1) Need for better understanding of local languages + culture — 25-27 J

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RICHARD HELMS INTERVIEW BY R. JACK SMITH -- 14 APRIL 1983

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

SM: The attitude, the shift in responsibility, is perhaps a better way to say it, and your approach to the Vietnam problem as you moved from DDP, DDCI to DCI. In other words, how you grasped the responsibilities as DCI.

H: Well, as DDP there wasn't any question about the fact that my only preoccupation with Vietnam was operational, and, of course, administrative. As the war wound along, or ground along, might be a better way to say it, more and more Agency assets had to be deployed to Vietnam in order to satisfy the various requirements, not only for basic intelligence but for some sort of field analysis or reporting of a kind and in a depth that we obviously would not be obligated to be involved in, in any country except one where American troops were at war. This responsibility continued as I became DDCI and later DCI. In fact, in those later years the effort to try and make the American commitment of military forces in Vietnam a success led President Johnson, particularly, to become so absorbed with this problem that every agency of Government was asked to contribute to the maximum extent possible. And on the part of the Agency, this obviously involved still more people, and we were simply robbing Peter to pay Paul. Interestingly enough, it was my impression that despite these demands, we were able, during the time that I was DCI, to cut the total manpower of the Agency somewhat. I mention this only because I have read in the newspapers in the years since I got out of the Agency that Admiral Turner and others contended that the Agency had grown fat during this period of Vietnam in order to take care of these requirements, and therefore a lot of people should have been cut out

of the Agency simply because this bulge had been allowed to form during the Vietnamese years. This was not my impression about the manpower figures, and I'd been interested to have it verified and actually looked at inside the Agency. But to get back to the time that I became DDCI, under Admiral Raborn as DCI, I recall that Admiral Raborn became preoccupied with Vietnam. One of the things that he did was to set up a Vietnamese adviser to himself and to me in the person of Peer DaSilva. I agreed with him at the time that such a move seemed to be desirable, particularly since Admiral Raborn had some ideas of his own as to what one might do in Vietnam to help with the war. These, it seemed -- my recollection is vague in this respect -- but it strikes me that they were things that had little to do with actual intelligence work. It had to do with more gimmicks and things that might help in a military sense. In any event, when I became DCI, I took a look at the situation which we were confronted with from the standpoint of the White House and other elements of the Government and so on, and whereas I may not have been entirely enthusiastic about the setting up of the DaSilva unit at the time that I was DDCI, I realized that it was gonna be impossible for me as Director of Central Intelligence to carry out all of the responsibilities of that office and still spend twenty-four hours a day on Vietnam, which is what President Johnson wanted everybody to do. So it seemed only sensible to maintain the unit and the space in the building and so forth, which had been set up for this Vietnamese group -- I think Special Assistant to the DCI for Vietnam or whatever the title of it was --

S: SAVA. Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs.

H: Vietnamese Affairs, expanded it and make the head of it responsible for the DCI's brief on Vietnam, in an effort to be a help to him, not to cut

across DDI, or DDP, or anybody else in the Agency, but to help put the information, which was flowing out in great quantities, into manageable form, to write papers for me of presentations that I had to make on an hour's notice and things of this kind. And I must say that Carver did an absolutely superb job in this as Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs. He worked long hours, he was bright, he was fast, he apparently, to the extent that he may have irritated some people in the Agency, he still seemed to get along reasonably well and get the information he needed.

S: He didn't permanently bruise anybody.

