ADST ORAL HISTORY LESSON PLAN: Vietnam War
Middle School Grades 6-8
High School Grades 9-12

Big Idea: Oral history is a tool for learning about people, places, and events. Diplomats have a front-seat perspective on many international historical events.

Topics
- Diplomatic Oral Histories
- U.S. Foreign Policy
- 20th and 21st Century U.S. and World History

Description: Students explore how historians use primary source oral histories to understand events, people, and places from the past. There are 3 choices for classroom activities contained within this lesson plan – choose what best works for your class. Students will read the oral histories given by five (5) different individuals who were U.S. Department of State Foreign Service Officers serving overseas during the Vietnam War and conduct a critical analysis of the interviews in order to better understand their experiences described. Students are encouraged to make connections between the experiences described in the oral histories and their own lives.

[Teachers: Please note that this sample unit is for the Vietnam War but this lesson and format can be used with any historical events on our site, adst.org, by searching the event in Moments in Diplomatic History or our Country Reader Series by country.]

Objectives:
Students will:
- Understand oral history as a primary source as a way of gathering detailed information that helps us understand a specific time, place, person, or event.
- Connect past and present experiences.
- Understand that perspectives of events change over time.
- Understand that all of us have important stories to tell and perspectives to share.

Skills:
- Identify, analyze, and interpret primary sources to make generalizations about events and life in world history.
- Evaluate the authenticity, authority, and credibility of sources.
- Develop perspectives of time and place.

Standards
This unit is aligned with the following Virginia Department of Education History and Social Science Standards of Learning:

- World History and Geography: 1500 A.D. (C.E.) to the Present
  The Modern Era
WHII.1, WHII.11, WHII.12
- **The United States History: 1865 to Present**
  - Turmoil and Change: 1890s to 1945
  - US11.7
- **The United States since WWII**
  - US11.8

- **Virginia and United States Government**
  - GOVT.1, GOVT.3, GOVT.12

- **Civics and Economics**
  - CE.1, CE.3, CE.4, CE.10

Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are the raw materials of history — original documents which were created at the time under study. They are different from secondary sources, accounts or interpretations of events created by someone without firsthand experience, such as textbooks.

Examining primary sources gives students a powerful sense of history and the complexity of the past. Helping students analyze primary sources can also guide them toward higher-order thinking and better critical thinking and analysis skills.

**Essential Questions:**
- How do historians learn about the past?
- How can the past inform our understanding about the present?
- How can one’s understanding of an event change over time?
- How are historical accounts influenced by the biases of eyewitnesses?

**Time Frame:**
1-3 class periods. This activity has been designed to be customized to your learning goals and your students’ individual needs. Choose to do the complete lesson plan or select parts with your students based on your schedule and objectives.

**Background for Teachers: Why study the work of diplomats?**

"The good diplomat must have an observant mind [and] sound judgment. The diplomat must be quick, resourceful, a good listener, courteous and agreeable. Above all, the good negotiator must possess enough self-control to resist the longing to speak before he has thought out what he actually intends to say. He must have a calm nature, be able to suffer fools gladly, which is not always easy."

- François De Callier, 17th C. French diplomat

1. **Diplomats work on important issues.** Diplomats work on a broad range of topics. Their portfolios span areas such as environmental issues, climate change, counter-terrorism, women’s
rights, conflict resolution, technology, science, human trafficking, global health, and the preservation of cultural property.
They work with business leaders, NGOs, and carry out development work that improves lives. They are often first on the scene during natural disasters and their expertise in crisis management can save lives.

2. **Diplomats become Country Experts.** Part of the job is mastering a country’s language, culture, and traditions. And through day-to-day responsibilities, diplomats work with a fascinating range of people from artists and musicians to parliamentarians, journalists, and scientists.

3. **Diplomats have Transferable Skills.** Diplomats conduct high-level discussions with foreign leaders, analyze political and economic developments, write speeches for their ambassadors, and engage in social media. Above all, they are masters at communicating across cultures.

4. **Diplomats are Part of a Team.** In a typical embassy or consulate, diplomats collaborate with many agencies and learn how to assemble people with a variety of skills to accomplish international goals. They work alongside colleagues from the military, the intelligence services, commerce, trade, agricultural, law enforcement, science, and technology.


**Materials:**

1) This unit relates to the Vietnam War, but this lesson can be used with any international historical event from post WWII-present by searching our site by that historical event. Find content related to your curriculum at ADST’s website in *Moments in Diplomatic History, Fascinating Figures*, written or podcast Oral Histories, or *Country Readers* which often have different perspectives on the same event (available at [http://adst.org/oral-history/#.WgyWSkqnGUk](http://adst.org/oral-history/#.WgyWSkqnGUk)).

2) Make 2-4 copies of each Oral History Transcript/Moment in the Appendix or search other historical events (located on website: [www.adst.org](http://www.adst.org)) and that will be placed at 2-4 stations around the classroom. There are 5 Oral Histories to choose from in the Appendix, chosen for their varied perspectives and length on the same historical event.

3) Student Worksheets – choose among the following and distribute to the class:
   - **Versions of History Chart** ([www.edsitement.org](http://www.edsitement.org))
   - **Document Analysis Worksheet** ([www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov))
   - **Venn Diagram Worksheet** ([www.eduplace.com](http://www.eduplace.com))
   - **Appendix: Vietnam Oral Histories & Dictionary of Diplomatic Terms**
     - Oral History - Paul Kattenberg, Intelligence Analyst & Political Officer
     - Oral History - Thomas Corcoran, Political Officer
     - Moments in Diplomatic History - U.S. Ambassador Frances McNamara
     - Oral History - U.S. Ambassador Theresa Tull
     - Moments in Diplomatic History - U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Officer John Bennett
Vocabulary:
− Oral History
− Perspective
− Bias

Procedure:
Pre-Lesson Prep *(to be completed before the day of the lesson):*
1) Watch the 55-min. video, *America’s Diplomats* on www.adst.org in class or assign as homework to become familiar with the work of U.S. Foreign Service Officers. Students can also read *How do you become a diplomat?* at the U.S. Diplomacy Center website or Diplomacy 101.

Part 1: Introduction
1) Ask students if they know any childhood stories about their parents or grandparents related to the historical event being studied -- in this case, the Vietnam War.
2) Instruct students to share those stories with someone sitting next to them.
3) Ask a few students to share their stories with the class.
4) Ask students how they know about those stories if they were not alive when those stories took place. Reinforce that information is often received through stories that people tell each other. *Option:* Ask for 5-6 volunteers to play the game of Telephone. Tell the first student a brief story and then compare the first and final versions to illustrate the need for an objective eye when reading first-person accounts.
5) Connect the exercise to the work of historians. Explain to students that historians learn about the past by asking people to tell them stories about it. These stories are called oral histories.
6) Ask students if they know what a diplomat or Foreign Service Officer does? Ask class if anyone knows a diplomat or Foreign Service Officer? This may be a good point to gloss what Foreign Service Officers are at U.S. Diplomacy Center’s *How do you become a diplomat?* and gloss some diplomatic vocabulary from the oral histories. See the U.S. Diplomacy Center’s Diplomatic Dictionary in Appendix. For example,
   o FSO= Foreign Service Officer
   o Tour= an assignment overseas or in Washington, DC, usually 2-4 years in duration
   o Embassy= the chief U.S. mission, usually based in the capital city
   o Consulate= based in other cities within a country
   o CG= Consulate General who heads the Consulate

Part 2: Activity A *(choose among these)*
1) Tell students that in today’s lesson they will compare/contrast different oral histories among the choices on the topic of Vietnam in order to understand the different perspectives of each diplomat, to learn what it was like for U.S. diplomats dealing with the same historical event. In addition, students should look for what they shared in common, using the Document Analysis and Venn Diagram worksheet attachments.
2) Distribute copies of oral history transcripts (*or excerpts* of each, due to time constraints) at 2-4 stations around the room. Break class into small groups of 3-5 students and leave 3-5 copies of each oral history for small groups at each station.

3) Each group can decide to read aloud to one another in their small group, or silently. After the reading, they will then complete the worksheets individually or as a group, discussing each one. Allow enough time for students to complete each oral history (15-20 minutes) before moving to the next station with a buzzer/bell.

4) Ask students what they learned about each of the experiences of the U.S. diplomats/Foreign Service Officers.

5) Record students’ observations on the board.

6) Ask students to pay close attention to clues that help us understand how each diplomat/Foreign Service Officer felt about these experiences.

7) Discuss as a class various students’ observations they are willing to share.

8) Have students attribute adjectives to describe the ideas and feelings captured within the oral history. Guiding questions might include:

   - What do you think it would feel like to be placed overseas in Vietnam, away from your family and friends for several years during wartime?
   - How might that help us understand their experiences?
   - What do you think it would feel like to live, speak, and read in a new, unfamiliar language to complete your job? How might that help us understand their experience?
   - Has anyone in class had a story from childhood that they retold again and again? How has your telling of stories changed over the years?
   - What does this tell us about how we should think about *their* oral histories?
   - Can we take them as absolute truth?

**Part 3: Wrap-Up**

1) Instruct students to write a short paragraph reflecting on two versions of experience of the same historical event as told by the two diplomats. In what ways were their experiences different? In what ways were their experiences similar?

2) Invite some students to share their thinking with the class. In what ways did reading their oral histories add a dimension to their understanding of the Vietnam War before this activity?

3) Encourage students to think about the oral histories of these two diplomats whenever they think of this historical event.

**Assessment:**

1) Review the students’ reflective writing.

2) Note what kind of details students were able to pull out from the oral histories. Did students pick up on how the two diplomats might have felt?

3) Note whether or not students were able to make personal connections to the diplomats’ stories.

**Extensions:**

1) Have students interview a family member or visit a senior living center member about their experiences with the same historical event (Vietnam) and include that additional perspective in their essays.
2) Facilitate a discussion about the historical event. Ask students how this debate relates to the two diplomats’ stories. Ask students where they stand on the issue.

Part 2: Alternate Activity B

9) Tell students that in today’s lesson they will read an oral history of a diplomat assigned to Vietnam during the War, to learn what life was like during this time period, using the Document Analysis worksheet attachment. Have students complete the Document Analysis worksheet and review as a class.

10) Distribute copies of 5 oral history transcripts (or excerpts from each, if time constraints) from the Appendix to read individually, as a small group, or as a class. Ask students to pay close attention to clues that help us understand how each diplomat felt about his/her experience serving overseas at the time.

11) Ask students what they learned about each of the experiences of the diplomats and record students’ observations on the board.

12) Have students attribute adjectives to describe the ideas and feelings captured within the oral history. Guiding questions might include:
- What do you think it would feel like to be placed in Vietnam during wartime, away from your family and friends for several years?
- How might that help us understand their experiences?
- Has anyone in class had a story from childhood that they retold again and again? How has your telling of stories changed over the years?
- What does this tell us about how we should think about oral histories?
- Can we take them as absolute truth?

Part 2: Alternate Activity C

Circle of Viewpoints (source: loc.gov):

Draw a big circle on the board or on a flipchart & add roles of other perspectives around the circle like spokes on a bike until full, if possible.

1) Ask the class to brainstorm a list of the many differing viewpoints related to these oral histories.
   - Who is involved?
   - Who is affected by it?
   - Who might care?

2) Ask student to choose one of the viewpoints, and try to imagine the thoughts and feelings of a character from this point of view.

3) Ask student to act out this character:
   - From what point of view are you thinking?
   - What would you say about this document or about U.S. diplomats serving overseas during the war?
   - What’s a question you might ask them?
APPENDIX: ORAL HISTORIES RELATED TO VIETNAM WAR

PAUL M. KATTENBURG
Intelligence Analyst, Indochinese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1950-1955)
Country Officer, East Asia Bureau
Washington, DC (1963-1964)
Political Officer, Policy Planning
Washington, DC (1964-1965)

Dr. Paul M. Kattenburg was born in Belgium in 1922 and came to the United States in 1940. He joined the Department of State in 1950 as a research specialist and entered the Foreign Service in 1956. He served in Germany, the Philippines, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed in 1990 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Okay, let's move to Indochina then.

