draw up on paper on the North Korean situation, and I said, "I want a layout in this way - that we have two concurrent, but not necessarily compatible goals: one, we've got to get rid of the North Korean nuclear threat; and two, we will not go to war. Now how do we resolve those?" So he drew up a really wonderful paper.

By the way, my senior staff at the embassy were very unhappy with us. I was told, in no uncertain terms, that ambassadors don't draw up papers to present to senators that haven't been vetted by the NSC (National Security Council) and the State Department. I said, "Well, okay," and then we still did it.

Lugar and Nunn were so pleased with that, and they incorporated most of that paper in their report, which is in the congressional record [February 24, 1994], by the way, and in their recommendations to the administration about what should be done. So that was a good...that was a timely visit by those two very important senators.

Things began to heat up as the weeks rolled on, and people began to get nervous in Seoul because we were trading threats and implications, but we had no real contact with North Korea. There was a North Korean mission in New York, but there was no real discussion, and you know, we were not trying to resolve anything through them.

Q: So in one sense, one was sort of stuck responding to headlines or statements without really talking to the people that were making these statements?

LANEY: Right. When you get to the point where you're dealing with threats that are an ultimatum to war, you have no way of testing the seriousness, the intention, that sort of

weight to put to it. I liken it to smoke signals on two opposite hills on a windy day, because “there’s a signal.” “What does it mean?” “Damned if I know.”

I said, “You know, this is no way to run a ship. You know, we need better contact.” And they said, “Well, you know, nobody wanted to deal with North Korea because it was a pariah.”

Q: But isn't what you're saying is, because of domestic political concerns on the U.S. side, the attempt to talk to the North Koreans would be criticized.

LANEY: Well, you can't talk. It sounds like appeasement, you know.

Here's our biggest problem: it's the United States, whether it's now or then. The United States is so big and so powerful that if it looks like it makes any effort to take the first step, it's already a concession, because they should come to us. It is very difficult for us to be receptive in a way in which we invite, you know, really in a sense of inviting, some sort of intimacy, some sort of contact -

Q: The inhibitions you are describing are embedded within our domestic political discussion...

LANEY: Well, and internal to the government itself, yes. Washington is so, so obsessed with the idea they've got to look tough. I mean there's nothing, in terms of domestic political situation, more debilitating, more damaging to the political career than to not look tough. So every time it's, “Will this make us look tough, or will this make us look like we're softies?” You know, this is the whole reason about wimps and all that stuff.

And I said, “Well, you know, I'm not worried about it. We're two ships in the night. We're headed for a collision course. This is like a Greek drama being played out, and nobody will change. We're playing chicken: two cars running at each other, and no one's going to swerve.” I said, “Do we really know what we're doing? Are we going to go ahead with this without any...” I mean I don't mean to say no one else didn't think like that too, but this was my thinking: how do we avert this with honor? I mean I wasn't going to talk about being craven or anything. Is there any reasonable way out, you know?

Of course, they had the news people who were saying...part of it is our domestic hard Right which whips and goads any administration into being tough. These people have been deceitful, and of course now they're evil as well, which means that how do you deal with them!? You've got to destroy evil; you can't deal with evil!

Anyway, there were those who said, “Let's have a surgical strike on Yongbyon; we're talking about Yongbyon. Yongbyon had produced all these spent fuel rods - 8,017 at last count - with their reactor, and they had the capacity to be turned into plutonium for five or six bombs, which it looks like they've done now, for the last year. But we froze it for nine years. Well anyway, how do we stop that?

I said, "Well, if you bomb it," and the Commanding General agreed, "you've got a prevailing wind, and it's coming down from Manchuria, it means that all that radioactive dust will come into South Korea." He said, "That's one of the stupidest things I've ever seen." And I said, "Furthermore, if you bomb it, they will go to war." They had all these long range artillery pieces lined up with their sights on Seoul, which is a city of 15 million people, very densely populated, and with one signal, all those things could fire. I mean you'd have a rain of fire. Well, in fact, one of their... I think it was their foreign minister said, when we were exchanging some bad vibes at Pyongyang, he said, "We will turn Seoul into a sea of fire."

Well, you couldn't believe how quickly ramen disappeared from the grocery shelves in Seoul! People were getting ready to get out of there! And with that the Seoul International School, which has a lot of foreigners in it, they didn't close it, but the parents decided to take an early summer vacation; so the mothers and the children went home. We had a great departure. There was never any, and you know, I tried to keep them calm -

Q: So what was in the papers that brought on this crisis, or what were people responded to it?

LANEY: All excited about it. I mean we're talking about things getting more and more nervous, and people leaving, and business being, you know, affected. I know I was on national television. They would pick me up in Seoul, I'd go over to the station, but I tried to calm things down. They said, "How are things going?" I said, "Well, they seem to be a lot calmer than they are in Washington" [laughter]

But anyway -

Q: Now you're saying as American Ambassador you gave interviews at this time?

LANEY: Yes, I don't know whether it was NBC (National Broadcasting Company); I was frequently on CNN (Cable News Network) and stuff like that because I knew the people at CNN here in Atlanta who run it.

Tom Johnson at that time was head of CNN, and Eason Jordan was head then of newsgathering; He's (Jordan) now head of the whole thing. But in any case, I kept thinking, "We've got to get hold of this." At one point, I was in close contact with Sam Nunn - that is to say, I mean like a lot - and I went back to in March 1994 Washington, and met with -

To back up a little bit, I had told Winston Lord in January or so that, "Winston, somebody in the State Department will have to give full time to this Korean thing. I mean we don't have a policy center, and this is big time!" And Winston said, "Well, I don't have time for it!" I said, "Well, what about [Thomas C.] Hubbard?" He was his Deputy Assistant Secretary. "Oh, Hubbard has other responsibilities." I said, "Well, you know, this means

by elimination there's no time left for North Korea; and you know, I understand there are a lot of other problems, but this one has shown up big!"

So this distressed me greatly, and so I went back to Washington. I made about... at least one trip a month, if not more, usually just for a few days, and met with [Thomas F.] Mack McLarty and David Gergen in the White House and told them. I said, "I really want to impress upon you how serious this Korean situation is, and how can we deal with it in a way that is not by default?" I said, "Right now we don't have anybody in the administration, either in the White House or in the State Department who is spending full time really thinking about what we should be doing," and I said, "You know, if war breaks out, this will not be a popular thing, because you will have a bunch of body bags coming back!" and that got their attention! Well, later, I didn't know this, but Bob Gallucci told me that before I got back to the State Department, Mack had called Christopher and said, "The President wants you to appoint somebody in charge of North Korean situation." I think they had asked me whom I thought, and I said, "Bob Gallucci," who was the best one I could think of. So Bob was appointed that afternoon. He was already Assistant Secretary for Nonproliferation of Whatever that's called [In February 1992, Gallucci was the Senior Coordinator responsible for nonproliferation and nuclear safety initiatives in the former Soviet Union in the Office of the Deputy Secretary. In July 1992, the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs]

But they added this as an additional portfolio and made that primary because, of course, this was an issue of proliferation. So I was enormously relieved to have someone of Bob's caliber be put in that position.

But I was still concerned that we were not talking to North Korea. So I talked to Sam Nunn, and he and Dick Lugar agreed to try to go to North Korea. We got them lined up to go, and they had their bags packed - this is literally true - but at the last minute, they could not get clearance from the North Korean mission in New York, so they had to cancel the trip. So here was -

Q: Because obviously the North Koreans have to go through a decision-making cycle themselves.

LANEY: Right. So here we are, now coming on May 1994, and I've had to meet with the embassy staff to calm them down; they're all agitated - the question, "Were we planning to have a NEO?" (That is a Noncombatant Evacuation [Operation]). I said, "No. If we do that, that will be a signal to the North that we're getting ready to do something, and I don't want to give such a signal." Kim Il Sung had said, "We watched the Gulf War, and we know that as you build up, we know what's going to be the next step." Well, this is what I kept telling Washington. I said, "You know, we're between a rock and a hard place. If we don't build up, we're not prepared; if we do build up, we'll probably precipitate what we're trying to avoid."

So that's when I came back in May for the Emory graduation, the commencement. I was the speaker, and they were giving me a degree and all that stuff, and I used that occasion to have a long talk with Jimmy Carter, and I expressed to him my profound concern about the way things were going and the lack of being able to take the nettle, I mean to really seize it, you know!

And he said, "You know, Bill Clinton was just here yesterday for a world town meeting (it was at the Carter Center), and privately he told me how disappointed he was with his foreign policy team" and he said, "I can now appreciate what kind of quandaries you must be in, you know, in dealing with that. If he sees it from the top and you see it from where you are, you're both seeing pretty much the same thing. There's no resolution. Tony Lake is a great guy, but he's not a...he's not a decisive guy. That's what Berger had - decision."

So he said, "You remember the invitation that came to me two years ago from Kim Il Sung who is in North Korea?" I said, "Sure. You and I were going to go." He said, "Do you think it's still operative?"

And I said, "Why don't we check and find out?"

He said, "If I can get clearance, I'll go." And I said, "That would be great, because we need to have somebody go over and talk to the old man and find out what's really going on." So he checked, and they said, "Yes, it's still good. We'd love to have you." And he checked with the Clinton White House, which you've got information on, I'm sure, about the briefing of Gallucci and how they tracked down Clinton to get his approval (he was in Europe, I think). Ever since I've called it: they didn't give him a green light, they gave him an amber light. It was, "Well, okay. We don't like it, but if you're going to go this way."