H: No, I don't think so. (Laughter) And as I look back on it, I don't think I could have survived without this sort of assistance, because President Johnson particularly was demanding to a degree on this problem that was hard to imagine. It was a twenty-four hour a day proposition with him. The fact that he would stay up at night to get the word on some Rolling Thunder mission over Vietnam, or some particular military operation that was going on, to find out how many had been killed or wounded or whether it had been successful, was simply a manifestation of the fact that this was a twenty-four a day absorption. In that connection, let me now say that the relationship between the Agency and President Johnson on Vietnam was a good one, contrary to whatever else you may have heard. Unquestionably, there were many occasions on which we gave him very bad news, indeed, and I usually gave him the bad news in writing, defended it and supported it and so forth. And some of it was very disappointing to him, there was no question about it. But he did not complain, he took it like a man, and even on the time when the second meeting of the so-called Wise Men took place -- this was the meeting in which they began to point out to him that this war was not going anywhere, it was losing support in the country, that there were things that

were gonna have to be done about it and so forth --and it came as a very bitter pill to him. And it was at that time that George Carver gave him the briefing about the fact that the writ of the Vietnamese Government did not extend all over South Vietnam anymore. But his reaction was not one of persecution, or of taking it out on anybody personally or anything of that kind; he didn't like it, he said so, and he fought against it, but he certainly was not small about it. Dean Rusk very seldom ever commented about these matters favorably or unfavorably; he just didn't comment. He just was a good soldier and did what the President was asking him to do in various diplomatic areas related to Vietnam, and there was not much that he ever said, either favorably or unfavorably. Mel Laird was the one who, from time to time, would challenge me and others in the Agency with Quote "Who's side are you on?" Unquote. In other words, he felt that some of these studies undermined the military operation, he felt that they were really, in a sense -- he never put it this strong, as to say that they were disloyal but -- that they could be more upbeat, that they could look on the good side rather than the bad side, that they might be cast in more favorable terms. A whole series of things of this kind. So that it was a period, in the Johnson Administration, where the road was rocky; there was no doubt about it. But, the Agency was able to hold its head up because it was hard, very hard, for anybody else to naysay what these studies and reports were saying. They were in most cases well done; people had to pay attention to them. The fact that they were disappointing, I think, was recognized as being the role intelligence should have in these matters, but to say that this was smooth sailing during this period would be to cast the thing in an entirely wrong light. As for the Congress, I did my very best as DCI to be as objective about the Vietnamese War as I could, in testimony

before various Congressional committees. It seemed to me that it was absolutely essential that we try to tread a center and objective line because as the feeling about the war became more intense, the more obvious it became that if intelligence was to have any standing in the Congress, it had to have the support, as intelligence, of both sides of the aisle. And I didn't know any way to do this except to make the reports as objective and my testimony as objective as I was able to do. This obviously did not on an occasion earn me any particular warmth in the Administration, because I think that some of them felt that I was probably feeding the prejudices, or the dislikes, of some of the people who were against the war. But there was no doubt about the fact that it in one sense helped the Agency because people like Fulbright and Gore and others of that stripe have said to me on many occasions that I was the only person who appeared before them and gave them what they felt was an honest picture of what was going on in Vietnam. They were appreciative of it, they recognized it as such, and I don't think that it hurt the Agency one bit. In fact, I think it did the Agency a lot of good. Then we come to the Nixon Administration. And in this period, obviously, the emphasis began to change on Vietnam. This was the major effort to get peace, to try and work their way out of Vietnam, to do a variety of things which would finally bring the war to a conclusion, and the emphasis became somewhat different, the studies we were asked to make, the work we were asked to do and so forth. But this was a difficult period too on these issues because we had the problem about the Sihanoukville matrix, which hadn't worked out, and then when we later got these bills of lading that demonstrated that the amount that had gone through Sihanoukville was much larger than we had calculated, (this)

obviously irritated Nixon. And so we had a pretty rough time during that period. On the other hand, there were times when the ability of the Agency analysts to turn out economic studies, and study certain economic matters related to the termination of the war and who was contributing what to it and so forth, were well received. So that we had good days with Kissinger and bad days with Kissinger. We'd have a bad day with Nixon and on some other occasion maybe things would look better. In other words, to cover the Nixon period of the Vietnamese War, at least to the extent that I was involved in it: it was rocky. It was in some cases difficult. The Laird treatment I think was indicative of this (and I think I put Laird in my remarks a bit out of context chronologically -- I should have talked about McNamara and Clifford and so forth, but I don't think we've lost anything there particularly in either matter). McNamara was supportive of the Agency; Clifford never took any position particularly one way or the other and was only in there a year. So that if you take the Laird remarks and put them in the Nixon period you'll have them in the right area chronologically.