KATTENBURG: I switched with Al Seligmann, who was quite tired of Indochina business, and none of us had been Wristonized at this point. We were civil servants. I was more than willing to change my scenery from Indonesia to Indochina. Here I fell into quite a different story because of the struggle between the bureaus that we in the Division Research Far East supported: the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, on the one hand, and the various personalities in that bureau including Mr. Reed the head of Southeast Asian Affairs, who had at one time been consul general in Hanoi, and the European Bureau on the other hand. Relations were quite strained. I spoke French and I was sort of a natural in a way to do Indochina as so much of the documentation and the analysis had to be through French material. Jack Lydman and I established a pretty close relation with the working people on the Indochina Desk in the Far East Bureau -- this was the period '52 through early '55. I had spent the summer of 1952 in Saigon at the Embassy under Don Heath, the ambassador. This was a period of conflict within the Embassy as well because Ed Gullion, who was his DCM, opposed the pro-French policy. He supported greater independence for Bao Dai's Associated State of Vietnam. We had provided the French support since early 1950, when we had started giving them economic and some military assistance. We increased the military assistance a couple of years later when the French started having a tough time with the war. In any event, as far as the relations within the Department, we had a fairly tough time holding a point of view which on the whole, I think, was supportive of assistance to Bao Dai's Vietnam. We felt we should move faster towards independence. I don't know if this is the place to go into detail on all that...

Q: What was the situation in Vietnam? You talked about the Associated States.

KATTENBURG: These were created in 1948 under the Baie d'Along Agreement, and all this is recorded in a lot of literature so it is easy to get a hold of. Our policy anchored itself in support of the French when we recognized Vietnam -- Laos and Cambodia were secondary problems. They didn't really achieve full recognition. We maintained merely Chargés in Vientiane and Phnom Penh. In fact they were in many ways dependent on the Embassy in Saigon.
Q: **Our Embassy was in Saigon and not in Hanoi?**

KATTENBURG: No, our Embassy was in Saigon where the French had re-established the capital.

Q: **I see.**

KATTENBURG: Bao Dai was in Saigon with a summer home in Dalat. We maintained a Consulate in Hanoi until the summer of 1955. Here, before I forget, I would like to clarify something because some of the literature incorrectly assumed that we closed the Consulate in Hanoi after the Geneva Accords of July 20, 1954. South Vietnam took what had been the French territory south of the 17th parallel or the Bao Dai area under the French, if you want. But we did not close the Consulate in Hanoi. It remained under Tom Corcoran, who closed it in the summer of 1955. I was the person on the Desk at that time who recommended him for the Superior Service Award, which he got for the remarkable job he did in quietly, efficiently and thoroughly closing the Consulate operation.

The Embassy, in those intervening years, '52 when I started working on Indochina and first went out there on detail through '55, when I went back again, was under Don Heath virtually the entire time. He may have left in 1954, but I don't think so. In any event there was a mission sent out by the President and Secretary Dulles in 1954, under General J. Lawton Collins, a famous mission. This leads us to a very interesting episode about a key meeting on Vietnam that I described somewhere in my book, but not in great detail. The meeting took place in late April or May, 1955 during the Sect Battle, so called, in the city of Saigon. When Ngo Dinh Diem, who had by then returned, that is, post-Geneva, as the new President of the Republic of Vietnam, was under siege by the Sects, so called Binh Xuyen. A meeting was held in the Department in late April or early May 1955, chaired by Under Secretary Robert Murphy, to consider a report by General Collins who had been sent on that mission by the President and his political advisor Paul Sturm. They recommended going easy on support for Ngo Dinh Diem and a possible change in government if someone able to handle the situation could be found. I think that was the essence really of the meeting.

At that point Brig. General Edward Landsdale had already been moved from Manila, where he had supported Magsaysay under auspices of the Agency, of course, to Saigon where he and a number of other Americans, some of whom played a very important role and were private Americans, not necessarily directly linked with the Agency, had supported Ngo Dinh Diem. During the time of the meeting a general who had been loyal to Ngo Dinh Diem was able to take care of the city and push the Binh Xuyen back and out of the city, thereby actually solving the situation on the ground in favor of Ngo Dinh Diem. The meeting just naturally gravitated in that direction.

I, myself, during this time in INR supported the Diem regime. I thought Diem was quite capable of holding the situation and I would have hated to see a change made which would have brought
in some uncertain military leaders -- as happened ten years later.

Q: Yes.

KATTENBURG: Immediately after this particular meeting, I went out to Vietnam. It had been decided that I would take the Desk in the fall of 1955 to succeed the two people who had been working on Indochina in the Bureau. The director of the Bureau of Southeast Asian Affairs was Philip Bonsal and his Indochina Desk officer was an army colonel, who came into the State Department at the end of the war, but did not join the Foreign Service, to the best of my knowledge. This was Robert Hoey who played a key role in the whole period of the French war. He was assisted, and very ably so, by FSO John Getz, later U.S. Ambassador to Malta before retirement [who can be interviewed, living in North Carolina], with whom I was very close from the INR vantage point during this whole period.

Somewhere or other it was decided, I think with Jack Lydman and other Bureau people, that I would go to Saigon. Now in the summer of '55 I was involved with the question of how to handle the provision of the Geneva Accords of 1954 which required consultation between the two zones of Vietnam, the Peoples Republic of Vietnam north of the 17th parallel, temporary demarcation line, and the government south of that line, that is the Republic of Vietnam. The political part of the Accords had called for interzonal consultations which would lead to all Vietnam elections to be held in July of 1956, two years after the signing of the Accords.

The consultations, of course, had to bear on the question of what the elections were for, what kind of body, what sort of constitution would there be, what method would be used for these elections, was there to be a parliament elected, etc., none of which was determined in the Accords, except that the elections would be by secret ballot. During the year '54-'55 I, from my desk in INR, worked together with Ed Gullion, in the Policy Planning Council, on preparing various papers for the Secretary. The policy in the end shuffled itself out to support for Ngo Dinh Diem. Whatever he wanted, we would support. That was what was essentially confirmed in the 1955 meeting that Murphy held. While the general in Saigon, who was Little Minh or Tran Van Minh, won the war against the Sects in support of Diem, Landsdale supported Diem, Wesley Fishel from Michigan State University, who was the other very important American there, supported him. It was decided at that meeting, although no details were forthcoming that day, but I recall very clearly a discussion of the replacement of the ambassador and designee, Freddy Reinhardt, who went out almost immediately afterwards.
THOMAS J. CORCORAN  
Political Officer  
Saigon (1950-1953)  
Consul  
Hanoi (1954-1955) ©ADST

Thomas J. Corcoran was born in New York in 1920. He entered the Foreign Service in 1948. He served in Spain, Laos, Cambodia, and Burundi, where he was ambassador. He served three times in Vietnam: in Saigon (1950-1953), Hanoi (1954-1955), and in Saigon (1965-1966).

Q: I want to concentrate mainly on your time in Indochina, because this is where you did spend I can almost say an inordinate amount of time for a Foreign Service officer. How did you get into this particular corner of the woods?

CORCORAN: I got orders to Saigon, which had not been a diplomatic post when we were discussing this, but which had been converted from a consulate general to a legation right about that time in 1950.

Q: I'm confused. How was Indochina divided up then? I thought Hanoi was sort of the center.

CORCORAN: In the French period, Vietnam was really in three parts. You had the empire of Annam, the middle, which had a French resident.

Q: That was Hue?

CORCORAN: The capital of Annam was Hue. You had North Vietnam (Tonkin), which was largely under military administration, although it was technically under the imperial crown, but was run by the French Army. Then you had South Vietnam, which was a French colony, Cochin China. So you had three different administrations there.

But with the French reoccupation at the end of World War II, after the Japanese had taken it over, the Chinese Nationalists in the north and the British in the south had accepted the Japanese surrender. The French went back in. There was a very complex period of negotiating with Ho Chi Minh, who was the leader of the Communists, who had come out of the bush and taken over Hanoi initially at the end of the war. They followed on the Chinese Nationalist occupation and coexisted with them for a while. But then the French moved in there. It was a very complicated period of negotiations between the French and the North Vietnamese, first starting with the French admiral, D'Argenlieu, who was General de Gaulle's representative and commander in chief. Then he was replaced eventually by General LeClerc. General LeClerc was the Army commander in the north.

All of these details have to be sorted out, because I've been in that area three times over a period of 30 years, actually four times, with three desk tours. It needs sorting out of the different periods.
The original sort of modus vivendi which the French worked out there began to break down in 1946. Jean Sainteny, who had been in the French colonial service, and who was the son-in-law of Albert Sarraut, who had been the governor general of Indochina and a French cabinet minister, went back in and tried to deal with Ho Chi Minh and re-establish the French presence in the north. For a variety of reasons, that broke down in 1946, and that’s when the war really started.

Q: I want to come back now to what you were doing. This gives an idea that it was a complex situation. You were sent to Saigon as what?

CORCORAN: Initially, there had been a consulate in Hanoi and a consulate general in Saigon. As I understand it in the old days, during the hot season, the government moved to the north, and consular representatives would follow them there. But when the war ended, we maintained a consulate in Hanoi and a consulate general in Saigon, two consular posts. Then in 1950, when the French union concept was being established, the other two countries, Laos and Cambodia, had their own problems. Laos had also been divided into three parts, Luang Prabang, the kingdom in the north, Champassak, the kingdom in the south, and Vientiane, a sort of expired kingdom, in the middle, which was under direct French administration. The French union concept was that these three separate countries, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, would be members of the French union, each with its own monarchial form of government, a king in Laos, a king in Cambodia, and the ex-emperor of Annam, who was supposed to be accepted as the ruler of Vietnam.

As part of supporting this, in 1950 we agreed to diplomatic recognition of each of these countries, and we sent one minister, Donald Heath, who resided in Saigon. He kept a small branch office with a junior officer in Vientiane and one in Phnom Penh. So I first went to Saigon when it was a legation, and I was a political officer. I was, at that time, a third secretary. But after a few months there, I was sent up to relieve the man who was in Vientiane.

Q: When were you in Hanoi?

CORCORAN: I was there from about the beginning of September 1954 until about December 12, 1955. I was there about 14 months.

Q: We had some trouble on the previous tape. Some of this may be repetitious. How would you describe your principal job there?

CORCORAN: The main thing was to point out that we were not pulling out, we weren’t prejudging the Geneva Conference as the end of everything. It was an armistice. We were going to wait and see what happened. We were supporting the government in the south, but we were keeping consular representation in the north. According to tradition and custom, the people holding the real power in the north, the Communists, could have expelled us if they had chosen so to do. But they chose, instead, to say that they just did not recognize us. But of course, we did exist, and we had employees, we had our buildings, two buildings which we owned, and for a while, a couple which we leased just as an anchor to windward, and had people spread out. We
obeyed the curfews and we paid our electricity bills and things of that sort. But our main purpose there was to wait and see what happened, rather than just climb aboard airplanes and get out. They did, in effect, deal with us through the municipal Military and Administrative Council of Hanoi, which was, in effect, a municipal government with both military and civilian functions. At one point, they actually sent troops into my house during preparation for a parade. My house was on the big Place Ba Dinh, a central place where Ho Chi Minh's tomb is now. I was awakened in the middle of the night by my house boy who said the Viet Minh had arrived. They explained to me that in preparation for a parade the next day, they were putting troops and machine guns on the roofs of the building. I said, well, I couldn't argue with that, I suppose, and they could go up there on the roof. I couldn't stop them. I said, "Please use the back stairs and stay out of the house," which they did. They stayed there until after the parade. They did the same thing on some other buildings in the area. Actually, when the parade came by, I went out to watch it, and a French-speaking Communist policeman gave me a running description of what was going on, obviously part of the propaganda department. So there again, they knew who we were and what we were up to.

As I say, we were very careful not to try to do anything clandestine or subversive or anything of that sort. It would have been hopeless in that situation. Our main purpose was just to stay there and then keep the possibility of dealing with whatever came up.