Q: Sort of the impression I have, but Gallucci comes down on June 5th and briefs Carter for the purpose of this trip and I'm sure preps him on the Washington -

LANEY: Right, right, goes all the way to Plains, [Georgia]. That's further away than Atlanta; like three more hours, anyway, in a car. But anyway, now this is an interesting sidelight. After I left Atlanta I flew to Hawaii for a meeting of the Chiefs of Mission in Asia Pacific with Winston Lord. We were all there: Mondale, other ambassadors were all there. With Winston as chair we had cover a lot of material, and he said, "Now, I'm going to give each of you ten minutes to talk about your post," and we were talking about Bali, and we were talking about Seoul, and we were talking about Tokyo, and we were talking about...everyone had ten minutes, no matter what the importance of their post or what problem. So my time came, and I started talking about North Korea, and I had hardly gotten into it, and Winston said, "Sorry Jim, you're times up." I said, "Winston you know, we're talking about very serious things here." He said, "Well, I know, but," he said, "you know each one of these people wants to have their say, okay." I said, "This is...God, you know..."

So I flew back to Seoul, and within a day or so Carter called, and he said, "I've gotten clearance, and I've been briefed, and I'm ready to come. I'll be in on such and such a flight." They arrived that Sunday afternoon. At that time we were hosting our daughter and her husband and three children at the embassy residence, and so they all went swimming after the Carters arrived. [Laughter] Big deal, you know! Carter's here.

It caused quite a sensation, you know, to have President Carter there.

Q: Because he comes in about June 12th, I think. June 12th is when he goes up to the North. So Gallucci must have briefed him around the 5th.

LANEY: Well, let's say we walk that back. I think he went up on Wednesday morning... Wednesday, Thursday, Friday...that's right. So he comes in on Sunday, and Monday and Tuesday we brief him, I think...or something like that. I know we brief him at least one day and he goes to see the president and so forth.

He was not at all impressed with the people he met in the Korean government. Kim Young-sam, the president, was very uneasy about his going up there. The main thing Kim Young-sam was concerned about the whole time he was in office is that somehow America might upstage him, and he was afraid this was an initiative that left him out. I mean it's an understandable reaction, and he didn't want to look like everything was taking place over his head, you know. Tall guys would pass the ball back and forth, and he was running around, and he couldn't reach it.

Q: Right, and hasn't that, in one sense, been the characterization of this problem handling all along, that the Koreans were saying, you know, "Take me along with you. I want to be there. I want to be a partner. Don't talk to those guys without me."

LANEY: Right. That was the later bigger issue as we began dealing with North Korea formally. That was the big issue - are you going to make a deal behind our backs that will leave us out or compromise us?

Q: Because that would obviously impact on their standing domestically for them.

LANEY: Oh, sure. Absolutely! So anyway, that was their feeling, and whatever day of the week it was, either Tuesday or Wednesday, the Carters were taken up to Panmunjom, and we walked him up to the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone], and I handed him over to the North Koreans! It was a very sober moment because the tension was so high, and you know, we didn't know what was going to happen.

I mean it was...Mrs. Carter was really very, I think, very anxious; and going along with him was Marion Creekmore, who had been an ambassador in Sri Lanka and was now working for the Carter Center; and Dick [Richard A.] Christenson, who had been the consul general in Okinawa, [Japan] and knew Korean language well, and had been

recommended by the State Department as a note taker and interpreter. I appointed Dick later as my DCM after Chuck Kartman left. I liked him a lot, and I was impressed with him. But anyway, there was a small group that went with the Carters.

The next day, I think (this is all in Oberdorfer's book, I think), Gary Luck, the general, called me, and he said, "I need to see you immediately on the highest urgency!" I said, "Fine." I was at the office. He said, "Would you mind letting me come to your home? I don't want to be seen coming into the embassy," and so forth. So we met, just the two of us, and he said, "I received a call just a little while ago from Shali - Shalikashvili," [General John M. Shalikashvili], "the chairman," [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff], "that they are prepared very quickly to send the first group of...it was upward of 20,000 troops to Korea. Then he said, "I didn't request these troops. Did you?" I said, "No. You know I wouldn't. I mean we work together." He said, "Well, this is a decision they've taken without any consultation." It was part of that stuff going on, you know. And I said, "Well, you know, this is absurd because if those troops arrive, we don't know what kind of hell will break loose! We don't know what this would precipitate with the North, and we've got 70,000 or 80,000 American civilians here in South Korea, and we're responsible for the British and the Australians and the Canadians and all the rest, you know, all these people; we are responsible for their evacuation, physically. We've gone through NEO exercises, and I had had absolutely no confidence whatever they would work" because in the middle of the chaos, people will be trying to find their children from school, and Koreans who wanted to evacuate and might storm the gates of the South post, the command post." I mean the whole idea, that we could all gather there and walk in and get on buses and leave, to me was just ludicrous while we're being bombarded from the North. But anyway, I said, "You know, we do not have a plan in operation for evacuation. I mean we've got some plans, but we don't have" – I mean we're talking about tens of thousands of people, and gosh! So he and I sat down and drafted a cable back to Washington saying, you know, this cannot take place. We're not ready. We have not given any consideration for an evacuation.

Now this whole incident has gotten a lot of play. Kim Young-sam said that he heard from me that we were going to evacuate the civilians, and that he ordered me not to do it, and that he called Clinton and told him this was impossible. Well, that didn't happen at all. None of the logs at the White House indicate that call, and I know that he did not tell me that because it didn't happen!

Secondly, the issue of how we were going to handle them was going to be something that had to be done, you know, first in Washington, and then vetted out on the field. This cable was very direct and absolutely uncompromising, and I remember a conversation I had with Bob Gallucci after I came back. He said, "You have no idea how bracing that cable was in Washington!" He said, "We had never received a cable that was cosigned by the commanding general and the ambassador saying, 'This will not do!'" He said, [laughter] "They backed off!"

Well, of course, the point was that all of this, as this turned out didn't put us on the precipice, because in the meantime Carter was in the North gradually making progress toward a freeze of the facilities at Yongbyon. Now Marion Creekmore had been sent down from the party in the North to Panmunjom in the DMZ to make a call to Washington; but he couldn't get through to Washington, so he called me on a secure phone, and he told me what Carter was proposing. This was after the first day, and I said, "Marion, that will not fly!" I mean it wouldn't fly; it's not just a question of: are we getting what we want and all that stuff? It would not have been a resolution of the issue, and I said, "You've got to make it clear to President Carter that he must hold out for a freeze. I mean a total, unconditional freeze that's monitored; otherwise the whole thing's dead!" Well, it turned out that by the time Marion got back to Pyongyang with that message.

Within the first few weeks of my arrival we got a cable, sent out to all heads of mission around the world, saying that the State Department was cutting our budget ten percent or maybe more, I don't know.

Because Seoul had grown so fast, I mean the work at the Embassy had grown so, because of the importance of Korea and then issues of North Korea and all, we were already stretched unbelievable thin. I mean, really, we had no fat in our embassy, and I was just furious to think that, without any discrimination, they just did a world wide cut, with no appreciation of the difference of priorities, or urgencies, or crises, or anything else. So I fired back a cable to Christopher saying, it's my experience, both on the board of several corporations and at the university, that when you make cuts, the cuts are necessary, but you don't just cut them indiscriminately across the board; that's the easy and cheap way out.

I did not get any remission. [Laughter] No, no, it's just insane.

Well anyway, getting back to the Carter thing, here he was up in North Korea, and he did strike a bargain with Kim Il Sung that they would freeze the Yongbyon facility, which was our concern, with a quid pro quo; and the quid pro quo had to be an equivalent amount of fuel and electricity that would replace it foregoing of the nuclear reactor. It turned out we later confirmed that and ratified it in Geneva; it came to Geneva accords or agreement [Agreed Framework] (this is not Gallucci's doing) and...set up the Korea Energy Development Organization, KEDO.

But it rankled very much with the White House, particularly because Carter announced it on open television, which I think was a serious mistake. His move to take credit for it effectively compromised his good faith with the Clinton administration. He made them look silly in an attempt to come out with the credit.

So when they came back across the DMZ on a Saturday, while I was waiting for them to return, I got a call on the secure phone that we have in the DMZ in our military place; and it was Sandy Berger on the phone; and he said, "Jim, I have one directive from the

president.” And I said, “What is that?” He said, “Tell Jimmy Carter not to come to Washington, but to go back home to Plains.” I said, “Sandy, are you sure you want me to deliver that message?” He said, “That is the message you deliver to him.” I said, “Well, I can tell you right now, it will not be well received!” And he said, “Well, that is the message!” I said, “Well, I’ll be the messenger, but I can’t guarantee that it’ll be heeded!”

So on the car going back to Seoul, I broached it as gingerly as I could, and Carter exploded. Of course he was feeling pretty high about the fact that he’d gotten an agreement, and here he was being told, “Shove off to Plains.” So when he got to our house, he went in the closet where the secure phone was and called the White House, and he got Al Gore, and he and Al went at it for it seemed like interminably, but probably 45 minutes. I could hear him shouting through the soundproof door! [Laughter]

Finally Mrs. Carter went in to join him because she was so concerned that he might have an apoplexy or something! So they did agree that he would come back through Washington to debrief; Al agreed to that; and then we went out on our front, and he had a news conference to report on his trip.