S: Dick, let's focus a little more on the operations aspect of it, that is the covert action and FI emphasis because this is what this chapter deals with -- your role in administering that side of the activity. You know we pretty well covered the estimative side in the previous chapter. And specifically, what was the attitude of the White House -- Johnson in the first instance and Nixon in the second -- toward Agency operations? What kind of pressures did you feel to get things done, either through covert action or through FI?

H: You know, I think it would be fair to say that neither Johnson nor Nixon had a picture in their mind of what espionage or FI operations, or anything, were like; I mean, except what they had read in novels. Therefore,

they were not ever very specific about that aspect; they wanted to know the results, and therefore what espionage contributed to those results, fine. But they didn't even realize the extent to which we had to fan people out through the country and have bases in these outlying provincial districts and so forth in order to accumulate the information, and not only accumulate it but acquire it in the first instance.

S: How would you characterize your role in this part of it? Because, of course, you took over a thoroughly operating organism which had been in position for some time. It grew larger during your administration, but fundamentally, the main outlines were not changed.

H: That's right.

S: What did you feel that you were supposed to be doing? What did you want to do?

H: Oh, well, as DDP, my preoccupation, during this period, aside from getting the proper people assigned to the Vietnamese Station, was to try and see if we couldn't find some way to get some information about what was going on in North Vietnam. I mean, this was the great blank, and this was where I spent a great deal of my Vietnamese time, trying to figure out ways to do this, through the British, through the Australians, through anybody who was there, through our own agent operations -- whether we could run them up the border or bring them in from the sea -- and it was a very perplexing problem which we never really resolved.

S: Yeah. Well, you put a lot of emphasis on high-level penetrations ....

H: That's right. And I was willing to do almost anything to try to get it, including putting peaceniks from the United States into the peace movement to see if they could get something via [redacted] or other peaceniks who travelled to Hanoi. In other words, we turned the box out on all the tricks that we

could think of to do this, but as I look back on it, it was no great success.

S: A hard nut to crack.

H: A hard nut to crack and we didn't crack it. I think we may have done a slight bruise job on one side of the nut but that was about all.

S: Well, you had a pretty good audio penetration.

H: But by that time we had the OXCART and it had just done its final flight test and so forth, and it was an operational entity which was ready to go, and it was over North Vietnam. It was the only time it was ever really used operationally, and it made some flights over there and came up with some extraordinary photographs of the area and so forth. And that, obviously, gave me almost a feeling of euphoria to have actually come up with something on North Vietnam which was useful.

S: Right. Now, Dick, what you're saying then is that the President, the White House in particular, didn't urge you in one way or another as far as operations were concerned. They wanted the results. You knew what they wanted, it was high-level penetration, and therefore you translated that into ....

H: That's right.

S: Action in the Agency.

H: Right. As a matter of fact, there is no question, Jack -- and I think that this was probably something that in retrospect I've had a chance to think about so perhaps the judgement I'm giving you today is different from the judgement I might have given you at the time -- the Presidents, or people who get to be Presidents, are not indoctrinated, by and large, in intelligence work. And I think they have regarded intelligence work as one of those areas in Government they don't understand very well and would like to have somebody

whom they trust in charge of it, who can interpret for them and, then vice versa, what ought to be done. And I realize now that I was doing an awful lot of that, of what you just mentioned, of taking something that a President said and then trying to translate it into something that was sensible. And if you let me give you what I think is an example of that, that's the whole MHCHAOS thing. I mean, the, Johnson never said to me, "Do X, Y, Z." He said, "I need this." So MHCHAOS was an effort to put in real life terms the solution to his problem. But he wouldn't have known from one side to the other and I think if he'd been alive when the hearings were conducted in 1975, he would have said, "What's this all about?"