As time went on, a difference developed between the way they treated us and the other non-Communist representatives. You had the British consul general, who, as I said, was an ipso facto agent of Anthony Eden, who was the co-chairman of the Geneva Conference. You had the French Sainteny mission (his nom de guerre) and he was accredited by Mendes France personally to the government of North Vietnam.

Q: Mendes France was the prime minister.

CORCORAN: Yes, who had forced the Geneva Conference in 1953. There was also the French military mission, actually a liaison mission with the International Control Commission, headed by General Groot de Beaufort. There was the Indian chairman of the international commission, Mr. Desai, who later became number two in the Indian foreign office. And there was the Canadian delegate, Brigadier Sherwood Lett, who was a war hero, who took part in the famous Canadian landing at Dieppe, was a lawyer, and who later ended up and died as Chief Justice of British Columbia. He was the Canadian representative on the commission. Then there was a Polish delegation headed by a man named Ogrodinszki. He was a complete Communist doing the bidding of the North Vietnamese. At that time I don't think you could expect anything else. On the other hand, the Canadians, who were trying to defend the free world's interests, were not in the same relationship with us at all. They were trying to help us out as much as they could, but they had their own standards of propriety.

The Indians were somewhat in between. The Indians represented the personal policy of Nehru, which was that the important thing was the end of colonialism and the independence of former Asian countries, and the Communist thing wasn't to be worried about too much; that it would
sort itself out later. Actually, Nehru came through on a visit. I met him briefly on this one occasion. He came through early on and talked to everybody.

Then, of course, the Indians also had a consul general. They had a vice consul there, and they sent a consul general, who was a man named Sahay, Anand Mohan Sahay, accompanied by his very beautiful daughter. He had an interesting history. He had been at one point the private secretary to Rajendra Prasad, who later became vice president of India. He had also been involved in the Indian National Congress of Subhas Chandra Bose, a Japanese collaborationist, and he had actually fled to Japan and was caught by the British and sent back to India to be tried for treason. But Nehru was his lawyer, the lawyer for all of these people, and they could handle that. So he was a nice man on the surface, very friendly, but he wasn't too realistic. At one point, I guess I can tell you this now -- is this going to be published?

Q: It will be in transcript form, and researchers will be able to use it.

[...]

Q: How did you leave?

CORCORAN: We were there for a total of 14 months. We left in early December. But in September, we could see signs of tightening up. For example, they required all of us, including Americans, to register as aliens with the government. They sent a big form about the size of that map.

Q: Pointing to a large map.

CORCORAN: Filling in all your personal history and whatnot. We could see this was the initial step of closing in on us. Then they wanted to come and interview us, each individual American. I said yes, but I would sit in on all the interrogations as though they were my own, and they agreed to that. They were asking sort of nuisance questions, and I would intervene after a while. They said, "You said you didn't speak Vietnamese." Well, I didn't speak Vietnamese, but I could just see the way they were going, just wasting time and harassing people. We filled out these forms, and they inspected the place and saw we had a lot of radio equipment, which they obviously knew we had. We had been broadcasting every day for the last year as our only means of communication. We couldn't use the mail. So I could sense by the tone of this, something was going to happen.

Early on, after the British started making trips, we had applied for permission to send people in and out. None of them were accepted or refused, but we had gotten a bad publicity campaign as our only reply, so we let that ride; figured that could wait; we'd rely on the radio. But at this point, with the detailed census statement things became tough. At one point, they came in and the Army tried to inspect the place. We asked them out, and they left. When they moved into my house, they had a really plausible pretext, security for the parade. They were doing it to the Russians and the Poles and everybody else, so I couldn't complain. But
it became clear that on this occasion, they were getting ready to do something. I could sense that things were tightening up.

What we did was make a plan, which we just sent in by telegram saying, "if this happens, we will do thus and so," and try to destroy classified material, of which we had very little. We would try to communicate by other means, a very simple code.

Sure enough, I suppose it was not more than a week or so after that, I was summoned in one rainy day to the municipal commission, and I had to walk through a flooded street to get to my car. The committee was sitting behind the table there, and they said, "We brought you in to tell you that you're not authorized to use your radio. Stop using it."

I said, "I don't know, this is interesting. When did this become effective?"

"Right now."

I went back and did not use the radio to report that, because that would have been a technical trap I'd have been walking into. What I did was draw up a telegram and send it through the post office, PTT, thinking that if we could survive in that old-fashioned way, that would be all right, too. They held the telegram for several days and then returned it unsent, said no route existed, which was quite false, because they had routes through Peking and Moscow, and then on to the outside world, and to Hong Kong. So what I did was send copies also to my various colleagues and the British, who were supposed to be our protecting power if we got out, sent theirs off, and the French sent theirs off, and the Canadians sent theirs off, so Washington got the news. They wondered why we'd gone off the air, but they got the news pretty quickly.

Then it was a question of getting out. I thought the appropriate thing was not to act in terms of just slam, bang, everybody out. It's easier said than done in a case like that. I said, "We ought to go slowly." In fact, one of the Indians told me, "I'm sure they don't really mean this. You ought to just hang on. Maybe they want you to stay." I said, "Well, I'll try." My other reason for trying it that way was I didn't want to show any signs of desperation to get out. I think if I tried to hang on, they would be less likely to keep us there. So we sent out people one at a time until I got down to one vice consul, who was also the administrative officer and the cashier. He, the man I wanted to keep with me, and I left together, turning it over to the British in due form. We had the regular transfer of the two buildings we owned, and a transfer of our consular function. With the approval of the foreign office, the British consul and I cosigned this. We went out to the airport and left.

Q: Were these done under instructions from Washington? Were you able, through the other: British, French, Canadians, to keep some . . .

CORCORAN: After this initial report, we narrowed it down to the British, since they traditionally, we understood, would represent us. I did it through the other people just to make sure the word got out. But it was pretty clear that we would have to do this. We developed the
details with the British, and we left the two buildings there. They were taken over, I gather, later on. My house was used by some Communist diplomat, I think, or by some Communist agency. The office became the headquarters of the liberation front of South Vietnam for many years. Then, strangely, when I was in Burundi, I was asked by somebody in the department for information about property. This is when Jimmy Carter was thinking of reopening there. I said, "Look in the files for 1955. It’s all there." They did. They kept the files in Milwaukee or someplace. They got it quickly, and they had all the documents, inventories, titles for the two buildings, and the Department said the Vietnamese would let us have those two back. These were the two we owned. We had rented some others just to give us alternatives. They had progressively moved foreigners out at different times. But the rented buildings they took over pretty quickly. These two buildings, which we turned over at the end, which we retained title to, we made it clear that we did, otherwise, there was no way we could have them back. I think the plans were proceeding to move some sort of diplomatic representation in there. Then, of course, the North Vietnamese moved into Cambodia.

The only suggestion I gave to anybody immediately when I left, and also at this much later date, was if you do go in there with any sort of representation, you’ve got to insist that you have your own territory. A lot of European countries were operating in hotel rooms for years, and considered it a great victory if they got a second hotel room. This is preposterous. You can’t function unless you can have a certain degree of . . .

Q: Space.

CORCORAN: Certainly a degree of space, and a certain degree of security, even though the security would always be a problem. So there it is. This goes back to the last days of the Carter era, about 1980.
On April 29, 1975, Francis Terry McNamara, then Consul General, finally received orders to evacuate the Consulate General in Can Tho, Vietnam. By that time, the U.S. had resigned itself to the fall of Saigon and McNamara and others had been evacuating the most vulnerable Vietnamese staff. McNamara had also been preparing for a water-borne evacuation which, in his view, would be able to rescue far more Vietnamese and Americans. This story recounts how the vessel, carrying more than 325 people, was intercepted by Vietnamese “monitors,” a final act of apparent rebellion from the CIA contingent at Can Tho, and the conclusion to McNamara’s trip down the Bas Sac River.

**Final Instructions to the CIA Contingency**

McNAMARA: Immediately after hanging up, I...went to the CIA offices on the third floor of the CG. There, I told the CIA chief and a group of his subordinates that I had received the evacuation order from Saigon with permission to go by water. “We have been ordered to release the helicopters immediately. They are desperately needed in Saigon,” I explained.

The CIA chief acknowledged my order to go by water, but asked that they be allowed to take their own motor boats that were fast and armed with machine guns. “We could run interference for you,” the CIA chief explained to me....

In any event, the helicopters were never sent back to Saigon. Many of the people waiting on the roof tops were never evacuated.... And so a lot of people got left in Saigon, including an awful lot of CIA agents, because they didn’t get taken out of these compounds by helicopter, as was foreseen in the plan....

I left the CG with Kassebaum, who was living in my house. We took my car to the house, where we picked up guns, changed clothes, and picked up a few things to take with us.... I had issued orders that nobody could pack their household goods and ship them to Saigon without my specific permission.
Some people snuck their stuff out without my knowing it. But the reason I said this was that people were watching us very closely, and the least thing could panic them. I’d left all of the money I had for the maids, on top of my dresser, a big stack of piasters. I hoped that they would get it before looters invaded the house. Given my system of priorities, I didn’t feel that I could offer the maids a place in the boat.

When I arrived at the CORDS compound, the Marines had already started loading the boats. I took up my stance near the entrance to the dock. I was determined to monitor who got on the boats. I feared overcrowding. I also wished to assure places were given those on our priority lists.

**Loading the Evacuees – and Helping a CIA Clerk Destroy Codes**

As we prepared to embark, I was getting people aboard the boats and the boats prepared for the trip down the river. Several CIA men came bringing people with them. I put them aboard while the CIA people left, ostensibly to join their comrades on their own smaller boats. Loading continued. Back at the Consulate General, Hank Cushing and Sergeant Hasty were closing up the office as if we were coming back at two o’clock after luncheon. They were showing people out, getting the place closed down, and getting other people down to us. Some of the Vietnamese that we had selected for evacuation told us no, they didn’t want to go, they wanted to stay there. We agreed that was their choice.

At the same time, my vice consuls, and others, were going about town alerting people, picking them up, getting them down to the boats. The consular officer, Dave Shiachitano, went to people who were on his consular list: American citizens or those having close American associations, for instance women who had children born of American fathers. He tried to convince them that their children, who had a claim on American citizenship, should be given an opportunity to go to America. He was able to convince some but not others.

As they were closing the consulate, Cushing and Hasty heard noise in one of the building’s back rooms. Investigating the source of the noise, they found the CIA code clerk, trying to destroy his codes. For some reason, he wasn’t able to do so; he just wasn’t strong enough. He couldn’t do it by himself. His colleagues had all departed leaving him alone. In their haste, they must have forgotten the poor devil. Fortunately, we had some cooler heads with us. Cushing and Hasty helped him destroy his codes and other classified gear and brought him with them down to our boat. At the time, I couldn’t figure out
what was holding Cushing up. I was on our radio calling to him to hurry, as the tide was ebbing fast. Further delay risked hopelessly beaching our boats for hours until the next tide came in. Of course, I had no idea that our CIA colleagues had abandoned their communicator with his codes....

Finally, Cushing and Hasty arrived with the code clerk sitting between them in near hysteria. He could not find his girlfriend. They had stopped by her house, but she was nowhere to be found. Finally, Cushing and Hasty had to drag the communicator with them, for he was reluctant to leave without his friend.

We forced him to get on the boat. Suddenly, I heard shouts of joy. The girl was on the boat. She had come along with the Consulate General employees fearing abandonment. They had a happy reunion. Incredibly, the CIA people had forgotten their communicator, who was responsible for their most secret codes. They simply forgot him in their anxiety to get away....

I then gave orders for those still on the dock to get aboard. The Vietnamese crew of this LCM had jumped ship. I told Traister, who’d been guarding the boat, to start the engines.... I took over the controls in the coxswain’s compartment. I had been in the Navy and the Merchant Marine, but I had never run a boat like the LCM. I did understand the principles. In any case, there was no one else who had any significant nautical experience. So I took the controls of the boat and started trying to maneuver it off the mud bank. By this time, the tide was running out fast.