But he had already come by to see President Kim Young-sam, who, as I mentioned, had been very antsy about this whole thing, understandably. When he [Carter] came in [to see Kim Young-sam] he said, “We have a freeze, and Kim Il Sung has told me to issue an invitation to you that he wants to meet you as soon as possible for a summit.” All of a sudden his [Kim Young-sam’s] face was wreathed in a smile, and before we got out of the Blue House, he had already sent somebody out to announce to the world that he was meeting Kim Il Sung for a summit. This satisfied the need to be a player, and it was right! I mean it was a shrewd move on the part of Kim Il Sung, I’ll tell you.

So anyway, Carter went on home, went on back to Washington, and was not met by the President, or the Vice President, or the Secretary of State; I can’t remember whether it was Winston or Tony Lake that met him. It may have been Lake; I’m not sure; I mean I just don’t recall. That’s not something I was involved in.

Q: Yes, somebody can research that point...

LANEY: Yes. By the way, in the meantime, I told you that my daughter and her family were there. The night after Gary Luck, General Luck, had come to see me all agitated, we were both very concerned and fired off this cable. They were staying with us, and I was walking Wendell, the husband, around; and I said, “Wendell, this thing is getting really serious, and I don’t know where it is all headed.” At that point Carter hadn’t returned. And I said, “It would be a great relief for me if I didn’t have the additional burden of my own children here and grandchildren here. You know, my wife is one thing, but I don’t need that additional worry, and you know, where to put you all, and I just don’t need that.” And he said, “Well, why don’t we go down to Malaysia, to Bangkok, and go up to Chiang Mai, and then we’ll come on back after things blow over, if they do?” I said,

“That’s great.” So in a couple of days they left and went to Chiang Mai, and about a week later they came back and were with us for another week.

At that point, you just don’t want, in a sense, a psychological hostage. It’s one thing for your wife to share it with you - but it’s another thing for a visiting child and their family. So anyway, that was part of the picture.

Then at this point we breathed a great relief! We thought, well, you know, we don’t need to have the - oh, and by Saturday, I’d gotten a cable from Washington - that is, the Saturday that Carter came back - I’d gotten a cable. Of course by then we had known through CNN that they’d reached an agreement. So things were greatly relieved.

But this cable from Washington said it’s urgent that you come back for discussion of the evacuation! [Laughter] I said, “No, it’s not urgent for me, but I’ll send somebody.” So I sent somebody down about three levels, because the issues, the pressure it caused, they were behind the curve, you know, as usual.

And about that time we had to leave to go to Scotland because I was being given an honorary degree by St. Andrews University at its commencement in July 1994. So we were there for several days and very festive and all that sort of thing, and then we were going to fly over to Dublin for a few days in Ireland. It was just a vacation, and we were going to see Jean Kennedy Smith [Ambassador to Ireland June 1993 to September 1998], and so, lo and behold, the morning after we’d gotten - we’d just gotten there -

In Dublin, we’d just gotten there. The phone rang, and we had Christopher on the line, and he was in Europe, and Winston was somewhere else down in Washington, and I was in Dublin, and I don’t know who all was on the line; I guess Tony Lake or someone. Anyway, Kim Il Sung had died [July 8, 1994].

So you know, this is, where does this leave us? This was the issue. I mean everything was, what does this mean?

So I was instructed to fly immediately back to Seoul [laughter], be at post. So I did; in fact, I didn’t even get to go over and see Jean Smith. We left and that took care of the summer.

Well by that time, Bob Gallucci was beginning to set up the machinery for working on the ratification of the agreement that would be between North Korea and the United States, and so forth, and that took the rest of the fall. The big issue, there again, was the domestic politics. For all the carping and complaining and foot dragging in Congress, South Korea and Japan were paying 85 percent of the cost of the KEDO agreement. It was ridiculous the way we carried on, as though we were the only ones writing a check. But that all to say, that it was a political issue for Kim Young-sam, because this is big money, you know.

Now the interesting thing is that all the time that Kim Young-sam was in office, he complained bitterly about the United States sidelining him. In fact, the Four-Party Talks were designed primarily to bring Kim Young-sam into the picture, along with North Korea and China. This was a device that we thought would relieve, would sort of equalize the thing, move it along a little bit. It never got off the ground, but that was a brilliant idea! [Laughter] That was announced by Clinton and Kim Young-sam at an April 1996 summit in Cheju Island in Korea -

Kim Young-sam would tell me periodically, in a very confidential way, he said, "You know, I have sent the chairman of such and such a corporation to North Korea to meet with the leader to find out what we can do." I thought, you wily rascal! You're complaining about us, and then you're telling me!"

Q: Taking in some of the initiative.

LANEY: There were a lot of...Kim Young-sam came back to Washington for a formal visit in November 21-23, 1993 after the APEC meeting in Seattle, and I had only been at post six weeks. And there we were seated at the table with the Clintons and Kim Young-sam. But then the meeting, that happened in the Oval Office, which I did not attend, in fact, it was only the two presidents; and Christopher wasn't invited, but he just walked in, stormed in - he was so upset at being left out. But the foreign minister of Korea Han Sung-joo cooled his heels outside with Bill [William] Perry and me in the cabinet room.

But anyway, in that meeting Kim Young-sam laid down a condition. We had said we wanted to move in a kind of broad and general way toward the North, and he scotched that idea with President Clinton, much to the discomfiture of all the people that had been working on it clear up until that very moment. He just came out and said, "No!" I mean he dug in his heels. As it turned out in the long term, it didn't really matter much. But it was an interesting...he constantly, if he was not fully included or made to feel a meaningful participant, there was this obstructionist tendency. As you noted, it's quite understandable the president of a country wants to feel like he's in charge of his own destiny. But...

Q: In fact, in another sense with all the Korean issues, the main actors are not only the North Koreans and the South Koreans, but the Chinese and the Japanese have a piece of the action, and we do too! And the issue over time is: how do you include all those people so that they feel they're in on the action? As you said, one of the devices was the Four-Party Talks.

LANEY: That was a device that Tony Lake and I set up. Tony was over in Seoul...it was kind of in a reconnaissance, and we were riding around; and I said, "Oh, Clinton was scheduled to go to Beijing," (that April), and I said, "He should stop by Korea." Tony said, "He can't do it!" Then I said, "Yes, he can do it!" So we had argued this back and forth, and finally on one of our meetings, just the two of us in a car I think, he said, "How

long is the runway to Cheju Island?” I knew then I’d won, because it had to be big enough to carry the presidential plane.

But the idea of the Four-Party Talks was hatched, and I’m not sure I understand why this was so necessary, but it was done so secretly that nobody in our embassy was supposed to know about it, anybody, except me! Nobody! And he wouldn’t talk to anybody in State about it; he was only going to talk to the president and that kind of stuff. Well, you know the result of this is not going to be well received, you know; and as it turned out, the Chinese were miffed because they hadn’t been properly briefed. North Korea said, “Well, we don’t know anything about this. You’re talking about a Four-Party Talks, and you announce it down there with the two presidents, but we’re not party to the announcement. How do you just bring us in?” This sort of stuff.

But it was still a move in the right direction, and it did mollify Kim Young-sam, the president of South Korea. From that standpoint alone it was a good move.

By the way, there was a real contra tone in regard to Clinton’s visit to Cheju. One morning about two or three days before he left Washington to come out to Asia I got a call real early in the morning. It was General Luck, said, “They don’t have any idea there’s a 12-hour difference between Seoul and Washington! [Laughter] They just pick up the phone!” But anyway, here on the phone was the head of the advance team for the presidential visit, and he said, “Ambassador Laney, President Clinton has decided that he wants to leave an hour earlier, like at 11:30 at night, so he can arrive in the early morning and have a good game of golf. We understand there’s a good golf course there.” I said, “There is a good golf course.” I said, “You know that Kim Young-sam doesn’t play golf?” He said, “Well, that doesn’t matter. I mean the president can play with Mrs. Clinton.” I said, “I don’t think that’s a very good idea.” I said, “Now you’re scheduling the president of the United States to fly in at six in the morning to Cheju Island, a resort, and Kim Young-sam has already been there spending the night, and they don’t meet until twelve for lunch? But the Clintons spend all morning on the golf course while Kim Young-sam cools his heels?” I said, “How do you think that’s going to play in Seoul?” He said, “Well, I think you can explain it.” I said, “No, I can’t!” and I said, “Furthermore, the whole purpose of coming over here is really to obviate the problems we’ve been having by Kim Young-sam feeling out of the loop, and here you’re going to make him wait for five hours, and all of Seoul sitting there, their president is waiting, while Clinton, who flies halfway around the world, plays a round of golf?” I said, “That is unacceptable!” “Well, he is the president!” I said, “Come on now! I don’t think we’re discussing that! No one’s doubting he’s the president! The question is whether or not playing golf is wise!” So it was not a very happy conversation.

The Clintons arrived, and we held a conference over at the hotel. He didn’t play golf, and so he and Hilary walked around the golf course holding hands and stuff like that. Well, when we got ready to brief him - now this is the morning the briefing, here was Christopher, and Perry, and Tony Lake, and Sandy Berger, General Shali, General Luck, and me - I mean you know, the players - oh, I forgot Winston Lord. We met in the

briefing room, and they went over, and they moved a portable blackboard to block the window. I thought this is strange. I said, "What are they doing that for?" He said, "We don't want the president to look out on the golf course and get mad again!" I said, "Oh, Lord!"