S: I want to talk about CHAOS in greater length ....

H: Well, all right.

S: On another case occasion. But that's a good example, exactly. Now, on occasion, one would expect, however, if you're running operations of some size, some expense, and some risk, either nervousness or push, somewhere. Now did the Congress, which had to be fairly well briefed in some of these matters, ever evince any nervousness or concern about the nature of our covert activities?

H: In Vietnam? No, I never heard a word about that. And we used to brief in great detail, particularly before the Appropriations Committees, on what we were doing in Laos, in running that war and so forth. And the reaction I got, by and large, was, "Right on!" I mean, the more you can do the better. Maybe this is the way to fight those wars, putting our military troops in there probably isn't the way to do it; the way to do it is to do it with local people. This was the great irony about Symington's behavior, because he was all for this, until later, when it suddenly became a "secret war."

S: Yeah. I wanted to talk about that at some length after we have finished

this particular section here. There are one or two instances in which you forwarded memos, signed them and sent memos forward to the White House, regarding certain operations, and I just wondered what you can recollect about them. For example, you remember where there was a whole series -- and I believe this was '70 but it could have been '71; Nixon Administration in any event -- of shallow cross border penetrations, teams going in, and I think about eight, and they were not successful. They either got lost or did not do much of anything. And after a period ....

H: This was going into North Vietnam?

S: North Vietnam.

H: Yeah.

S: After a period of time, you requested a stand-down for 90 days. And then after 90 days you proposed that the nature of those operations be extended somewhat so that the drops be made farther in, and possibly be more effective, therefore. Do you remember anything about that?

H: No, I don't. As you've been talking, I was, you know, scratching my head and I thought what operation is that? (Laughter)

S: It was the SOG operation. SOG, it was called ....

H: Yeah, but I don't remember the details of them at all, or even where we dropped these things.