Suddenly a group of Filipinos came rushing down the dock dragging children, Vietnamese wives and girlfriends after them. They were CIA employees who had been abandoned. I stopped everything. Hasty rushed up the dock, grabbed them, and helped them get aboard. I too got off the boat to hustle them aboard. I was the last to board.

The boat was stuck in the mud but still in the water. With Traister’s help, I violently maneuvered with both propellers until she became unstuck and off the bank.... My comfort was short-lived.... In getting off the mud bank, the rice barge’s propeller had broken.... Mike boats have two powerful diesel engines.... With the barge under tow we started out into the main stream of the river.

“There’s no way we could outfight them”

Just as we were getting underway, two helicopters flew overhead. The deputy chief of the CIA informed us by radio, that they had gotten permission “from Saigon” to use the helicopters in their evacuation.
Therefore, they were taking the helicopters out to the evacuation fleet. Would we like some assistance, he asked? I could only conclude that they had disregarded my orders and taken the helicopter despite the desperate need for them in Saigon. I was never able to ascertain who might have given them permission to take the helicopter.... I was furious, but I was trying to maneuver the boat. So I told whoever was talking to them on the radio to tell them to please remind the Navy that we needed help when we arrived at the mouth of the river. We could also use some air support on the way down the river. I was never able to learn whether they made any effort to pass this information on to Naval authorities.

Anyway, whzzt, they were gone. I heard later that when they were taking the helicopters, their Nung guards (Chinese Nung’s who were supposed to be very reliable mercenaries) held them up at gunpoint. They relieved our CIA friends of gold and dollars.

We were now on our way down the river. The second Mike boat that had been tied up at the Shell dock was also on its way down river, just ahead of us. We took up position behind it. The crew of this second boat had not run away. A former Vietnamese naval officer was in charge. He knew the river very well. I still had the rice barge in tow. In total there were some 300 Vietnamese, 18 Americans, and five or six Filipinos in the three boats.

We continued on down the river for some 6-7 miles past Can Tho. To our north, over Vinh-long, the river there is very wide. We could see a helicopter firing its machine guns at something on the ground. We could see the tracer bullets flying in both directions. The war continued.

Off to the port side, some Vietnamese navy boats were approaching on an intersecting course. They were “monitors,” whose armored turrets mounted 40- and 20-millimeter guns. Pretty formidable stuff. Suddenly, the lead monitor fired a machine gun volley over the bow of the leading LCM. The signal was unmistakable. I gave the order to stop. There wasn’t any way that we could outrun them, and there was no way that we could outfight them. The only thing to do was stop and talk to them. I had women and children in all three boats. Good God, we could have had a massacre if they’d ever started shooting with the 40- millimeter guns at our boats.
Cashing In a Favor

We were stopped. A lieutenant, junior grade, who was in charge of the flotilla of navy boats said that he was under instructions from the corps commander to stop us. General Nam believed that we had South Vietnamese army personnel and draft-aged males on the boats. He wanted us to be brought back to Can Tho, to check the boat for deserters.

The navy people wanted to come on board our boats. I refused to let them come aboard. We were at an impasse surrounded in mid-stream with awesome 40- and 20-millimeter guns pointed down our throats. Most of the males on our three boats were heavily armed. If the navy people had come on the boat and tried to take any of the Vietnamese off, there could have been a shootout. I could not allow this to happen. All three boats were full of women and children.

Certainly General Nam had good reason to have us stopped. A senior Vietnamese air force colonel was on my boat. He had been the deputy base commander at Ben Thuy. I knew him very well. He had come down at the last minute. I thought he was there to bid goodbye to the Shell Oil manager who was a close friend. Unbeknownst to me, he shed his uniform and hid on the boat. One of my Americans identified him only after we had begun our voyage. By that time, there wasn’t anything to do except throw him over the side. I could not do that. I was angry and disgusted with him, but I didn’t feel there was anything I could do about it. I would not have minded the navy taking him, but I couldn’t give him up without giving up some of our employees who were of military age.

Luckily, two weeks before, I had made an agreement with Commodore Thang, who was in charge of the South Vietnamese navy in the Mekong delta. I got his wife and children evacuated through Saigon in return for a promise of help should we have difficulty in our river-borne evacuation. He owed me a favor. I wasn’t very sure whether he would or could honor our agreement under these circumstances. Nevertheless, I asked the navy lieutenant to get in touch with Commodore Thang and inform him that we were being held. I offered to allow the Commodore to inspect the boats if he would meet us in mid-river. I did not want to return to Can Tho, not knowing whether we would ever be able to leave again.

The lieutenant was friendly, but some of his sailors were not. They looked potentially dangerous. Obviously, they resented our leaving. As requested, the lieutenant got Thang on the radio. The
Commodore offered to come immediately to resolve the impasse.

We were held for about an hour and a half waiting Thang. When he arrived in a small boat, we greeted each other as friends. He smiled at me, “You don’t have any officers, soldiers or males of military age on your boats, do you?”

“Of course, not,” I replied. “The people in our boats are all my employees and their families.”

“Right. Then I see no reason to bring you back to Can Tho. I'll go back and tell the corps commander that I have inspected the boats and found no one on the prohibited categories.

He was really a smart cookie. He had taken the precaution of bringing a young sailor with him whose aged father was on one of our boats. He encouraged the sailor to say goodbye to his father in full view of all of the other sailors. It was a very touching goodbye; the young sailor was staying behind. This disarmed the other sailors, whose animosity disappeared.

To further ease tensions, I gave the sailors our rice barge. It was more a hindrance to us with its broken propeller. We took the people who had been on the rice barge and divided them among the two LCMs. This meant that all our people were in modern, sea worthy craft behind protective armor. I was greatly relieved....

While we were stopped, I told my Americans to disarm all Vietnamese. The fact that they’d give their guns up to us was important. It was a sign of trust. Perhaps, they had no choice, but we got no resistance. My men circulated among the Vietnamese reassuring them in their own language. We kept all of the guns on the top of the engine compartment behind my steering post. The Marines were there to guard them.

We also had a machine gun off one side and a BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] off the other side. All of the Americans were armed. As my own protection, I had my Gurkha kukri from Katanga. It meant a great deal to me. I could not leave it behind. Besides, it might come in handy.... My kukri was one of the few things I brought with me in the evacuation. Other than that, I had little more than the clothes on my back, an old pair of dungarees and a sports shirt. However, I did have the damned helmet the Marines had given me. We took some pictures on the boat with me at the helm of the boat. One of those pictures got into the State magazine.
“We’ve just been fired on by a rocket!”

After Thang released us, we recommenced our journey down river. It was about two or three o’clock in the afternoon. The tide was running out fast, which was useful in giving us additional speed. This was important in my calculations, as I wanted to reach the mouth of the river during daylight. I was not so confident of our ability to navigate on the river in the dark…. Luckily, the Vietnamese commander of the other boat knew the river well. I followed him, for the most part, through the seventy miles from Can Tho to the sea.

About 30-45 minutes after our release by the Vietnamese navy, we were cruising down the river when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a flash. I turned my head instinctively in that direction. To my horror, I saw a long rocket with flame at the rear. I remember the smoke coming out of the back of the rocket, with the flame. Jesus Christ, I jammed the throttles to full speed. If I could have pushed them any further, I would have. I said to the Marines, “Hey, we’ve just been fired on by a rocket! Shoot at the source of the fire on the right bank!”…

We put up a tremendous volume of fire. Some of the Vietnamese got hold of M-16’s and supplemented fire by the Marines and my CORDS people. One or two rockets were fired and we put up such a volume of fire that they must have decided to leave us alone.

The rockets passed near our stern, scaring the hell out of us but doing no damage. It’s pretty hard to hit a moving boat in the middle of a wide river.

We were now approaching the narrowest part of the river. The channel flowed between islands. It was a well-known infiltration route used by the North Vietnamese, moving from one part of the Mekong delta to another. The VC held the banks on both sides of the river and often occupied the islands in mid-stream. The channel narrowed as it passed between the island. We would be dangerously close to shore. This was certainly the most perilous part of the trip down river.

Before we got to this narrow part, a U.S. Navy F-4 flew very high over us, and did a barrel roll. I optimistically thought, “The Navy now knows where we are. They will protect us. We even have air cover.” I had asked for air coverage to suppress anybody who wanted to screw with us. There it was, our U.S. Navy’s F-4 fighter plane up in the sky, doing a barrel roll. Less encouraging, the CIA communicator
that we had rescued after his abandonment had several radios. He used every frequency imaginable. No one would answer. Finally, we put out an international “May Day” distress signal. Still no reply. Just as we were coming to the narrow part of the river, heavy rains began to fall. Providentially, a deluge obscured us as we passed between the islands. At times, the banks seemed close enough to touch. The VC aren’t stupid, however; they get in out of the rain. Navigation was a problem during the rains. I could see very little ahead of our boat. We would have had difficulty following the channel without the experienced Vietnamese captain in the lead boat. I might have run the boat onto a sandbar.

The rain covering our passage through this very dangerous patch was another piece of extraordinary good luck. Oddly, it stopped soon after we emerged into the wide river below the islands.

We continued down the river...Normally, that river was full of traffic. That day there was none. I suppose, the river folk were also frightened of what was happening.

_Goooooodbye, Vietnam!_

At about seven o’clock, we reached the mouth of the river..... I did not want to stay in the mouth of the river. I was fearful that someone might come to interfere with us in the middle of the night.... But most of the people with me were land oriented. They were afraid of the sea. The unknown was what frightened them.

Since I was in charge, I decided to put to sea. No one questioned my decision, or my right to make it. We could discuss options, but, when a decision was taken, all loyally followed instructions. To maintain morale, I insisted that the U.S. Navy must be just over the horizon. They’ve probably got us on radar right now. They wouldn’t abandon us. The American Navy has traditions to uphold. Honor would never allow them to abandon friends in peril on the sea. Moreover, the Task Force representatives had promised that a ship would be waiting for us. We only had to get far enough out to sea. The water’s too shallow in here for them to bring a ship in, I reasoned. They will find us with their radar if we get away from the land....

Symbolically, as the sun set, we left Vietnam. I could see the channel out to sea marked on my map. Depths were deepest on a line going in a southeasterly direction. Obviously this was the main channel. We just went in that direction. In any case, I had the captain of the other boat to follow, so I didn’t have any problems.

I remember looking back as the sun set over the Mekong Delta for the last time. God, it was beautiful. A beautiful big red-orange sunset over the flat, lush region. I had been entranced with the beauty of the delta ever since I first arrived some five years before. It was so beautiful, especially at sunset. Anyway, I remember thinking, “This will be the last time that I’ll see this.”
Floating into the Dark

Then I turned around to more important things, like which direction we should take once clear of the channel. To my sorrow, I discovered, at this late date, that there was no compass in my boat. Someone must have stolen it. We could not be sure of our directions. The night became increasingly dark with low cloud cover obscuring the stars.

There were many lights out at sea. I found they were attached to fishing nets laid there in the shallow water. At first, we were fooled by these lights thinking they might be boats from our expected navy ship. There was no one....

After several hours of searching in vain, we had all but given up for the night.

First, I tried to tie the two boats together so that we would not be separated in the night. This did not work. The boats beat against one another in the swell. We risked putting a hole in one of the boats.... The next morning, either the Navy would find us or we would run northwards parallel to the coast, to where I knew the evacuation fleet was anchored off Vung-tau. All you had to do was keep the coast to your left. It would be uncomfortable to spend a night on the open sea but we were safe enough....

As we were about to lay to for the night, we saw some especially bright lights in the distance. I didn’t know for sure if it was a ship. But we decided to make for the lights. It turned out to be a ship, called The Pioneer Contender, an American freighter owned by the President Line. In fact, it was the freighter that the spooks had asked be sent down to lay off the coast to evacuate their people. There it was, anchored off the coast. It was well lit. The ship had a Marine contingent aboard as guards. As we came alongside, they were not happy about these strange boats coming out of the night. Initially, they were reluctant to let us come aboard. Finally, we convinced them that we were fellow Americans and not pirates or VC saboteurs.