I mean now here are the top figures of the United States moving the blackboard because the president is out of sorts because somebody told him he couldn't play golf! [Laughter]

Well, as it turns out, after we had our briefing, and he was civil to me; I mean he never raised the issue; Hilary and Berta, my wife, had lunch up in their apartment, in the Clinton's suite; and after our briefing and everything, President Clinton walked in and greeted them. I don't think it was malice of forethought, but my wife said to President Clinton, "I'm sorry you weren't able to play golf!" [Laughter] And he looked at her with daggers and he said, "Someone you and I both know told me it would cause an international incident!" And Hillary said, "Bill, that's enough! I think you better leave us alone!"

This is what we're dealing with friend. I'm not characterizing that as being the total picture, but it's amazing! Nobody can treat a president as a human being and say, "No, we can't do that!" I mean this is insane! I mean literally insane! This is not an imperial world. For God's sake, I don't understand it! I'm not for all that stuff. I love to honor leadership and you know, that sort of thing, give respect and esteem, but to pander...and I know I've read Shakespeare's series of histories. I know the problem!

Anyway, Cheju otherwise was a great success.

I mean the balance is fairly...I gave my briefing, and I was annoyed that Clinton didn't seem to pay any attention to it. He was fiddling, and he was looking around, you know, this sort of thing. I thought, good gosh, you know, in this briefing I'm giving him words of wisdom, and he's not paying any attention! Well, lo and behold, he went out with Kim Young-sam before all those television cameras and gave an absolutely stunning statement that included all the points made. He hadn't missed a one! So he's good! He's smart as he can be!

Q: Just to wrap up on the Four-Party Talks, my understanding is it then takes about another 14 months of talks with the North Koreans before the actual first Four-Party Talks meets in December of 1997 or so.

LANEY: Yes, they didn't do anything. Yes, and we had so many incidents in the meantime with North Korea, you know: getting the KEDO going; the obstruction of North Korea about the site and the labor and all that stuff of the light-water reactors was really a hassle; and you know, on our part, they expected us to lift the sanctions after the agreement was signed, and we didn't; we lifted some, but some of them we never did lift. So we didn't meet our obligations, and we said we would move toward normalization, which, of course, we never made any steps toward. So there was no gradual move toward

a mutual confidence that would allow some actual things to happen. It was always legalistically minimalistically defined, you know. And you know, that's dealing with the North. I mean they are really hard to deal with!

Q: My impression is sometimes in these circumstances, you're dealing with people who don't have a lot of self-confidence and a lot of sophistication, and that therein comes your dug-in heels -

LANEY: They may not have a lot of authority. Every time they have to go back and make sure they haven't gone further than they should or gone astray. Of course in that society, [laughter] I figure that's not a healthy way to live!

Q: You've spoken highly of about working with General Luck, a very sharp officer.

LANEY: Yes, right. He once told me, he said when we were talking about - oh! One of the things he said was, "They're talking about bombing Yongbyon in order to get rid of a possible atomic bomb." He said, "Now let me think this through. We're going to bomb a place because we think they might have a bomb, and that will precipitate a war that will kill a million people. I think that's a pretty good odds if you're crazy."

[Laughter] Then he went on to say, "I've been in every war since I was old enough to go to war, every war America's fought, and not one of them was worth a damn! But," he said, "I'm a good soldier, and I know how to fight, and when they tell me to fight, I'll fight, but," he said, "war is hell!" He said, "I've seen it. Don't kid yourself! You don't want war." I loved his honesty.

I mean this is a guy, this wasn't shirking or playing. This just, you know, I've been there, and I know it! You know, these desk warriors are one thing, but it's in what you have solved. He said, "What do they solve? Now you ask it, when it's over, what has been accomplished, you know." Now, you know, he's looking at post World War II and all. But it's a serious issue.

Okay, back to the grindstone [laughter].

Q: One of the things I wanted to ask you about is, you're coming into this environment. The embassy is yours. You are the captain of the ship. What does the embassy look like to you? I mean how many agencies are out there, you know? Isn't Commerce and Agriculture? I mean what does this ship look like as you're starting out, people serving you?

LANEY: Well, first of all I have to say that I was impressed by how little authority State had over the occupants in a lot of their buildings - Agriculture, Commerce, you know, CIA. I mean you can go down the line, or nominally responsible to you and you are nominally over them, but in fact, they have their own budget and their own personnel, and you know, you really don't have - whether it's in the whole budget I can't remember, but

it's not really under your control. You know, it's separate agency stuff. Having said that, I was very pleased with all the principals I worked with.

Q: Here's the list of the officers who were there when you arrived from the Spring 1994 Key Officers Overseas pamphlet...

LANEY: Oh, this is a helpful list.

Q: Well, this State Department publication is primarily for business people and others who want to contact an embassy.

LANEY: Ah, in any case... I felt that my relationships with station chief were very good. I made a point of working with them, knowing what they did.

In some cases I was often briefed by the USFK people out at the base, the overhead stuff, and got briefings in conjunction with the military on some of that stuff. On one or two occasions I actually asked where - in fact, once when I was back in Washington, I had breakfast with John Deutch (Deputy Director, CIA) at the White House mess to ask for additional assets and so on from the CIA. At that time I felt it was very important; we were not quite strong enough; we had more than we could handle. So my role in at least being in coordination and in counsel was one that was very satisfying to me in that regard. I know a lot of places where that relationship was prickly. In fact, I know one of my predecessors had a hard time getting along with the commanding general. The relationship between the ambassador and other senior people in country was not always easy; there would be those who... But in both of those cases, the station chief and the USFK (U.S. Forces Korea) Commander I felt, you know, very comfortable and thought that it was a productive and constructive relationship.

But you asked me about the whole embassy.

Q: Because it's one of the largest embassies around, wasn't it?

LANEY: It's pretty big. I mean all together I guess there were 450 or 500 people, but about half of them were Korean Nationals working there. But it was a big embassy; we needed it to be a lot bigger, actually. I mean it just needed it. We were over, over, over taxed, the political section, and gosh, it was small compared to the enormity of our job! But anyway, we were constrained by our wretched facilities, just terrible facilities; they were not only outdated, but they were in poor shape and equipment always breaking down.

And they're still trying to build an embassy. I've never seen anything like it, the slowness of the whole thing. It's just been a - I mean a lot of reasons for it, including the government of Korea itself; but still it's been very difficult.

But you know, I met with my principal minister counselors every week for about two to three hours in my office. This was in addition to the country team that met whenever it was on Friday morning, to which General Luck sent I think a brigadier as representative, in addition to the military attaché [Col. William R. McKinney, USA], and the naval attaché. Well, I liked to have that group just thrash out policy issues, then talk about policy considerations, and I wanted to hear each one of them; I wanted to hear what they said. I'd ask them, I'd poll some issue and I wanted each one of them to address it from their standpoint. I didn't necessarily seek their counsel for a decision, but I wanted to hear them talk about it. So that was one of the ways that we operated.

You know I guess in most embassies the DCM and the ambassador have adjacent offices, so it's easy communication. But I spent a lot of time down in the political section - I walked around a lot; I didn't summon people. I went into the station chief's office a lot, just sat down, sometimes unannounced, and down to the political section, and so forth. I wandered the embassy a lot. I don't mean I just spent a lot schmoozing; but when I had questions, I would go ask them rather than ask them to come up and see me simply because I wanted to get the feel of things, you know, size up their staff and all. All this stuff is what I did when I was president of Emory and I knew it worked, so I did it. It was very surprising for a lot of them. Apparently some ambassadors are very full of themselves. I don't know; I'm not - I don't have anybody in mind, but I mean I get that impression from...for instance, the first meeting of the country team they all stood up, and I said, "Is this the normal thing?" "Yes." I said, "Well, you don't need to do that anymore."

Well, they all sat down! [Laughter]

I have a very adequate view of myself. I'm not at all...I don't need to prove anything, and I didn't see any reason to rub their noses in it. I had long since learned that I can run as fast as any of them, and I don't need to have to hide by anything. So there we are.

Q: That's something about the way the embassy was organized. Now, of course the other part of your job is interacting with the Koreans.

LANEY: Yes.

Q: And here you are, with language capability because you've been there before, you have friends throughout Korean society, you are an ambassador who has a relationship with a country. Do you get a chance to get out and see those old colleagues?

LANEY: Yes. We had a modest social life with our old friends. It wasn't very, you know, demanding, something we had to do all the time. Every Christmas we had a carol sing in the embassy residence to which we invited our friends around, not so much the bigwigs, like corporate heads and stuff like that, but just our friends; and they were so thrilled to be invited to the embassy.

Often we would walk around. This often gave my bodyguard heartburn, particularly at night. We loved to walk the streets of Seoul at night because it's so vibrant. One night I remember we got on the subway and rode out to one of the universities for a concert, and we got on the subway, and we were standing; the subway was full. And this man, he announced to everybody, he said, "This is the American ambassador. May I offer you my seat!" [Laughter] So they all clapped, and it was a big deal, you know, and I thought, "Good Lord!" [Laughter]

It was pretty funny!

One of the other things I did, and I've forgotten this. I realized early on that Kim Young-sam, the president, was very poor at communicating to his own people; and as a result many of the things that we were doing were misunderstood by the Korean people because there was no communication, you know; and they were left to rumors and the scurrilous stuff in the newspapers and things like that.

So about at least every other month I would have a full-hour television interview with a Korean interviewing me, a Korean of some stature, like a former ambassador to the United States or a former foreign minister or something, with hard questions, you know, what's this, and what's that, and so forth. I just loved it, because first of all, it gave me enormous presence in the country, and I wasn't at the mercy of the print; I mean it was more immediate. But secondly, I could explain, even for the good of Kim Young-sam, what we were trying to do; and I think it was of value to him or to his government that I would do this, and I never got a word of criticism from the government about these things. It wasn't like this... I wasn't trying to politic, I wasn't trying to influence domestic policy, I was explaining what I thought we were trying to do together, and so forth. Sometimes I would be asked hard questions about trade policies; or the United States looks like it's doing this, it's not in our interest, Korea, and so forth. So I could have a chance to explain that.