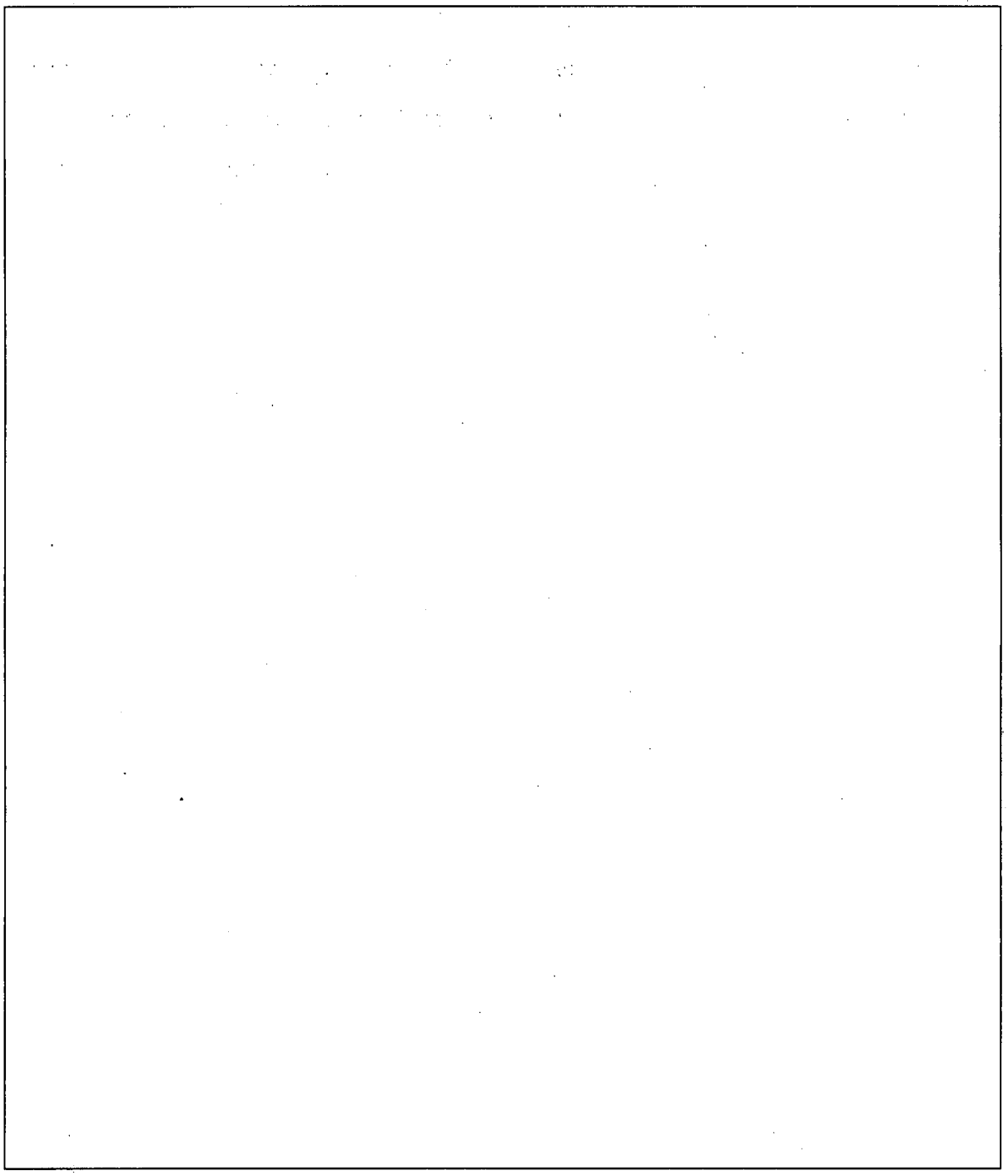
S: They were kind of horrendous. They were a failure, the first eight results, and I suppose that the Division came to you and said we ought to re-think this a bit and you asked for a stand-down which was granted. But the impression that one gets is that the White House was leaning forward and you were saying, "Now, wait a minute, you know, we're not getting anywhere this way; let's reconsider doing it a more sensible way."

H: I'm sad to say I don't remember any part of that.

S: Well, that's all right. That's just the kind of example I'll be able to use, as I have the notes from your memos.

H: Oh, good. So I'm glad you've got some evidence. (Laughter)

S: Now another incidence of special activity on your part had to do with



S: That this didn't make sense to him in our terms.

H: But he was not our man?

S: No.

H: Well, I remember the case certainly, because I had I remember one rather acrimonious meeting with Stanley Resor, who was Secretary of the Army, over this whole affair. I can't remember any more of the details of what we were arguing about, but it was a question of who was to blame in this situation. And I guess it was just a discussion of the facts in the case and so forth, but I, that's the one thing about it that I do remember.

S: Yeah.

H: And also, it was clear in my mind, and that's why I asked you the question just now, that if you had said, "No, he was ours," then my whole vision of that thing would have been turned upside down. But I realized that it was not our fault. [redacted]

[redacted]

H: Well that I guess is what Resor and I were arguing about that day, whose idea was this?

[redacted]

H: Yeah. Yeah. Who was, who did what to whom. And who was responsible. I guess that's what it was.

S: It was just a matter of different phraseology.

H: But anyway it was acrimonious, I do remember that.

S: Well, I'll tell you what you did that I think is very characteristic. You got a very thorough brief pulled together and you got it down to Congress and you got Congress thoroughly brought up-to-date on this, exactly

what had happened and all the details. Carver did a masterful job. There was a trial, and it looked as though the Agency might get smeared in the trial, but Carver did a masterful job in pointing (out the problems). The Station was inclined to say, "No problem, don't worry about it." And there were lots of fish hooks in it that Carver outlined. And sent out indications what they should watch out for in the testimony. Anyway it was one of those instances in which it was threatened we would be spattered with mud but were not.