It was a ship on which they’d had some awful experiences in the evacuation from Danang. Vietnamese soldiers had run amok raping, stealing, and killing. There was mayhem on the ship. The crew locked themselves up in their quarters and ran the ship. Vietnamese gangs took over the rest of the ship.
Understandably, the Marines were apprehensive. They didn’t know who these madmen were, coming alongside in a boat in the middle of the night off a hostile coast. The unknown is always a little frightening, and they didn’t expect us....

Still wary, the Marines agreed to take us aboard. Rope slings were lowered into our boats. Our passengers were loaded into the slings and hauled up onto the deck. The Vietnamese were put down into the hold, where there were other Vietnamese. Some of them, maybe all of them, had been evacuated by the CIA people from the delta.

We got on the ship. The Marine captain in charge of the security detail was very officious and not very welcoming. It was difficult to explain to him who we were and what a Consul General was doing wandering about in the South China Sea. Still skeptical, he took me to the ship captain’s stateroom. The captain was there with his chief engineer and chief officer. They knew what a Consul General was. Quickly, they sat me down and gave me a cold beer. Then they put me in a stateroom that the CIA man had occupied. I even got a shower. Sadly, I was the only one in my crew who got a bed that night. Well, the Vietnamese were okay, because they were down in the hold where it was dry and clean. They had facilities there; with food and water. My Americans had to sleep on deck. It was cold and wet; it had been raining, and they had to sleep outside....

Anyway, we were on the ship, we were safe. But they hadn’t been waiting for us, didn’t expect us. There was no Navy ship anywhere near the mouth of the Mekong. The Navy had simply forgotten. Later on, I asked a Navy captain in the evacuation fleet, “Didn’t you hear us on the radio?”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” he replied.

“Then, why didn’t you answer?” I asked.

“Oh, communications security. Our communications were blacked out because of communication
security,” he told me as a matter of fact.

I thought for a moment of “Catch-22,” or was it Alice in Wonderland? Unbelievable, but true....

We were really the only people who weren’t traumatized in the whole thing, as far as I could see. Others looked beaten and depressed. My gang were upbeat. We had done what we had planned to do. We’d gotten ourselves and our people out. Nobody helped us. I was very proud of the guys that I was with, and they were all proud of having been part of what we’d done.
Q: Okay, let’s move back to 1967. You took Vietnamese for, how did this come about?

TULL: I began Vietnamese language training in 1967. I took it from January of ’67 for 44 weeks. It came about through the intercession and help of Bob Beaudry who was the political counselor who had taken an interest in my career and performance. I was assigned as I indicated earlier to be a consular officer in Saigon and I wanted to do political work and Bob said he would talk with a friend of his provided I was willing to go and be a consular officer in Saigon and I said yes, I definitely would do it. Anyway, the word came back and my orders, by the time they were finalized were to be a political officer in Saigon with 44 weeks of Vietnamese language training in Washington. I would not have gotten the language training, I don’t think, with the consular assignment.

Q: How did you fit with Vietnamese as far as, how did you find learning Vietnamese? A difficult language?

TULL: I was fortunate. I found it, well, I can’t say it’s easy, but it’s a tonal language and I had no difficulty with the tones. I’ve played the piano, I like to sing. I could detect the differences in tone and there were small classes. You know how the Foreign Service Institute works, there were four or five of us in the class. I didn’t have any difficulty. I earned a 3/3 at the end of the course.

Q: I can speak as one who does not play the piano and does not sing and I was exposed to a couple of weeks of Vietnamese and found it just, I never could hear the difference been the damn things, you know. It all sounds like one thing and maybe you raised your eyebrows or something like that. Anyway. You got to Vietnam, what were you picking up while you were taking Vietnamese, those 44 weeks of, what was going on in Vietnam at the time. We’re talking about the Washington scene.

TULL: Yes, 1967. Well, of course the war was very controversial among our college students and a segment of our population, but I was a strong supporter of what we were trying to do there and I still remain convinced it was worth the effort. Unfortunate it didn’t work out the way I would have liked to have seen it work out, but it was a time when there were difficulties, a lot of campus riots and takeovers of selective service offices and things like that, but I was not aware of any particular downturns in the military situation in Vietnam itself. I felt I was going into an operation that had a chance of success. It was a war. There was no question about it, but I was not frightened at the thought that I was going into the war. When I arrived in Saigon in January of 1968 it was two weeks before the Tet Offensive. I was billeted at a hotel in downtown Saigon, on Tudo Street and I got a rather rude awakening when the Tet Offensive hit in the middle of the night right outside my window.
Q: Before we get to that even though it was a short period, what were you getting, was there a sort of a sizable group that was going out in the training process when you were back in Washington getting ready? Was there a real program to get people to Vietnam?

TULL: Oh, very large numbers of students. The CORDS program, I forget what the acronym stands for, Civil Operations Rural Development or something like that. They were getting a lot of people military as well as Foreign Service, AID people, USIA to learn Vietnamese and they would go out and they would be staffing embassy offices in each of the provinces of South Vietnam. We’d have a CORDS office in each of those provinces and maybe it even had suboffices in the smaller administrative units within the province itself. There might have been other small offices. There were a lot of people taking Vietnamese language in 1967. Not all were taking 44 weeks. Some of them were taking shorter periods, but most of the Foreign Service people were taking it for 44 weeks.

Q: Was there a cadre within those going out there of junior officers like yourself and all who were dubious about this, or were they enthusiastic about this, were they opposed to the war? Did you get any feel, was there any sort of movement going on?

TULL: I got no feeling of that whatsoever. The people that I studied with and ended up working with over there for almost three years in Saigon, I think they were like me. They viewed Vietnam as the hot issue of our time for the U.S. government. It was exciting to be involved with it. I didn’t detect any sense that we shouldn’t have been involved. Most of the Foreign Service people I met were willing, maybe even volunteered, but were definitely willing to go. Probably that might not have been the uniform case of say older officers who were sent over, I don’t know, but this group that I went with, most of whom either ended up in the embassy or at provincial offices were junior officers, or, were one or two promotions up from junior officer. There was not a lot of feeling of what a waste this is. What am I doing to my career? This is a total waste. No, let’s get over there. This is the exciting issue of our day. I guess this is probably a similar sentiment that a lot of our Foreign Service people might feel today about volunteering to go to Iraq, God bless them.

Q: Yes. Well, when you got there, I mean this is before the Tet Offensive, how was the situation explained to you and all when you got there? What were you doing?

TULL: I was assigned to the internal affairs unit of the political section. We had a very large political section. There were close to 20 officers. I believe that might have included the political officers who were assigned to each of the four military corps areas. There might have been one in each Corps area who actually technically belonged to us in the political section, but I believe we had five or six in the internal affairs unit, which followed the internal Vietnamese developments, particularly political developments. There was the external affairs unit which dealt with Vietnam’s relations with foreign
countries and ultimately with the peace process with the negotiations in Paris; the political/military section; a labor office with a couple of officers. When I first went there and here I’m drawing on a memory to try to pull a name out, there was a very famous retired American general who had a little operation in our political section. He shared the space. He didn’t report to anybody except the ambassador, but this is frustrating. He had been very active in the Philippines. I’ve got it: General Lansdale, I think it was Edward Lansdale.

Q: Oh, yes, he was the man who, he had been a colonel and very much close to Magsaysay.

TULL: He was very close to Magsaysay, in combating a communist insurgency in the Philippines. He was very well known at the time. He wrote a book and he was regarded as an expert in counter insurgency warfare. He was fascinating. We had the head of the political section who was on our floor and then there was a political counselor on the floor above me. It was a large operation. I believe I was the first woman officer ever assigned to the Saigon political section.

Q: Who was head of the political section, the political counselor?

TULL: The counselor when I first went was Arch Calhoun and he was later, when his tour was finished, Martin Herz. The head of the political section when I first went was Laurin Askew and he was replaced by Galen Stone. Both very nice people.

Q: Very competent.

TULL: Yes, they were.

Q: Again, prior to Tet, what were you getting, were they saying we’re winning the war. The government really has extended its control or were they saying this is very problematic?

TULL: I don’t recall. I definitely don’t recall that there was any hyping of progress, certainly not in the political section. The sentiment was pretty strong and again whether it was before the Tet Offensive that I got this or after, the sentiment was strong that our military, the military components were under extreme pressure from McNamara to do body counts of dead enemies to show progress. In the political section this approach was ridiculed.

The first couple of weeks I got there, it was a question of finding your way around Saigon and being assigned certain duties. I as the junior-most person in the section got a lot of the grunt work. There was a daily publication put out by the Vietnamese government in Vietnamese, French and English and it was my job to scan that for items of information. You had to look at all three because the one that had the meatiest coverage and the
thickest number of items was the Vietnamese, but you would also maybe see an item in English and then check it in the Vietnamese and find out there were four or five more sentences that gave you more information about who was doing what or what the Vietnamese government would be up to. That sort of thing. I was pushed into doing that. I was also made the biographic officer, one of the “fun” things that junior officers get to do. I also perused Vietnamese newspapers. Saigon had about 35 daily newspapers, most of them in Vietnamese, a couple in English. I skimmed those daily to find out who was attacking whom. The average American did not realize the variety of opinion that was allowed to be freely expressed in South Vietnam. So, you had different groups that had their own newspapers and they could attack government policies pretty strongly provided they did not support the communist policies. They could criticize bland issues, they could criticize this, that and the other, so there was a lot to look at there and they were vying for their audience. There was many a night, not in the first couple of weeks, that I would take home newspapers, home being the hotel and I would work to 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning writing cables summarizing some of the key editorial comments in these papers that reflected fledgling political party views. I had hardly gotten my feet wet when the Tet Offensive struck.

Q: How did it hit you personally?

TULL: I was in this hotel.

Q: Which hotel do you remember?

TULL: Let’s see, the Astor on Tudo Street, but we would pronounce it Tudo, T-U-D-O, Tudo Street and it was about a block around the corner from the Vietnamese naval headquarters. It was around maybe 2:00 in the morning and I heard tremendous blasts of what I thought were firecrackers going off, but major sounds of firecrackers. Not being totally stupid I slithered to the window and cracked a Venetian blind of the hotel room and saw some people shooting at each other in the street, running around the corner. Were you there for the Tet Offensive?

Q: No.

TULL: No. There were strings of firecrackers hung from buildings and earlier in the evening people had been igniting them illegally because the government didn’t want that, but you saw all the red strings of firecrackers hanging and in the street the paper red paper residue. So, when I heard suddenly at 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 whatever it was, this tremendous racket, I just assumed it was more of that, but it sounded stronger, so I didn’t want to stick my head out the window obviously so I just cracked the blind. I could see some fighters, but they were scooting around the corner. Apparently they were part of the attack force on the Vietnamese naval headquarters. That was just as I say around the corner. I was pretty scared and decided I wasn’t going to stand by the window. I remember being concerned naturally thinking well, now if these people take me over,
they come into the hotel, they’re right outside, if they come in the hotel, should I acknowledge that I speak Vietnamese? Would it be better if I didn’t? You know, these thoughts are running through your head. At any rate they did not come into that hotel. We got through the night and when daylight came I put the radio on. Armed Forces Radio was announcing that the embassy had been attacked and that there was a wide-scale offensive going on in sections of Saigon and it said that personnel, embassy and military personnel should remain in their quarters until further notice, but keep the radio on. It was in the middle of the Tet holiday and so I went on the roof of the hotel, it had a rooftop restaurant, because I wanted to see what was going on. You could see tanks going back and forth and bodies in the street. You could see helicopters and still hear fighting and shooting. This would have been maybe 7:00 a.m. or something like that. While I was there two army majors who were billeted in the hotel, they had not been there in Saigon very long, they came up and they were astounded to see me. What is this American woman doing here on the roof? Because the hotel staff, most of them, were off. They were not serving breakfast; the restaurant was closed and we knew that it would be closed.

Q: It was Tet, yes.