But I enjoyed that, and I gave a lot of speeches. I gave a speech to the Asia Society in the spring of 1996 in Seoul. The Asia-wide meeting of the Asia Society was held in Seoul; and I spoke, and Dick Holbrook was there speaking, and the foreign minister of Korea spoke, and I don't know, this was a big program, a day and a half in total. I prepared a speech called, "[North and South Korea:] Beyond Deterrence," and it was an attempt to break out of the mindset that we were still frozen in the cold war and spoke primarily of the need to engage North Korea in ways that could allow it to have the freedom to begin to make the reforms that China had undertaken.

If you look back in the late 1960s, our attitude toward China is almost identical to our attitude today toward North Korea: we saw them as an enemy, they had let their people starve, and it was a strong military leader, and so forth; and I said, "Now, you know, look where it is now." I said, "There's nothing that is categorical that says this cannot happen in the North." I said, "I don't know that it will, but I know that it's worth the effort, and we need to have some boldness in our approach and so forth." And I didn't get this vetted

in Washington, and as a matter of fact, it was well received because it was well received in - I gave the same speech at the Council on Foreign Relations. It was very well received there! [Laughter] So Washington wasn't bothered by it!

Q: Well now, in the embassy, you have your public affairs officer to assist you creating these venues and creating these opportunities.

LANEY: Sometimes. Some were my own. I mean those invitations were mine, not set up by the public affairs; although the public affairs officer was very good. This is not a backhanded putdown or anything. Bill Maurer [William H. Maurer, Jr.] was the officer the whole time.

Q: And he would have good contacts in the press -

LANEY: Excellent, and he, you know, was on the ball for normal things, and things that were going on, and news releases, so he would see that they got proper play.

I mentioned before we started, about a visit to Kwangju. I said, "I want to go to Kwangju." They said, "No, you don't want to go to Kwangju." I said, "Yes, I do!" I said, "I believe in human rights, and I think that I don't want to duck this."

Q: Now Kwangju, for the listeners, is where the riots -

LANEY: Where the riots in 1980 took place, the spring of 1980, the riots and the brutal suppression, a very bloody suppression. Anyway, so we set up a thing; I was to go to Kwangju. I was not to go to the cemetery, because they said that would be incendiary. I don't understand. I was always restless with my handlers because I, on the whole, think I have pretty good instincts, and I find they're always much too cautious, you know. But nevertheless there are some times when I realize I need to listen to them.

But we had a meeting with some of the aggrieved people in Kwangju, a private dinner, that is, with no press or television or anything, and I just wanted to listen; I wanted to hear their side of the story and so forth. I was not attempting to placate them; I just wanted to hear. In a way, I was going down and just saying, "Look, I'm here, and I want to hear you, you know;" and they appreciated it. When the dinner was over and we walked out of the little room where we'd eaten, there were television and print media waiting for me, and what did you talk about, and I said, "I'm sorry, but this was off the record. I'm down here because I'm interested. As the ambassador of the United States I'm down here to express my concern about what's happened. I'm not here either to apologize or to explain, but I am here because I'm concerned." The next day we drove on across the middle part of the south of Korea to a Buddhist monastery up on a mountain.

And we stopped at our rest stop along the way, and somebody in my entourage said, "The Blue House is trying to reach you." I said, "How do they know where I am?" And he said, "Oh, they know all right!" [Laughter] Well, as it turns out, the daily papers in Seoul

carried a verbatim interview with me about Kwangju. Well, I'd given no interview! But this was a full-page interview, pure fabrication, the whole thing, just absolutely made up! And the Blue House was just incensed; they were just livid! I said, "I didn't give an interview!" "Yes, you did! It's here in the newspaper." I said, "Look! I did not give an interview. This is all a mistake." And so we had to go back, and so I unleashed a broadside against the irresponsibility of the press that would make up an interview. Well, then the next brouhaha was not the subject of the interview or the interview itself or anything; it was that the American ambassador has trespassed his welcome in criticizing the local press. [Laughter] And I said, "You're dog gone right I'll criticize it." [Laughter] Well, as it turned out, I had to give an interview to one of the papers that would be on the record and would be really what I said, a long interview, explaining the whole thing, and they ran it! And after that it was no more. But anyway, these are the trials and tribulations of public life, as anybody that's ever been there knows.

Q: The interview you did arrange was through your contacts?

LANEY: My friends who I'd had many years before and they had contacts and friends that were the editors of a couple of the papers, and they were the ones that arranged for me to have an interview that could in a sense explain what really happened and get it right before the public.

Q: In one sense, that's, you know, where diplomacy works. You're finding local allies to help you explain the American position within their context.

LANEY: Right. There was a lot of that.

Q: There's a couple of things that come to mind, not only in terms of your contact with the press, your ability to sort of speak directly to the Korean people, but you were talking about this road trip. Did you have many opportunities to get out of Seoul and travel around, and did you have the sense that you might have done more or less than your predecessor?

LANEY: No, I wouldn't make any kind of comparison on that. I think Don Gregg traveled a lot. But I did, and I not necessarily made road trips because there are time constraint, but I often would fly down to Pusan, or went down, or choose events, like the christening of a new tanker at their big shipyard, and I went down. I happened to have another family of ours, of grandchildren, daughter, and husband, and that was, you know, both a fun occasion and kind of quasi-official one. And I would often get invitations to speak. For example, I was invited to speak at Yonsei University. I was the first ambassador to speak since I had invited Sam Berger in 1963.

No American ambassador had been because the tension with the students, you know, very sensitive about all that, and they didn't like to kowtow and that sort of thing. I spoke a lot at Seoul National University and Korea University to various groups, seminars about trade, or about policy, and that sort of thing. These were not necessarily public, they were

not necessarily reported, but they were excellent forums, and I enjoyed those very much because it harkened back to my time in the university and all.

Q: In terms of directing the efforts of your staff, Foreign Service and otherwise, did you encourage them to get out?

LANEY: Well, as I said, I met with my staff every week and would go over the major issues that they were confronting and that I wanted to deal with. I left the running of the embassy and its administrations to the DCM and was happy with that. We talked every day several times. I would visit - in fact, I would be invited by the minister counselor of various things, agriculture, commerce, trade, whatever, intellectual property or whatever it was - science and technology, that was it. I'd be invited periodically to come and meet with their staff and talk. They took the initiative on that, and I liked that very much. I did not feel, except at a policy level, that I had much I could offer, the actual day-to-day workings of most of these departments, you know. They knew the drill, and they were doing their job. They could bring problems to me, and when I would visit with them, we could discuss the issues they were facing, and that's the only way I provided leadership for that; otherwise the ordinary running of things was with the DCM. I did have pretty much an open door, so I don't think anybody, any of the officers in the embassy, felt that they were shut out from discussing things with me.

Q: Now, while you're in Seoul, you're actually coming back to the United States from time to time.

LANEY: A lot!: Six to eight times a year.

Whenever I wanted to I came back. Whenever I felt I had something I wanted to discuss. When I came back after the crisis that was resolved by Carter's visit and the Geneva Framework Agreement, most of my time would be spent either at the White House or the Pentagon, in the NSC and the Pentagon. Bill Perry was a very fine interlocutor; he always wanted to know what the situation was, the state of play, and we had a lot to talk about; and I found him the most receptive. My times with Secretary Christopher were more formal; he always wanted to see me and was very cordial, and sometimes he would bring some staff in and ask me questions, but I never felt like there was either the deep interest or the curiosity that wanted to lead me out. Peter Tarnoff was a friend, and I often had lunch with him when I came back, but that was almost more of a social call; he would ask me about things, but it was more like I was briefing him. And I always saw Winston; we often went to events together at the White House, or you know, formal things, just that were happening while I was there; but I had long since learned that, you know, his plate was so full, and it really was with China and Japan, and all that.

So that by now I had established, particularly with the NSC, with Sandra Kristoff and her assistant Jack Pritchard [Charles Pritchard], who was, until last summer, Bush's point man on North Korea [the U.S. representative to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO)], I had established with them good relations, and we

talked about everything, and increasingly with Lake and Berger. These would not necessarily be schematic talks where I'd aim to cover this or that; these would be sort of sharing - you know, where we are within our goals, what does it look like, sort of assessments - and that was the same with Bill Perry, and to a lesser extent with the CIA. So I never had a -

Q: Assessments associated with North Korea?

LANEY: Primarily, and also with the South Korean political situation, how solid is it, and where are we, and that sort of thing.

Q: I see in 1995 you came back in May and gave a presentation to the Asia Society in Washington, D.C. So this would have been one of those trips -

LANEY: I didn't come back for that purpose. I was back, and I was - I mean I was invited because I was incidentally going to be there.

Q: But what you're saying is part of your way of operating style was frequent trips back to Washington to make sure you had the face time to go over the issues with the Washington players.

LANEY: Yes, and you know that meant since I was really in a way stepping out, that kept them with me. Rather than being guided so much, I was trying to push and do this, and I'd go back to make sure that I wasn't off the reservation, or that they felt that was okay; and I never once, ever, had anybody say, "No, I wouldn't do that," or "That's too far," or you know, whatever. There was always an appreciation and saying, "That's fine." So you know, I don't think - first of all, I'm not a daredevil; I know I'm not just striking out just to be making waves. So I had no inner tendency to want to just be novel for the sake of innovation, and I needed that kind of support and connection; you know, I couldn't just be by myself out there.