H: Well, it doesn't surprise me that I did that because if there was one thing, among many, that I learned about dealing with Congress: (if) you got down there first and told members of your committee of something that had gone sour or gone wrong before they read it in the newspapers or heard about it from somebody else, they could be very understanding and stand with you and help you and so forth, if they felt that they had been taken in and told about this in advance so that they could protect themselves against criticism from the outside. But when they were caught by surprise by one of these things by reading it in the newspaper or being told by somebody, they really could get very flinty indeed. So I'm not surprised that I did just that.

S: No, I think that's a consistent principle in your administration of the organization. Did you remember much about, it's not a terribly important matter, but Komer came up with this scheme for reorganizing the pacification structure, program, the whole works out there, shortly after he got in a position to do so. There were a series of memos back and forth. I think there was a certain amount of heart-burn within the Agency, particularly with, in the Division, and probably within the Station, over the loss of certain functions, shifts of personnel, and things of this sort. Do you remember your attitude toward it at all?

H: The only thing that I recall about Komer's work on pacification, at this late date, was how outraged I was at his making a pitch at lunch with President Johnson one day for Colby's services to replace (assist) him, when he had never mentioned this matter to me. And he and I really had it out after the meeting was over. But I don't recall having anymore, what my attitude toward his pacification reorganization was.

S: Well, what comes through in the memos, on exchanges, is you had a feeling that if it's gonna happen, you might just as well let it happen. In other words, let's not burn out all our bridges trying to prevent it from happening. Let's just go along as gracefully as we can, which I think was the better part of wisdom.

H: Oh I think it was. Pacification was getting up a head of steam in those days. There was no sense in bucking it, because this was something that Johnson wanted, this sounded like a great idea, let's go, let's go, let's go. And ole blow-torch Bob, having been put in charge of it, he was a blow torch all right.

S: Yeah. I saw him out there in action. I think this is as good a time as any to talk about the Symington "shift," or however you wish to describe it. Tell me as much as you can remember about those occasions on which Symington was fully apprised of the nature of the Laos operations, and then his attitude after this shift came and how you would analyze the cause of the shift. What do you think brought it on?

H: In the first place, Symington was allowed on two occasions, as I recall it, to go to Long Tieng, which was the operational base where the Meos were run from and where we had Americans working with Vang Pao. I believe it was after the second of these, but certainly it was while Shackley was [redacted] in Laos, Symington asked me to have Shackley, on one of

his trips home, to come down and brief the Senate Armed Services Committee, the full Committee, on what we were doing in Laos. What he, Symington, had seen us doing. So I arranged this briefing. The date of it is known; I've got it written down somewhere; I can find it if you actually need it; it is in the record at the Agency. And so, sure enough, there was the full Armed Services Committee, with Stennis as Chairman in the chair, and for an hour Shackley gave one of his excellent briefings on everything we were doing in Laos, and how we were doing it, and where we were doing it and so forth. When the briefing was over, Symington got up and said, "Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, this is the way we ought to be fighting the war in Asia. They spend more money in a day in Vietnam than they do in Laos in a year. You've just heard that. This is the way we ought to be doing it and I wanted you to have this briefing so you'd understand that we're capable of doing something like this and seeing how wrong-headed our whole approach in Vietnam is." I'm sure Shackley will bear out this statement of Symington's because he heard him make it, too. We were just the two of us there. Well then, a year or two goes by, and for political reasons of his own, I can only assume, Symington began talking about the "secret war" in Laos. Well, it was certainly no secret from him. It was certainly no secret from the entire Senate Armed Services Committee, not of the sub-committee, but the whole committee. It was certainly no secret from the Senate Appropriations. It was no secret from House Appropriations. It was no secret from House Armed Services, which had oversight. So to say that there was a secret war was, I suppose, a tricky way of saying that it was secret from the American public. But it was supposed to be kept secret from the American public. Congress agreed to this, when President Kennedy got us involved in it in the first place. He wanted it kept secret because of the Laos Accords, which we had signed on to in previous

years. So that it was being conducted exactly as the executive and the legislative wanted it conducted, but Symington was using it for his own political purposes, to feather his own political nest, I can only assume.