TULL: It was Tet. These two fellows, they were really antsy. They wanted to get to MACV and see what was what, but the radio was telling them to stay where you are unless you’re called. We watched, the three of us watched the show, from the roof. At one point I looked across the street. We were on about the sixth or seventh floor of the hotel. There was an apartment house across the way and I looked out and here’s a middle aged Vietnamese man coming out on his rooftop in his undershorts, which is what they’d wear all the time, no problem with that. He comes out and he starts feeding his chickens on his rooftop terrace, just oblivious to the noise and the military action. After a while, these two majors got hungry and they thought we could take a chance. They were looking down the other side of the hotel roof and they saw a restaurant across the street that seemed to be open. This was on Tudo Street. They said, why don’t we give it a shot? I said, well, we’re supposed to listen to the radio. They said, yes, but you also have to get something to eat and that restaurant’s open. You don’t know how long its going to be open. I thought hey, with these two guys I’ll go, and we went and got breakfast. No problem. Went back to my room, got the radio on and suddenly there’s an announcement that says, all the employees of the American Embassy should report to the embassy immediately, but USIA personnel and AID personnel should stay in their billets. Well, I’m thinking, what am I going to do? I was brand new. How am I going to get to the embassy? It was feasible walking distance; I had walked daily up to this point. It was the equivalent of maybe 10 blocks, but am I going to be walking over bodies or dodging bullets? I thought it was kind of stupid myself, but needless to say I was also very curious and I’m brand new, the first woman in the section and I’m not going to be hiding behind my bed in the hotel. I did use a little commons sense because there was an apartment building around the corner about a block away where I knew two of the secretaries from the political section had apartments and I thought maybe if I go around there if the three
of us decide to go to the embassy there will be safety in numbers and we’ll see what’s what. Anyway, I screwed my courage to the sticking point and went out on the street, went around to the apartment building. They were very happy to see me because they had heard the word, too, but they were concerned about just walking, getting out and walking up to the embassy. They wanted to obey the order, as did I. Well, also in that apartment building were a couple of USIA officers who had been there for a while and they had a Jeep between them and they were just champing at the bit because the instructions were State Department should go to the embassy, not USIA and other people. They said, we’ll take you in our Jeep. That gave them the excuse, if they were challenged to say, oh we were just taking these embassy girls, these embassy women to the embassy. We agreed and they drove us to the embassy. The trip was a series of sights I’ll never forget, with streets with a sprinkling of dead bodies in the gutter and shooting in the background. When we got to the embassy itself they had not yet removed the bodies of the Viet Cong who had been killed in the embassy front yard, caught I guess inside the compound, the front lawn you might say. These bodies, so young, were there and I remember the images are so vivid. I remember being so struck by how red the blood was and how it was so red on the white concrete surface of the embassy steps and, huge flower pots.

I went in. One thing I absolutely would not do under any circumstances was take pictures. I just felt that was beneath contempt. I didn’t even take a camera although I know other people were there snapping. I didn’t do it. I got to my office. First I reported to the section chief, Ted Heavner, he was the chief of the internal affairs unit. He was startled to see me. I said, “Well, the order came out over the radio that we were supposed to come and we had a couple of secretaries with us, too.” He thought it was a mistake to call us all in.

In my office, there was some concrete debris on my typewriter and on my desk from rounds, I guess mortar rounds that had been launched against the embassy. It had a concrete screen outside, probably set back maybe a foot or so, but still some of that chipped off.

Q: An ornamental screen, but the idea was to detonate any rocket-propelled grenade.

TULL: Right. So, there was obviously some debris there on the typewriter and the desk. Can’t say that I did much work because everybody was just trying to figure out what was going on. There was still fighting in the streets. The Viet Cong had taken over part of a building across from the embassy. It was a substantial distance across. It wasn’t like from here to there, but it was probably with this other apartment building, half a football field or something and the Viet Cong were occasionally putting out sniper shots. I guess about the only thing I was able to do was to send a cable to my family telling them I was alive and well. We were all doing that. They said everybody can send one short cable to have the State Department call your family. Before too long I guess a few hours after that it was decided that most people should go home. There was not a whole lot we could do that particular day. I don’t think I went in the next day. I think the day after that they sent
a vehicle to pick us up.

Q: Did you get any feel for what’s going on or well, this is a big surprise?

TULL: The element of surprise was clear. Yes, it was a great surprise, but very quickly within a day or so it was clear that it was a massive defeat for the Viet Cong. Absolutely massive defeat because they had risen up quite confidently all over the country and after the initial shock was over they were mowed down. They were really mowed down. It was a tremendous setback for the Viet Cong military. For the U.S. however, psychologically I think it was the turning point of the U.S. involvement because the idea that these Viet Cong had actually gotten into the embassy courtyard, they never got into the embassy building, they might have actually gotten in the door of the consular section which was next to the embassy, a separate building, but the idea that they had gotten there was just so shocking and was played up so much in the press that nobody ever believed, I don’t think the average American ever believed that it ended up as a defeat for the Viet Cong. Adding to that the fact that, George Jacobsen. He had a position at the embassy.

Q: He was an administrator.

TULL: Some sort of a mission coordinator. I think he handled aircraft and whatever the ambassador wanted. He lived in a house on the embassy compound and he actually at point blank had to kill a Viet Cong who was coming up the stairs to get him. Somebody I think threw a gun up to him or whatever and so that got tremendous play on television and all. That really did steer things away from the fact that so many Viet Cong had been destroyed. It really set them back immensely, but the VC won the offensive psychologically.

Q: I would have thought that being in internal affairs this must have put quite a load on the whole internal affairs unit, what the hell does this mean within the Vietnamese society? I’d talk to people and find out how what the effects of this were.

TULL: Yes, we were so large that we, individual officers had individual political parties that they followed. Following the Viet Cong and their doings was not something we did in the internal affairs section. The external affairs people had someone who was pretty expert on Viet Cong operations, but was principally it was CIA that dealt with that. No, I was quite a shock that they had managed to come into the city and they held sections of it for a while. It was wild and woolly.

Q: In Cholon there were a couple of fights there.

TULL: Oh, major, yes, major. It was after a few days the hotel opened up again for food and all and there were rocket attacks and various things. It was surreal. You work all day literally through the lunch hour in that case and get back to the hotel where I lived for such a long time, go up to the roof because life has to go on. You have to feed yourself
and you have to give yourself enough strength to go on the next day. You’d be sitting up there, a friend would come and join you, you’d have a drink and a meal. It’s dark at 6:30 or so in that part of the world and you’d watch the pretty tracer bullets and the patterns flares would make. You would think I’m looking at lethal fire that could be killing people on the ground and I’m thinking isn’t this making an interesting pattern against the night sky.

[...]

Q: Did you have contacts within the various parties that you went to see and if you were what were you getting from them?

TULL: No, at this stage of my embassy career shall we say I was not having contacts to speak of with Vietnamese outside the embassy. The political parties were divided among other officers and I was the junior person and I think there was a feeling that well, let her prove herself and then maybe we’ll let her have a political party or something like that. Eventually I did get the job of following a political party, but it took a long time, several Months.

Q: Did you feel that being a woman was a problem? You know sometimes.

TULL: It might have been a problem with my male colleagues, or male superiors. I think they felt protective.

Q: Yes and also sometimes there’s a feeling well, playing the game, well, its fine we accept her fully as an equal, but will the foreigners do this? This has often been the excuse.

TULL: I don’t think that was an issue in my experience in Saigon. I think it was more, I’ll be very kind and generous. I think I was more concern about my physical safety. For example, I didn’t have, I was not put on the embassy duty roster. As I indicated in Brussels after three weeks I was on the embassy duty roster. I found out I was not on the embassy duty roster and when I inquired about it I was told it was because the duty officer had to sleep in the embassy every night. They had a little room with a bed and bath. You had to physically be there and they just felt it wouldn’t really be appropriate for me to be there alone and then of course the officer who was there in the embassy on the night of the Tet Offensive he was a little bit under siege. He did a fine job. Allen Wendt was his name.

[....]

TULL: I did not push for the idea of getting on that duty roster. I did push to try to get out and do what I regarded was real political work. It took quite along time. In addition to the work I was telling you about with the newspapers, anytime
President Thieu gave a speech, there was a voracious appetite not only in the embassy but in Washington to get a verbatim account of what he had said. Usually two really superb Vietnamese language officers in the section recorded the speeches and did a highlights cable.

Q: Who were they?

TULL: Hal Colebaugh and Harry Dunlop. Particularly Hal. Hal spoke Vietnamese like a native. So, when there was a speech, they would listen to the speech on radio or television, but also record it and then go through it and do a highlights cable, put together a cable saying President Thieu expressed strong support for blah, blah and expressed concern about the lack of whatever. I remember this one occasion I had gone to dinner at a friend’s house and the next thing I know there’s a phone call and I was told that I would be picked up. We had a curfew at this time. I was going to spend the night at this friend’s home. If you went to dinner you spent the night during this period of a curfew, a 7:00 p.m. curfew, whatever it was. I was prepared to spend the night, but I was told I had to go back to the embassy it was around maybe 8:00 when I got the word. We were gathered up, the three of us who spoke Vietnamese, and taken to the embassy because the word that we got was that the highlights cable of this particular speech had aroused such interest that President Johnson wanted the entire text word for word, an hour-ling speech. The three of us spent the night going over it, we each took a section of the tape, and did a word-for-word translation from Vietnamese into English. I will say that this was a little later on, maybe it related to preparations to go to Paris for the peace talks I’m not sure. I remember Galen Stone was there by that time. I think Galen came in the summer of ’68. It was around then. Anyway, he very nicely, since he had called his officers in he came in to the embassy, too. He didn’t know Vietnamese or anything, but he felt that he should. I remember that. Then he insisted we go home I guess around 9:00 or 10:00 when we got the cable off and have a couple of hours sleep before we came back in. We did that sort of thing. I wasn’t given a political party to follow until later in the year.

[...].

Q: Looking at the situation then, sort of the feeling has come out that somehow this was a dictatorship and all. How did you see the political process? I mean you were sort of inside it.

TULL: I think that Thieu got a very bad rap in the U.S. press because the Vietnamese people were not being offered a choice between Thieu and Thomas Jefferson. They were being given a choice between Thieu and a communistic dictatorship. I say looking at the situation there they had a national assembly that was freely elected, slates of candidates, competing slates of candidates. The municipal and provincial elections were also vigorously contented. In fact I wrote an article that ended up in a book about those elections. It was part of a compilation of studies on electoral developments in Vietnam. It was edited by Joseph Zazloff from the University of Pittsburgh. They had 35 newspapers
in Saigon with competing points of view, but if the paper advocated a position that the government, the South Vietnamese government thought echoed the Viet Cong position you were thrown in jail. That was all there was to it. There was a wide area of freedoms and then beyond that you could not go, you could not advocate a communist takeover.

I had one episode for example of this with Martin Herz, the political counselor. There was a very controversial member of the “lower” house, how I got so involved in it I don’t know, maybe Hal was away, whatever. He was left leaning, extremely left-leaning. He was accused by the Thieu government of advocating Viet Cong positions, I forget which specific position, but he made a speech, the speech that they eluded to was made on the floor of the House in which he should have had immunity, but the word got out that he was doing this. He had a newspaper, which he put his views into, but on this occasion he was on the floor of the House and security goons came and dragged him out and took him away to jail. Well, I don’t know how I got the job of writing this up, but I did. I drafted the cable on this episode and I remember Martin Herz wouldn’t approve it. You had several layers where you had to get approval for cables and if something was going to be negative it definitely had to go to a higher level. So this cable was rejected. I was very upset because this is what happened, it happened, Washington had a right to know. I didn’t put a strong comment in the cable, but I said clearly this is what happened here. The man was taken from the assembly floor. He was bounced down the steps. I had witnesses who told me this and I think one of them was probably my principal contact, Senator Huyen.