For the first year I was in office out there, I spent an enormous amount of time with Korean foreign ministers. We would meet as late as midnight, at his house always, never at mine. There was a certain aversion to be coming to the -

Q: Called to the councils? [Laughter]

LANEY: Yes. And sometimes we would meet in a restaurant incognito; we would never come in together, and we'd never leave together; it was fascinating! There was a real sensitivity about not appearing as though I had very much presence or influence. On several occasions the president himself asked me not to show the flag when I came to the Blue House. I said, "Mr. President, I cannot go without showing the flag." He said, "Well, would you then park next door," [laughter] which I did, and I walked over. This is marvelous! You know, when I say these things, I say them with human nature and, you know, these are issues: that they cannot be seen to be toadying to the United States.

This is a major issue. As you can see more and more they're sensitive now, even more than they were when I was there. You know, in a sense I think I was a good guy. You know, I was not seen as bullying and that sort of thing; although I was very strong with them, and I'd try to massage it.

Q: Because, of course, the Four-Party Talks and the KEDO thing, this was probably one of the first times that action was being taken that also involved North Korea.

LANEY: Yes, there was heavy sensitivity there, right.

Q: Everybody's presence and status -

LANEY: Was at stake, yes.

I do want to insert here that Charles Kartman was an exceptional Foreign Service officer, my DCM, and I felt implicit confidence in him and in his judgment, and this is very, very special, to have someone in which you feel that. We had great sympathy, you know, I mean I don't mean the deep friendship, but we had a simpatico in terms of how we saw things; and only once or twice did I feel he went too far, then I would reign him in, and more or less gently. But nevertheless, I never knew Chuck, except on one personnel issue inside the embassy, to commit what I felt was a mistake, and nothing else. I mean that's a remarkable record, and I felt very well served! Of course he was ambassador to KEDO and head of KEDO, which is pretty much defunct now, but...he should be ambassador to Seoul; he's good. I don't know; of course, he's probably tainted by being too much in the KEDO thing and Clinton's policy.

Q: Talk about stereotypes and how they work through the domestic structure.

LANEY: Oh my, it was terrible...terrible to see a man's career so stultified by that, because he is able enough and bright enough to move beyond it. Anyway, but I did want to put that in for the record.

Also, I want to say that toward the end of my career there, there were two station chiefs who were exceptional, and both of them I became friends with and felt we really shared a lot. There was an ease with us in terms of what we were doing and all, and both of them have gone on to much higher, very significant posts. In fact, that's why there were two toward the end, because one of them was only there probably six months and he was moved on to Washington. But I felt that we were able to talk about a lot of things that happen on the underside of Korean society and politics that were not visible or accessible to most people, and I really needed to know that. You know, I needed to know what the KCIA was doing, and what kinds of shenanigans were going on, and who was where in terms of the political situation. I'm good hearted, and I am upfront, but I'm not naïve, and I didn't want to be blindsided by something, and they were extraordinarily helpful in that.

Q: However difficult that may have been, this is, of course, precisely everybody's professional job in the Embassy to find out how the local society operates and make sure Washington understands that so that it can understand the sensitivity when you're saying, "Don't do that!"

LANEY: Right. But they were good men; they were very able men. I was well served by my staff; I have no complaints about the staff. I felt at the time, sometimes, that I wanted them to work harder, or I wanted them to be smarter, but on the whole they were good.

Q: Now I've worked in posts where we use the ambassador's table to bring in mid-level local government officials, give them a little prestige. Was that the situation in Korea, or the environment there was quite different?

LANEY: No, that might have been a good idea; but I have to tell you, we were really busy. I'm serious! We worked. You know, I was up early. I'm an early riser anyhow; I usually get up at five, and I worked, and I was in my late 60s at the time. I worked until ten or eleven o'clock at night, you know, going to this and that, and seeing this and that and all, and a lot of it was - I mean everybody would be busy, but a lot of this was freighted with extraordinarily high stakes, which is, you know, it takes a lot out of you! [Laughter] There's a lot of heartburn there. You know, there were times when I would go to sleep I'd think: what are we going to do if, you know, something happens here? What are we going to do with all these Americans here? You know, this is a terrible responsibility! Fortunately we didn't have to face that.

Q: In addition to some of the North Korean issues, what were some of the economic issues that the mission watched?

LANEY: Well, there was a lot of concern about intellectual property rights; there was a lot of concern about patent infringement. One situation, I think it was with Amoco. They had had a joint venture with a Korean company, which allowed them to build a plant for this very special technique, this technical process, or whatever it was; and it was owned by Amoco. It was a very carefully guarded secret. And after about five years, while I was there, the Korean company decided to build a second plant, and they duplicated the first plant, and then they told Amoco that they could have the first plant and go home. And so Amoco was, of course, aggrieved that the Korean party was violating their patent rights and also that they had broken their partnership. So I was supposed to solve that. [Laughter]

I mean that was one of the kinds. Then we had real brouhahas about trade. There was an enormous problem about American products appearing in the Korean market. They didn't want any American cars; there was a huge import tax on all American cars. I said, "Well, look how many cars you're selling to the United States, and you don't want us to sell any here."

"Well, that's different!" [Laughter]

So we had to deal with issues like that, and I met with a huge number of people that would come through from the United States that had business there, and often had lunches for them, and stuff like that.

Q: One of the things that I noticed was frustrating in helping American businessmen was that often more than one American companies bid on an overseas contract. So while the German ambassador could go in and say, "Here's my one company and I'll do this on the side for you," the American ambassador said, "Well, I have two good competitive companies, and it'd be nice if they were players."

LANEY: Yes, yes. Well, that's another thing there. One of the biggest pressures that came out of Washington was to get the Koreans to buy America's defense products, their F-16s and their communications and all kinds of stuff. Which reminds me, one of the most important things that we did that I initiated was we began having monthly breakfasts with the foreign minister, the defense minister, the commanding general, and myself - the four of us. This turns out to be a - it's still going on by the way. That's still going on! That turned out to be a great device for resolving public differences or private differences and just making sure that we understood each other, and usually there was an affinity around the table. One of the problems was there tended to be a lot more turnover on their side than ours, which meant you constantly had to repeat your points.

But at one point in the summer and fall of 1996, it may have been after one of the submarine incidents, where the North sent a small submarine that was beached in South Korea, and all of the officers and submarine people were shot, were killed, they killed themselves, or else they refused to be captured - this whole crew - I'm talking about a total of maybe 18 people. It was a chilling thing! But anyway, that was a real problem with tension.

My concern then, on the DMZ, was that at the height of that tension, where we had no hot line, that we might have an incident that could escalate out of control and no way to tamp it down. So at one of our breakfast meetings I brought this up, and I said, "It's very important that when an incident happens, let say the North Koreans start something, they shoot or something, if the South returns fire, they can only return fire commensurate with the initial fire. It cannot escalate the incident." He said, "Well, we must escalate, otherwise they won't stop." I said, "No, I don't want any move taken on the part of the South or U.S. that is without approval from higher up. And so the foreign minister said, "I don't know whether we can give that." The defense minister and I said, "Well, let's work on that." This was a breakfast meeting. (I'm showing you how this operated in a very important way.) They came back the next meeting, and they said, "We're not able to give that assurance." And I said, "I want you to understand that the United States is not going to be drawn into a war because we were unable to control the escalation of exchange of fire, which really had no strategic importance at all, that it was pure accident." I said, "We have a stake here, and we're will guard this stake, but we will not be pushed into some incident. We must have control over our own destiny."

“We can’t give you that.”

I said, “I’ll have to get this from the president. I cannot allow this to continue like this.” The issue became really one of, you know, of...well, as I said, to control our own destiny. We were in a position at that point where, if it happened, it happened. Well, the president refused to give assurances I sought.

So about that time we were going to meet at APEC in Manila, and by now John Tilelli was the commanding general. He had replaced General Luck, and he was a good man; he and I got along famously. I said, “John, I want you to go to Manila with me.” He said, “I don’t have an invitation.” I said, “I’m inviting you, and we’re going down there, and we’re will get this thing straight!” So we flew down on a military plane, and John sat in on all the briefings. His eyes were as big as saucers because it was a real introduction to him of the inside of policy making outside the Pentagon, you know. And I briefed Sandy Berger, and then Secretary Christopher, and the president. I said, “We have got to beard this thing right now. We’ve need to get a commitment from the president of South Korea that we will not allow this thing to escalate out of control.”

So we had a bilateral meeting, and then Christopher said, “Will everybody excuse us except the two presidents.” And so they had a meeting, and we came back in, and we got it settled. Now that was a major thing, just working it out. But those breakfast meetings with the four, we call them principals, was a new thing; it had never been done before; and it turned out to be a - they looked forward to it. Every time we met, of course no press was involved in the meeting, but they always took our picture and had it in the paper, and of course the Koreans were pleased because this was...now this sort of like inviting them to the embassy, but it’s much better because we were at my house, General Luck’s house, or we would also meet at their house; it was we went round and round.

When the tension was ramping up in 1994, the other thing I instituted, because of the urgency of communication, was monthly breakfasts with all of the English-speaking ambassadors: UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States -

So the six of us would meet, and of course most of the reporting was done by me because they might not have had the contacts, that inner loop with the Korean government and all. But it was a good chance for them to quiz me and for me to hear their views, and their concerns, and apprehensions, and so forth. The UK ambassador and I got to be very good friends through that; in fact, the others too. We visited the - oh, the Irish. The Irish were included. The Irish ambassador became a friend, and the Australians, you know, Canadian...