S: In other words, just to make Symington look good, but it's a curious bouleversement, isn't it?

H: It is, and obviously very painful for me.

S: Carver speculates, and he says it with some assurance, that this was a gambit on Symington's part to skewer Stennis. Well, how does that work?

H: I will tell you how that works, if it's true. I don't know that it's true, but one of the problems that I had in the Senate, during my tenure as DCI, was brought about by the following difficulty. When Richard Russell died, he had been the protector and the defender and the advocate of the Agency. He chaired a combined sub-committee made up of the Senate Armed Services and Senate Appropriations, and this combined committee heard the CIA Director in testimony, not only when he was testifying generally, but when he was testifying on the budget. This was Russell's way of keeping the number of knowledgeable people in the Senate very small indeed. And that worked all the time that he was alive. When he died and Stennis took over as Chairman, of the Senate Armed Services Committee, he immediately ran into the fact that he did not want to make Symington the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Preparedness Sub-committee, which he, Stennis, had held, when Russell was Chariman of the full Committee, and that Symington, being the next senior man to Stennis, legitimately could aspire to that Chairmanship. And the Preparedness Sub-committee was one that had an investigative responsibility into all types of military activity. Stennis, because of his dislike and distrust of Symington, refused to give him that Chairmanship. Also, he would not hold hearings of what he called the CIA Sub-committee of the Senate

Armed Services, because he didn't want to have to have Symington there to know what was going on. Symington deeply resented this. In fact, on more than one occasion referred to Stennis as a whore, went to Fulbright, and since he was on Foreign Relations as well, he got Fulbright to set up the equivalent in the Foreign Relations Committee of the Preparedness Sub-committee, so that he could do his investigation under the aegis of Foreign Relations rather than under the aegis of the military of the Armed Services. And it was in this capacity that he would make these trips hither and yon about Vietnam, Laos and all the rest of it. Where it caused great difficulty for the Agency was that even Scoop Jackson tried to persuade Stennis to set up a sub-committee which he would chair -- it would be very small, to hear CIA problems and so forth -- Stennis would never do that either, with the result we had very few hearings. Therefore the charges were quite correct that the Senate hadn't been hearing the Agency very much. But it was in no sense the Director's fault. It was entirely this fight between Stennis and Symington.

S: Now, how does Symington, blowing the lid off and exposing his good friends in the Central Intelligence Agency to all this opprobrium, how does that help him make any points against Stennis? How does that embarrass Stennis?

H: Well, I think it embarrassed Stennis only because it showed that Symington was on the ball, was working hard with these problems, he was right out there out front. And I think it must have had some effect on Stennis' grasp of the problem, in retrospect. I say it in retrospect, because in early 1975, you remember when this question came up about a Select Committee on Intelligence under Church being set up, a Democratic caucus met early in the year and voted Stennis down, which was really a very demeaning thing to have happen to him because here he was a powerful and long-time member of the Senate and

under normal circumstances he should have been able to maintain control of that whole thing. And they just took it away from him. So, Symington and the others involved in this whole operation obviously were working in various ways to undermine Stennis' hold on the Agency.

S: So, in other words, Symington could look like the white knight, protecting the interest of the people and the United States Senate while Stennis was moldering along.

H: As I said earlier, I don't know whether George was right about this, but it is not far fetched, in the light of this difficulty between the two men.

S: How did Agency relations with Symington proceed after that? Did he ever display any feeling, any indication that he felt that he had perhaps double-crossed somebody? Or did he ever in any way exhibit any ....

H: He never apologized to me, he never made any comments about it one way or the other. He and I got along all right, but Symington, you know, is in some ways, some measure responsible for the difficulties I had later ....

S: I'm very well aware.