I thought it was important that this be told. The cable was rejected. Well, it happened the very next day after I had finished this cable late in the day and was told it wasn’t going, there was the big political section staff meeting, all 20 of us there, and Herz chaired it. He tried to explain to me why we couldn’t send that cable because he felt that obviously it was exaggerated, we can’t exaggerate these little difficulties they have from time to time. I just wouldn’t budge. I just stood by what I had written. I said it’s up to you to decide to send it, but that is what happened and I’m standing by what I wrote. They bounced him down the steps and his head hit the steps once or twice, according to what I was told. Well, we can’t send it, he insisted. Well, everybody around the table is kind of looking like, good grief, because here is the counselor going back and forth with me. By this time the head of the Internal unit had changed and he was not a very forceful individual, but Galen Stone, the head of the section, spoke up quietly and said, well, I think Terry feels pretty strongly about what she wrote, Martin, and she’s been a pretty reliable, no, she’s a reliable observer, something like that. So, we simmered it down and I was really ticked off, but okay. You follow orders, you know, I’m not going to get on a plane and go to Washington.

To Herz’s credit, later that day I got a phone call saying that Mr. Herz wanted to see me and Galen and so the two of us went up to his office. We went in to see Herz and he says, “I’m signing off this cable. I’ve given it more thought and you’re right, it should go. I really appreciate your explaining it forcefully and standing up for your principles and
your beliefs on this issue.” I was impressed by his willingness to rethink the issue. I think the fact that I did stand up to him on what I thought was in important issue caused him to respect me. He was a man who appreciated that. He would roll you over with a bulldozer if you would be wimpish, but if you would stand up, and make a reasonable argument, he would listen. He was supportive of me after that.

[...]

Q: Well, had there been any reflection on what you were doing and your fellow officers and all of the demonstrations in the United States mainly student demonstrations and all. How did these affect you all?

TULL: Well, I was concerned. I thought it was unfortunate. I don’t think the war had been properly explained and I thought the emphasis on body counts was probably aggravating the situation, but I felt that we were there because we were invited to be there to help South Vietnam forestall the communist takeover from the North. I had idealistic views that eventually perhaps the North and South could work out some reasonable accommodation, maybe a federalist type arrangement where there’d be some freedoms in the South that didn’t exist in the North and I also thought that perhaps the South which has I believe some oil deposits offshore might eventually be able to even finance their own continuing strife if that’s what they had to do. Yes, it was distressing to know that what you were doing, was opposed by so many people. My own family was very supportive, but I had friends in the Foreign Service who weren’t in Vietnam who opposed the whole business of the Vietnam War and who couldn’t understand what I was doing there and why I would think it was worthwhile. It was something I thought was worthwhile.

[...]

Q: When you came back [to the U.S.], did you find was there a different feel for Vietnam, you know, sort of the departmental feel for this group that was dealing with it that you had at the embassy or was it?

TULL: In the Department itself? I don’t know. In the country I think attitudes had hardened, as a result of what I believe was the misinterpretation of the Tet Offensive. We knew that the Viet Cong had been devastated by that, yet that was not the perception. The perception was it was a major U.S. and South Vietnamese defeat and we ought to get out of there. I know in retrospect we were just trying to hold back a wave with a bucket, but you couldn’t fight against that opinion, but things weren’t looking bad in September of ’70.

Q: When you got back to the U.S. during that time, what were you picking up during this two year period you were dealing with internal affairs?
TULL: At times I made speaking trips to college campuses and to media outlets, and that was quite interesting. I have to say I was a little concerned at first; the first time I was going to go to a college campus I thought we’ll see about the questions. A lot of the questions were based on ignorance and when you could explain specifically what was going on or answer a question with specifics I didn’t get as much hostility as I would have thought. These young people had been fed a lot of slogans and they didn’t want to go and be drafted, and I don’t blame them for being concerned. It was a wretched situation. My own personal view is that the conduct of the war from the way the U.S. government managed the draft was so unfair. It was absolutely absurd. Because you could afford to go to college you would be out of the draft or you could come up with some phony baloney like Cheney did, get four or five different deferments, or you could go to graduate school or you could say you’re going to be a minister. It was just so wretchedly unfair. Only those who couldn’t afford college got drafted.

Q: The National Guard.

TULL: Oh, yes, like the National Guard nonsense of our current beloved leader. It just was not right. I have a personal view that a lot of the antagonism toward the war by the young college people stemmed from guilt. They claimed they were opposing the war because it’s an unjust war, etc. I think part of it was they had to oppose it on those grounds because otherwise they would be opposing it because they were afraid to go and fight in the war. They justified their resistance by saying this is an unjust war. They did not want to say I don’t want to serve my country. They said this is an unjust war, therefore, I am virtuous and anybody who does go is not virtuous, therefore I am not guilty of shirking my duty. That attitude contributed probably to the poor treatment that some of our veterans received when they returned to the United States.

Q: Oh, yes. I agree with you absolutely. Just shown by the fact that as soon as the draft stopped the protests stopped. Nobody cared anymore.

TULL: It’s a shame it wasn’t corrected a lot sooner where you have a draft number and you knew right away you were going to go or you weren’t going to go. Just changing the mechanisms of it so that you had your magic number. They had a draft lottery after that. That made much more sense. It did. It just defused the whole business. It was wretched and of course horrible mistakes were made here. I mean at Kent State, that was so stupid, and tragic. It’s so sad that these young people were killed while protesting. It’s crazy that people would have reacted that way, but meanwhile I’m trotting along and I’m going, making speeches on local television stations and going to college campuses.
The Fall of Saigon — April 30, 1975

April 30, 1975 will long be remembered as the day that Saigon fell and with it, the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. It also marked the beginning of Vietnam’s unification as a “socialist republic.” North Vietnamese forces began their final attack on Saigon on April 29, with a heavy artillery bombardment. This bombardment at the Tan Son Nhut Airport killed the last two American servicemen that died in Vietnam. By the afternoon of the next day, North Vietnamese troops had occupied the important points within the city and raised their flag over the South Vietnamese presidential palace. The fall of the city was preceded by the evacuation of almost all the American civilian and military personnel in Saigon, along with tens of thousands of South Vietnamese civilians associated with the southern regime. South Vietnam capitulated shortly thereafter and Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

Operation Frequent Wind, the helicopter evacuation of Saigon, was the largest such evacuation in history and produced some of the most iconic images of the Vietnam War. John Bennett was the Deputy Director at the Agency for International Development (USAID) mission in 1975. In this excerpt, he recounts the difficulties he experienced leading up to and during the evacuation.

“The cards had already been dealt”

JOHN BENNETT: We were just playing out the hand. The cards had already been dealt and all we could hope for was a slip by the other side. I was beginning the process of getting my people out of Vietnam, thinning down the ranks, trying to be sure that their effects got shipped. I didn’t know how long I was going to stay until noon of the last day. My wife went at about noon that day. But we weren’t sure that we were all going to leave. [Ambassador Graham] Martin thought that we might make some sort of deal where we could keep a small embassy in Saigon. I didn’t want to make a judgment on this. I would probably have stayed if that had happened. That went with my job: I was the acting AID Director the last three months.
My reaction to that is that if we had pulled out any earlier, we would have had an incredible riot in Saigon, a total breakdown in authority. As it is, I don’t know whether Ambassador Martin foresaw it happening the way it did or not. The North Vietnamese divisions had surrounded the city but weren’t in it. They bombed the airport late Monday afternoon. We had been taking out masses of people for weeks, flying them out to the Philippines or wherever we could deposit them. I had been getting people out. The AID mission even chartered a couple of aircraft to get our people out and anybody else who needed a lift.…

The problem for the Vietnamese staff was that many of them had family who couldn’t go. I remember one woman who was preparing to go. Her husband just took off and left her. She decided that she had to stay in order to take care of her husband’s sick sister. A lot of the people who would have been eligible to go couldn’t.…

We took great care that they had enough money, in dollars. We would put them on buses and take them out to Tan Son Nhut, the airport. Then we found the guards at the gate would steal all their money. So we took the money out separately in an American car.

The question is whether or not [Ambassador Martin] should have done it [ordered the evacuation] sooner. If we had done it sooner my personal conviction is that we would have gotten fewer out. We certainly would have gotten different people out. Although, I think more people got out the way we did it, because we had martial law, we could move around the city. We got all of our Americans out and a whole lot of Vietnamese as well. The USIA [U.S. Information Agency] director got heavily criticized for not getting his Vietnamese employees out. That’s what I had spent weeks doing, making sure that each day’s group got out. There wasn’t a hell of a lot else to do. The one thing I didn’t do was burn a whole lot of low-level classified material in the AID building. We somehow never got told when to do it, until it was too late.
On Monday afternoon they bombed the airport. I was running a fever and had came home and sat down. I was taking an aspirin and a little libation. The next thing I knew all hell broke loose. Ten minutes of unremitting gunfire. Everybody in the city thought that this was it. My reaction was, hey, they’re in the city and here we go. It turned out not to be the case. The soldiers panicked and were firing in the air.

What really worried me was my wife, who was driving back from the airport when the bombing occurred. She had just put some kids who had been left by the American parent, married to a Vietnamese, with Vietnamese relatives. She’d taken them out and put them on an airplane. She was really concerned that they had been killed, but it didn’t happen.

The next thing I knew, I got this phone call to come to a meeting at midnight at the embassy. I said I’m not going, I’m sick. Then I thought better of it and so I called up [Ambassador] Martin. I talked to him for an hour about all the things that had happened that day. He was in a reflective mood. He’d called the meeting, but he wasn’t going to be there himself. But by that time I was fired up, so I went.

We talked about whom we were going to take out the next day. Then I went home to bed. At about 2:30 a.m. the Vietnamese artillery started shelling the city. You don’t sleep when that’s going on. The next thing I know, at 5:30 in the morning, I get a call from the embassy: “Meeting in the ambassador’s office.” So down I go with my wife and I never went back.

I spent that day burning embassy files and trying to round up my AID people. At first not all of them had to go, so I had to identify which ones would and get them picked up. Then we learned all of them had to go. So then I had to contact the rest by telephone and get them picked up. We had a number of small helicopters destroyed by the artillery the night before. They were the kind that could land on roofs, so their loss meant we had to move people around the city in cars and buses. We had a ship, but we couldn’t get to it because North Vietnamese troops were between us and the ship. So that didn’t work out. But we put others on a barge and towed it out to sea with a tug....

It was dark when the choppers finally began to come into the embassy. Because there was so little light and the pilots feared small arms fire, we had to use smaller choppers than originally planned and take off from the roof of the embassy. Fortunately there was little wind, because the pad was small and there was little room for error up there....
One crisis after another but no recognition for the embassy

There was one crisis after another. I can tell you that at one point I was so tired I didn’t think I was going to make it. But we kept soldiering on. At 8:00 p.m. I was told to go, and so I went upstairs to get on the helicopter. The Marine captain who was in charge was standing there cursing and saying, “Where the hell are all these people? We’re waiting up here and they’re downstairs having a party.” I decided that he might be right and went downstairs. People were milling around, doing nothing. I began telling them to go upstairs and get on the helicopters. Well, I was effective enough that by the time I’d made it to the ground floor there was a line running all the way to the roof. I had to get at the end of it. But I got out at midnight.…

It was an eerie sight, flying out. We could see tracers arcing across the ground, and in a couple of places it looked like ammunition dumps were burning and blowing up, a Fourth of July celebration.…

[I was evacuated] to a helicopter carrier. My wife was on another ship, the Denver, a landing ship. I was so tired. When we got on we had to stand in line and register and then they searched us for weapons and had us turn in government property — e.g., some people had brought electric typewriters. I got bunked with a young lieutenant who was on duty at the time. It was right underneath the flight deck. Every time a plane landed, it hit hard. Boy, that really wakes you up! A couple of days later I got on a copter and joined my wife.…

I felt I did all right. I got all my people out. That was my responsibility. Nobody was telling me to do it. I just went ahead and did it. I even got four of them over the wall and into the embassy at seven or eight in the evening by pure fluke. I had been working in [Political Counselor] Joe Bennett’s office at the switchboard and saw the light for his number and took the call. They had been waiting for a bus all day at the AID headquarters. I told them if they could get to the embassy in fifteen minutes we could get them in. The embassy was surrounded by crowds of Vietnamese who wanted to get out on the helicopters, so we had to figure out a way to identify them. I told them to take the cover off the embassy phone book
and wave it. And we got them over. An American on top had to identify them and lean down and pull them up.