This was not just social stuff. This was admitting them to the table for business that they would not otherwise be a part of, and I think it meant a great deal to them, and it was helpful to me, and it certainly gave us an ease of communication. So you see, I had a lot of breakfasts, a weekly breakfast with Gary Luck, and then John Tilelli, and then I had a

monthly breakfast with the foreign minister and the defense minister and the commanding general, and a monthly breakfast with the English speaking ambassadors, and a monthly breakfast with the Chamber of Commerce, you know, around and round.

There were lots of opportunities to see different constituencies. And for them to take my measure, hear me, you know; and at the height of the crisis, you know, they could read how steady I was, you know. “Is he nervous?” “Does he look nervous to you?” [Laughter]

One of the times, when we met with the whole embassy I think it was, and I was to reassure them, I said, “Well, I have had my mother here, who is 92 years old, and she doesn’t seem to be nervous.” They looked around and said, and it didn’t occur to them to ask, “Well, is that foolish or not?” [Laughter]

Q: You leave Seoul in February 1997. Looking back from the time you arrived in 1993, what do you see changed in terms of priority for issues, or you know, new things that were coming up on the horizon, something had been tamped down that maybe -

LANEY: Well, I want to say that the relations...I think that the relations between the United States and South Korea were very good then. I don’t mean they were perfect, but they were strong and warm and cordial. I know that when I told Kim Young-sam I was going home he called me and was very upset and told me to stay and all this sort of stuff.

But in regard to the issues, we had finally gotten an apology from North Korea for the submarine incident. I’d worked very hard with State Department in Washington, who was dealing with the North Korean mission in New York, and I insisted that we must hold out for that, and I said, “We have conclusive evidence, and we’re not going to back down. They have to apologize!” That’s the hardest line I’ve ever taken with North Korea, and finally they did, and they came about a day before Christmas or something like that. We had my daughter and other daughter there and her family; and her family went home, and she stayed on. So two days, three days after Christmas my daughter said, “Dad, when are you coming home?” And I said, “Oh, I don’t know. You know, probably in a few months.” And she said, “You’ll never get back.” She said, “There will always be a crisis!” And I thought, you know, she’s right, and right now is a lull; North Korea has apologized, and we’re sitting on top of things. This is a wonderful time to say I’m going to hang it up. So I decided that night; I called Washington; I called Bill Maurer, the public information officer, over, and I said, “Bill, I want to write a statement of resignation.” And he said, “You can’t do that!” I said, “I’ve just done it.” And I said, “I want it announced in the morning that I’m leaving post on February 1.”

I made the decision. This was the end of the first term in January 1997, and I had every reason to think I would be retained or kept on. But I had turned 69, and I was feeling like I’d really done my job or at least a job, and, oh, and my mother was getting older, and this all has to do with how I was perceiving Korea, and I thought that things were in pretty good shape, and I just decided to do it, and I did it. Mondale in Tokyo had already made his decision, and I thought well, heck! If he can do it, I’ll do it.

I didn't ask anybody's permission or anything. I just told them I was leaving. Nobody rebuked me. When I came back, I got a very warm welcome and appreciation from everybody. Madeleine Albright seemed kind of peeved, but that's all.

She was just starting as Secretary; Christopher had left. But Talbott, Strobe Talbott, was continuing, and he was very warm and supportive. I had made good friends with some people in the White House in key places and I had an easy access, and it was good. I was never close to Clinton; I didn't make any attempt to be and I never was. And I decided to come home, and I did, and I don't have any regrets. I called Vernon [Jordan], and I told him I was coming home, and he said, "You shouldn't do that." He was very close to Clinton. And I said, "Well, I've already made my decision, Vern." He and I had breakfast every time I came back to Washington; we were kind of buddies. And he said, "You're sure?" I said, "I'm sure!" He said, "Well, I'll tell you. You're getting out just in time!"

It (the Monica Lewinsky scandal) all hit the fan about a few weeks later! [Laughter]

But I thought, oh, I'm so glad that I'm not, you know, having to be put in a position of trying to explain it, or justify it, or apologize for it. I, you know - My decision was not based on that; I had no intimation at all; it just happened to be the timing.

Now the interesting thing is that after I came back, I was MC (Master of Ceremonies) at a dinner at the Council on Foreign Relations national meeting (they have an annual national meeting in June), and I introduced Sandy Berger. This was in June after I'd come back; I'd resigned; I was no longer ambassador. And Sandy got up and, in response to my introduction, said, "Jim thinks he's home, but," he said, "we've got other things in mind for him." So of course everybody looked around the room, "Oh, no, what is this going on?" Well, as it turned out, what he had in mind was both Sam Nunn and I going to North Korea, which didn't turn out to accomplish a whole lot, except we established a hot line, and then I became a supersecret presidential envoy to Lee Teng-hui (President of the Republic of China on Taiwan).

At that time Sandy Kristoff discussed with me Washington's anxieties over the continued intemperate remarks that President Lee Teng-hui was making. Sandy suggested, and implied she had presidential approval, that I become an informal personal envoy to Lee and underscore the risks his remarks were causing. I was briefed by Sandy Berger and Sandy Kristoff and we arranged a meeting between the two of us to see if we got along. This project was so confidential no one in the State Department was briefed on it. I only dealt with the NSC staff on this.

So for two years [1997 to 1999] I was the courier for personal message from Bill Clinton to Lee Teng-hui in an attempt to tamp down his enthusiasms and hold him in check; and it was done with this kind of hyper confidentiality because it was inappropriate for there to be an envoy between the President and Taiwan; although, I think if Beijing had understood or would have been willing to understand the purpose of the mission, they

might have appreciated it; but the NSC didn't want to run the risk. So, as a matter of fact, even the Secretary of State did not know of these visits. This was done with only Berger, the president, myself, Sandy Kristoff, and one other briefer, somebody in the system who knew Taiwan, Bush, Richard Bush.

Q: Interesting, I just finished reading an insightful book he just published, At Cross Purposes: U.S.-Taiwan Relations Since 1942.

LANEY: Bush knew about it; he was the first one to give me a briefing. My first meeting with Lee Teng-hui was in Honolulu in September 1997 in Honolulu. Lee was transiting Hawaii on his way to visit countries in Latin America [Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, and Paraguay], where a few countries still formally recognized the Republic of China. I first meet with the Foreign Minister John Chang and then Lee.

Then in December of 1997, after the financial meltdown in Asia, I went to Taipei again and this time I carried a letter from President Clinton. The night before I was to leave, I got a call from Larry Summers wanting me to go on to Seoul to meet -

Q: Summers is from Treasury [Deputy Secretary of Treasury].

LANEY: Right, right...to go on to Seoul from Taipei to meet with Kim Young-sam to talk to him about the role of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and what we were willing to do; that was all oral; it was not in writing; and at that point, Kim Young-sam was dragging his feet, and it was making it very difficult to provide the kind of support in a responsible way to keep South Korea from going belly up in terms of liquidity. So you know, that was a significant trip: first to Taipei and then to Seoul.

The new ambassador who succeeded me, [Steven W.] Bosworth, had just arrived [Ed: Bosworth served as Ambassador from December 1997 to February 2001]. I don't think we stayed at the embassy. But anyway, I had breakfast with him, and I invited him to go with me, but he declined; I don't know why; I guess he felt it wasn't his nickel or something.

Anyway with Lee Teng-hui, I kept meeting him for about another 15 months or so, and finally I told Sandy, "I won't go anymore, because the president is now treating this in too cavalier a fashion in terms of secrecy. When I first met, I went in very quietly, without any fanfare, and was put up under a pseudonym in a hotel; I mean it was really done quietly. But I blew it the first time because, when I called the first morning to order breakfast, I said, "This is Mr. Jones." She said, "Oh, you not Mr. Jones. You Mr. Smith!" [Laughter]

And then I got a call later that same morning, and here is this hyper secret trip. I got a call in Taipei from an embassy officer in Seoul. He called; he knew me because he'd been there under my watch; and I said, "How did you know I was here?" He said, "Well, I was alerted by the White House that you were coming to see Kim Young-sam, and I called

White House Travel. They told me you were in Taipei.” [Laughter] I said, “So much for supersecrecy!” [Laughter] He was my -

Q: Yes, people who aren't trained in the business?

LANEY: Right. He was my control officer in Seoul. Anyway, that's why he called. I thought I had a - here I'm blowing it in terms of my pseudonym, I'm found out by a guy by the embassy, they're all abuzz at the embassy, “What is Laney doing in Taipei?” you know, and the White House, “Just sent him to Taipei.” But anyway, it never did get -

Q: How many trips did you make over the...what did you say...17-month period?

LANEY: It went on through the summer of...at least through the fall of 1999.

I guess I went, all told, at least six or seven times; a trip may be every four months.; there was a good deal of traffic, and I was unpaid. You know, I was just impressed into service. I would arrive in Taipei on a evening flight and go to the hotel.

Q: You see, Lee had, they had made the decision to turn the presidency of the Republic of China into an elected position. So Lee is the first elected president under the Republic of China and in ingratiating himself with his domestic constituencies, he found himself saying things and doing things that other observers considered somewhat destabilizing.