The people in the Korean embassy stayed there till it was too late and they couldn’t move. We could have gotten them out earlier through the American embassy. There were other people who worked for the CIA whose lives were in real danger. They should have been picked up and taken out, but apparently, they all weren’t. The AID Mission was told how many could go out on a particular day. I would simply make sure to fill my quota.

A lot of Americans had friends whom they helped get out. These were not officials. If you could get them out to the airport, the planes would take them. This did produce trouble. A friend of mine picked up an ex-minister and took him out to Tan Son Nhut [airport] and dumped him on the street. The Vietnamese police picked him up. The next thing I knew Graham Martin was calling. I had to pick up the Vietnamese after he got out of jail. He was really shaking. He was white. We got him out. There was a lot of freelancing. We had a lot of people coming back in. Mission employees who’d been there in past years, came back to get their friends out. Then we had to get those people out again. There was a lack of control over what was happening.

In thinking back over Saigon’s fall, a whole lot of issues arise.... I discovered that the embassy, and Martin in particular, was strongly criticized for its conduct of the evacuation. Neither Kissinger nor Assistant Secretary Phil Habib had any great love for Martin. They believed that we should have taken far more people out earlier than we did. Perhaps, but they weren’t in Saigon and had no sense of how fragile control of the city was. I always believed we would have gotten fewer people out had we started earlier and order broke down. Even if it hadn’t broken down, the difference would have been in who got out, not how many.

I also think that Martin, as tough and nasty as he could be, kept everyone soldiering on in an effort widely thought of as hopeless. It was a remarkable performance, never acknowledged. In fact, somewhere I have a memo from Phil Habib saying that no one in the embassy was going to get any recognition because they didn’t want Martin to get it. Some years later, we turned that around, so that the lower level AID people did get recognition.
APPENDIX: DIPLOMATIC DICTIONARY TERMS
(Source: United States Diplomacy Center, https://diplomacy.state.gov/)

A

ACCORDS
International agreements originally thought to be for lesser subjects than those covered by treaties, but now really treaties by a different name.

AMBASSADOR
The chief of a diplomatic mission; the ranking official diplomatic representative of a country to the country to which s/he is appointed, and the personal representative of his/her own head of state to the head of state of the host country. Ambassador is capitalized when referring to a specific person (i.e., Ambassador Smith)

ATTACHÉ
An official assigned to a diplomatic mission or embassy. Usually, this person has advanced expertise in a specific field, such as agriculture, commerce, or the military.

ASYLUM
To receive asylum is to receive protection from another nation, in some cases one’s own nation. This can occur by allowing individuals to find refuge within the grounds of an embassy (not generally done in American embassies); and when one state allows someone to live within its borders, out of reach of the authority of a second state from which the person seeks protection.

B

BILATERAL
Bilateral discussions, negotiations, or treaties are between a sovereign state and one other entity, either another sovereign state or an international organization. The relationship between two nations is referred to as a bilateral relationship.

BREAKING RELATIONS
The formal act of severing diplomatic relations with another nation to underscore disapproval of its actions or policies. It is only done under severe situations.

C

CHANCERY
The office space where the Chief of Mission and his staff work. This office is sometimes called the embassy, but, technically, the embassy refers to the diplomatic delegation itself.

CHARGÉ D’AFFAIRES
Formerly, a chargé d'affaires was the title of a chief of mission, inferior in rank to an ambassador or a minister. It is still used as the title of the head of a US mission where the US and other nation do not
have full diplomatic relations. Today with the a.i. (ad interim) added, it designates the senior officer taking charge for the interval when a chief of mission is absent from his/her post or the position is vacant.

CHIEF OF MISSION
Usually called an ambassador, this is the ranking officer in an embassy or permanent mission and the personal representative of the head of state of his/her nation.

COMMUNIQUÉ
A brief public summary statement issued following important bilateral or multilateral meetings.

CONVENTION
An agreement between two or more states, often concerning matters of common interest such as commerce.

COUNTRY DESK
The Department of State has an office for each country with whom the U.S. shares diplomatic relations. These offices are often called country desks, and if a large country is involved, the desk is likely to be staffed by a large number of officers. A smaller country may require a one-officer desk only.

COUNTRY TEAM
An interagency group made up of the heads of each State Department section in the embassy and the heads of the other U.S. government agencies represented at post. The country team meeting represents a regular occasion for the sharing of information among sections and agencies, and an opportunity to coordinate activities.

CREDENTIALS
The name for letters given to an ambassador by his/her chief of state, and addressed to the chief of state of the host country. They are delivered to the latter by the ambassador in a formal credentials ceremony, which generally takes place shortly after his/her arrival at a new post.

CONSULATE
An office that is part of an embassy or established by one nation in an important city of another nation for the purpose of supporting and protecting its citizens traveling or residing there. All consulates, whether located in the capital city or in other communities, are administratively under the ambassador and the embassy.

CONSULATE GENERAL
The person that is head of the Consulate, also known as the “CG.”

CONVENTION
An assembly of persons who meet for a common purpose especially a meeting of delegates for the purpose of formulating a written agreement on specific issues. The word also refers to the written agreement itself.
D

**DEFECTION**
When an official gives up his or her allegiance to one state in preference for another, usually because of disagreement over government policy, often immigrating to or seeking asylum in the new state. Defecting generally indicates a desire to participate in opposition or political activity that is illegal or impossible in the original country, differentiating it from a simple change in citizenship.

**DEPARTMENT OF STATE**
The oldest and head agency in the President’s cabinet. The Secretary of State leads the Department of State in carrying out the President’s foreign policies. The Department was initially founded as the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1781 and then renamed in 1789 in the Constitution as the Department of State.

**DIPLOMACY**
The art and practice of conducting negotiations and maintaining relations between nations; skill in handling affairs without arousing hostility.

**DIPLOMAT**
A diplomat is one employed or skilled in diplomacy.

**DIPLOMATIC COURIER**
A member of a diplomatic service entrusted with bearing messages is referred to as a diplomatic courier.

**DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY**
The formal protection given to diplomats by their host country which shields them from prosecution or arrest. It also allows freedom of movement and is considered customary worldwide except in special circumstances.

E

**EMBASSY**
The diplomatic delegation from one country to another. Embassy is often used to refer to the chancery – containing the office of the chief of mission, or ambassador – and other buildings for the offices of diplomatic staff.

**EMBARGO**
An embargo is an order of a government prohibiting the departure of commercial ships and other vehicles from its ports. It is a legal prohibition on commerce.
ENVOY
In the past a diplomatic minister who was accredited to a foreign government and who ranked between an ambassador and a resident minister was also called "envoy extraordinary". Today, the term is generally synonymous with diplomat, or in the case of a Special Envoy, a person sent to deal with a specific issue.

EXTRADITION
The legal process by which an accused or confirmed criminal is transferred from one country to another. Generally, treaties signed between governments determine the precise requirements, rules, and exemptions for transferring suspected criminals from one sovereign legal authority to another.

EXPULSION
The formal deportation of a diplomat, often as a form of protest against the diplomat’s home country or as a result of actions by the diplomat, such as espionage.

FOREIGN AID
Assistance (often in the form of economic aid) provided by one nation to another.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS
The relations among states within the international system, including the roles of states and international organizations; can also include the roles of non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations.

FOREIGN POLICY
In the United States, the plan or strategy that the President and senior policymakers define and establish to achieve national objectives and interests.

FORMAL DIPLOMACY
This is government-to-government diplomacy – also called Track I Diplomacy – that goes through formal, traditional channels of communication to communicate with foreign governments (written documents, meetings, summits, diplomatic visits, etc). This type of diplomacy is conducted by diplomats of one nation with diplomats and other officials of another nation or international organization.

INFORMAL DIPLOMACY
Informal diplomacy includes Public Diplomacy which involves government-to-people diplomacy and reaching out to non-executive branch officials and the broader public, particularly opinion-shapers, in foreign countries, explaining both foreign policy and the national context out of which that policy arises. Public Diplomacy is carried out by both diplomats and, under their programs and auspices, non-officials such as academic scholars, journalists, experts in various fields, members of non-governmental organizations, public figures such as state and local government officials, and social activists.
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (IO)
An organization with an international membership, mission, or presence. There are two main types: International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that operate internationally, such as the International Olympic Committee or the International Committee of the Red Cross. Intergovernmental organizations, also known as international governmental organizations (IGOs), the type of organization most closely associated with the term "international organization" are organizations that are made up primarily of sovereign states (referred to as member states). Examples include the United Nations; NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization); OAS (Organization of American States); APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation); ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations); and the WTO (World Trade Organization).

LOCALLY EMPLOYED STAFF (formerly known as Foreign Service Nationals, or FSNs)
Staff that work at a Foreign Service post (Embassy/Consulate/Mission) abroad. The overwhelming majority are citizens of the country the post is located in, but some are American citizens living in the country and family members of Foreign Service Officers and other full time USG employees who are assigned to a post. More than 53,000 Locally Employed Staff work at U.S. Missions around the world. They provide local expertise, language skills, continuity and contacts within the host country. They are indispensible full-fledged members of our American missions abroad.

MISSION
A diplomatic representation to an international organization. Mission is also used to refer to an embassy.

MINISTERIAL
A formally arranged meeting of ministers of various states, such as the Defense or Foreign Ministers of the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

MULTILATERAL
Involving more than two nations (which would be bilateral). International organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, are multilateral in nature.

NEGOTIATION
Discussion between the representatives of two or more parties intended to reach a compromise on a disputed topic of interest. Governmental negotiations can be bilateral (between two states or between a state and a non-state entity, such as an International Organization or Non-Governmental Organization) or multilateral.
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO)
A private institution that is independent of the government.

OPERATIONS CENTER
The Operations Center (Ops Center) is the Secretary's and the Department's communications and crisis management center. Working 24 hours a day, the Operations Center monitors world events, prepares briefings for the Secretary and other Department principals, and facilitates communication between the Department and the rest of the world. The Operations Center also coordinates the Department's response to crises and supports task forces, monitoring groups, and other crisis-related activities.

PASSPORT
A passport is an internationally recognized travel document that verifies the identity and nationality of the bearer. A valid U.S. passport is required to enter and leave most foreign countries. Only the U.S. Department of State has the authority to grant, issue, or verify United States passports.

PERSONA NON GRATA
A Latin phrase meaning “unwelcome person.” As a legal term, it refers to the practice of a state prohibiting a diplomat from entering the country as a diplomat, or censuring a diplomat already resident in the country for conduct unbecoming of the status of a diplomat.

PROTOCOL
Refers to the ceremonial side of diplomacy, including matters of diplomatic courtesy and precedence.

RATIFICATION
To approve and sanction formally, as with a treaty.

RECOGNITION
Commonly used in connection with the recognition by one state of the existence of another state (for example when a new one is formed), or the existence of a government which is in effective control of a state.

SANCTIONS
A form of hard power, these are coercive measures taken by one or more states to protest another state’s actions and to force a change of behavior. Although sanctions may technically include military action, they usually refer to measures taken by diplomats in lieu of military action. Diplomatically,
sanctions may include the breaking of formal relations or the removal of a country’s embassy. Other forms include economic sanctions to ban certain types of trade, and sports sanctions to prevent a country’s people and teams from competing in international events.

SMART POWER
The flexible and combined use of hard power – military force or economic sanctions – and soft power – diplomatic and cultural influence – to overcome a foreign policy challenge.

SUMMIT
A formally arranged meeting of heads of governments.

T

TREATY
An agreement or arrangement made by negotiation; a contract in writing between two or more political authorities such as sovereign states, formally signed by authorized representatives, and usually approved by the legislature of the state.

V

VISA
A document issued by a country giving an individual permission to formally request entrance to the country during a given period of time and for certain purposes and usually stamped or glued inside a passport, or sometimes issued as separate pieces of paper.