LANEY: Well, he was getting more and more cocky and more difficult to deal with as time went on. This was after, of course, the Cornell thing [June 1995]; and I began to get very restive because I would come in with these letters, and he would read them, and then he would give me a lecture; he was charming, we never had hard words; although I felt I had some latitude to deal with him, but I did not, of course, feel that I could just flat out...I couldn't tell him what to do! He would give me a return letter. These meeting were not eventful, but probably acted as a pressure valve.

So with each succeeding visit, I got more and more uncomfortable. The foreign minister [Jason Hu] always briefed me at breakfast before the meeting with the president, with Lee Teng-hui, and I liked him a lot. But anyway, it was an interesting thing. I didn't mind doing it; but after a while I thought the payoff was not worth it, so I quit. I just couldn't see any point in continuing; it was a drain on my interest and energy.

Q: And you didn't particularly see any payoff to this -

LANEY: No, you know, at least we kept from driving into a ditch, you know, whatever role I had in that, in terms of conveying Clinton's interests and concerns, and therefore the United States; but after a while I thought I'd just gone over the same ground every time, you know. We weren't really making progress; we were just...each time I'd shore it back up, you know, and things would stabilize for a while.

The last time, the last meeting, September 1999, most of the time I'd go with my wife, and she was my cover. We went out for dinner rather than having dinner in the president's mansion. We went to this wonderful restaurant, and when we went out afterwards, there was this host of photographers getting our picture with the president. I said, "This won't work anymore." You know, this is they're not honoring the spirit in which I'm coming, because it's as though they were trying to tell me, "We've got you. You've got more at stake in keeping a secret than we do." At least that's what it looked like.

And I wrote all that up and gave it to President Clinton, and said, "Thanks a lot, but no thanks!" On one of the early visits we were flown over to Quemoy Island and saw all that stuff. That was particularly interesting because my wife's uncle, when he was chairman of the Joint Chiefs, that was during the real flare-up on Quemoy and Matsu. He had been there, and they all remembered him. They were excited to think that Admiral Radford's niece and husband were visiting, so they commented, "This is where he walked" and that sort of presentation.

Q: Actually, that's fairly illustrative of what I understand you've done since your ambassadorship. You have certainly kept your hand in Korean issues, maintaining you contacts with the Council of Foreign Relations.

LANEY: Right. I've been back about twice a year to Korea. Most recently last November. Of course when Kim Dae-jung was President -

Q: You were talking about your work with the Council on Foreign Relations.

LANEY: Well, you know, I co-chaired a Council task force on Korea with Mort Abramowitz and made trips to China. We just sent the Council our resignations last summer after seven years as co-chairs. That was the longest - no, six years, I take that back. Abramowitz is a great guy; I have a great respect for him.

Q: Obviously Korea is a sensitive issue, has been for a long time. How did the Council on Foreign Relations decide that it wanted a special taskforce?

LANEY: Well, in 1997, Les [Leslie H.] Gelb was aware that the North Korean situation was still festering, and that Clinton was losing his patience with it in Congress, Congress was dragging its feet on keeping its side of the KEDO deal and all, Republicans were very opposed to it, a lot of flack; and so they felt it was very important that we have a taskforce that could periodically issue reports that could, in a sense, give Clinton some running room, not necessarily just supporting him, but at least trying to break the logjam. And the most we issued, I think three reports in all, which is pretty sizable - every other year you don't have to report - with recommendations, bipartisan, and a fairly distinguished group of people on it, you know, the people who'd really been involved in foreign policy in Asia.

All along I'd been upset that we had not had the kind of high-level consideration of policy and career that it deserved because of its strategic situation. Bob Gallucci filled the post for a while, but then he went out in 1997 with me. He left and went to be dean of Georgetown. I don't think there was a replacement, but it certainly wasn't at the level it should be.

So we wrote a letter, Mort and I wrote a letter, to President Clinton because the situation had deteriorated so bad that I felt that we needed 1) to have a high-level coordinator, and 2) we needed to draw up a set of proposals, and 3) go to North Korea, and try to see if we couldn't reach an understanding on where we should go from here. Within a week he had appointed Bill Perry as the coordinator. I think that's pretty good action and enough so that the taskforce, you know, operated like that. We were trying to have influence to nudge things along constructively. We weren't trying to score points; we just wanted to see very difficult and complex problems addressed and if possible, resolved. That's what it was about.

Q: And out of that were...how...I mean one of the main actors that we're trying to influence here is North Korea. Does anybody have any idea of what North Korea responds to or is interested in?

LANEY: Well, my basic operating assumption, my axiom, all along has been that North Korea is basically insecure. They're not going to be aggressive; they don't have the capacity to be aggressive. They might have had at some point in the '70s or '80s, but that was long past. Their conventional military is so degraded because of time; they don't have enough fuel for their pilots to have any practice, you know, flying; and their tanks are old; and so forth. The two things they have: they have missiles, they have long-range artillery, which is operative; and they have or had a going nuclear program.

I was convinced that their principal purpose was regime continuity and stability; and they felt threatened that they would be taken out, and that they might collapse on the one hand, and on the other, that they would be pushed over. China of course, provided a minimum threshold of survival for them in terms of food and fuel, and South Korea provided a good bit, and in the meantime, of course, after some terrible natural disasters in the late 1990s, they have entered into a series of reforms, which are very...they're not far reaching, but they're significant in terms of economic reforms. Agriculture is now largely uncontrolled, and it's improved the production and the accessibility of food, and so forth.

But they still are benighted, and I know that they want some guarantee of stability, of assurance that the United States won't take them out. They've, of course now with the current administration, seen what we did with Iraq, and they know that they were linked with Iraq in this "axis of evil," and it's quite logical to assume that they would be maybe next. There are people on the Defense Policy Board who do a lot of talking - Jim [R. James] Woolsey, and Richard Perle, and a lot of others - and they say, "Don't deal with them because you'll only prolong the regime. We need to get rid of the regime." Well, you know, that kind of talk is not very reassuring if you're the regime.

So I have thought: what's the down side of giving North Korea an assurance of nonaggression. If they violate the conditions of the thing, we're no longer bound by it; so okay, what's the down side? We're not going to keep a nonaggression pact if they violate it; but if they need it for purposes of going further in terms of dismantlement and all, that would work. It's hard for them to imagine just giving up their only ace in the hole before they even have any assurance of nonaggression; I mean that's a nonstarter.

The problem is, of course, that forever the hard Right has always felt that it's appeasement to deal with them at all. And as I said earlier, the fact the United States is big makes it hard for us to do anything that would look like we were being conciliatory or you know, going even half way toward the adversary. But I do think, and I could be wrong, I do think that it could be worked out.

And I think China wants it to be worked out. China has moved into a position of geopolitical prominence through the Korea situation that we never imagined four years ago; their leadership in the region is enormous. They're not just economic power, but real geopolitical. I think they've moved into the vacuum left by the United States because we're so asinine and think that we can move unilateral or bilaterally, but we're in a logjam.

In the meantime, of course, the six-party things are trying to work. I was co-author of an article in Foreign Affairs a year ago this time ["How to Deal With North Korea." Foreign Affairs, Vol. 82, No. 2. March/April 2003. pp. 15-30], which proposed a six-party approach, and I think that's a good approach, and I think it could work out. I believe we could move to the point of where, with economic support and all that, they would give it all up, only, though, if they felt they were moving toward normalization; and if normalization is out of the question for us, then I don't know how it's going to be resolved.

Now in the worst case scenario, as I've said, even if we go down this route and they show perfidy, then we at least have China, and Japan, and Russia with us, and South Korea, in going the hard road, because they will have been demonstrated to be perfidious and unresponsive. But just for us not to do anything except demand everything up front is no approach. I mean no one thinks it is except us, except the hard Right of us! I don't know!

Q: Well, in one sense you're using a characterization that has come out of the Congress. In talking about another issue many decades ago, congressional leaders spoke of being in on the takeoff, as well as the crash. I mean let them in, as you say. Let Russia, and China, and Japan get together with us setting the game up, and if the game goes sour, then you've got all these friends and associates ...

LANEY: And we know who's responsible, see, because we are not the laggards or the obstructionists. Right now we just look like we're being obstructionists.

Q: Which probably makes all the other actors insecure too.

LANEY: Well, it makes South Korea angry. It means that I met with Roh [Moo Hyun], the President of South Korea, who's in a lot of hot water himself, last year a couple months after he took office. I didn't know him before that, and I met with him for about an hour, just one on one; and his great concern, which he reiterated over and over, he said, "I did not take the oath of office just to allow another nation to drag my people into war." That's a pretty strong statement. He said, "I do not like the fact the United States thinks that it can take unilateral action regarding the nuclear situation in North Korea without our being fully consulted and in agreement." He said, "We are the ones that will bear the burden, not you." That's no fool talking!

Q: Well, it sounds a bit of mirrored image of what you were talking about earlier, about the escalation of an accident on the DMZ. You said, "I don't want you drawing me into a war just because you can't tell your guys to stop escalating."

LANEY: It is the mirror image, you're right.

Q: Well, actually Ambassador Laney, I have really appreciated your time at this. I think we've covered a lot of material. Is there anything that you see as a summary to this exposure as an 18-year-old Counter Intelligence officer, through ambassador, to your current participation in the public discussion in these issues?

LANEY: No, I don't think so. I don't know of anything that comes to mind.

Q: Well, I really appreciate your time. We have spent a beautiful day here in Atlanta.

LANEY: Indoors. You're a very gracious interlocutor. You make it easy. Of course, you know that when you get people to talk about themselves that they can do that all day. It's been my pleasure.

End of interview