H: On Chile and there is no evidence, even in retrospect, that he was malign about this; he really didn't know what he was asking here, what he was saying.

S: That may have been senility.

H: Yeah, and I think in the latter years there was some evidence of this kind of thing because I recalled -- I don't know whether you want to put anything like this in a history but you could at least hear it -- that at the time of my difficulties with the Justice Department, Symington was asked for a statement about his relationship, or rather his asking these questions of me and so forth, and when Ed Williams, my lawyer, received the statement

from Symington, and I asked him about it, he said, "Forget it. It's absolutely incomprehensible, so it isn't going to do him any good. It isn't going to do you any good."

S: He just got erratic.

H: Yeah.

S: You used the word "quixotic" once. I think that's quite a good word. Dick, how would you characterize the Vietnam-Laos problems as a whole in terms of what they presented to you as a DCI? Were they frustrating, particularly, or burdensome unduly? I'm talking about the operational side.

H: As DCI, my recollection is that I viewed the thing sort of as a whole, that's Vietnam and Laos, (as) very time-consuming, absorbing the Administration's (attention), something that you just couldn't seem to get away from -- sometimes satisfactory, sometimes unsatisfactory, but just a gnawing, grinding affair that everyday of your professional life, was in there somewhere.

S: Yeah. You know the general perception of you -- well your whole career in CIA -- has been that you've always had a greater preference in operations for FI, as opposed to CA. That you just preferred it. That therefore the CA side of Vietnam, which was enormous, was particularly troublesome and burdensome to you, that you didn't really want to grasp it if you could help it.

H: I think that your first part, the first part of your statement is accurate, that I preferred FI. That's where I started out and it was something that I was more interested in, how you did it and so forth, but this was personal predilection, temperamental if you like, rather than the other. But I did <u>not</u> have any feeling that the CA part of Vietnam and Laos was troublesome to me. I was very much in favor of the way we were going about

the war in Laos. I think the Agency had really an extraordinary success if you look at it in any objective terms, that if the United States hadn't let down the side in the end, we would have won in Laos. So that I was admiring of everything those fellows did; did everything I could to support them, sent good people there, and not only in [redacted] but also at Long Tieng. And I really had my heart in that one, and I was really very sad at the way the thing came out in the end. As for the Vietnamese side of things, the frustration there was this North Vietnamese aspect, the fact that we couldn't seem to really do anything to shake those fellows. It wasn't that I didn't like what we were trying, or didn't want to try new things or other things, it was simply that we weren't getting anywhere with it. But I honestly think it was properly descriptive of my attitude toward the thing, if you like, in CA, in that area, during this long period -- if you were to sort of put a frame around that -- I would have said that I had my heart far more in trying to really do something effective in the CA field than in any other thing during my entire time with the Agency. We were at war, we had something that we were trying to accomplish as a country, and I felt we should throw in everything we could possibly throw in, whether it was good, bad or indifferent. I think my reservations about certain types of CA activities had much more to do with other parts of the world and other times and whether we really should be putting in the kind of an effort we were putting in.

S: Different situations.

H: Different situations.

S: Not clear-cut war situations.

H: No. But I truly believe that in war-time or where you have military operations, you ought to push in the stack, everything you can possibly do, and no holds barred, let her go. If fellows are gonna lose their lives as privates

in the Army or the Marines, or airmen in the Air Force or Navy or anything else, it's at that point, it seems to me, that anything that you can do to to help them in the war, you ought to do. And whether it's steal, kill, everything else, let her go.

S: And apart from the lack of the success we had in high-level penetrations, getting into North Vietnam, you had considerable confidence, I gather, in the personnel, in the organization, that you pretty much inherited and administered and operated throughout the war.

H: I think so. I mean, it was. I don't think that ....

END OF SIDE 1 of TAPE 1

S: The capacity of the organization, and the people that you inherited and administered, and made whatever changes you felt were necessary to make, after you became DCI.

H: Yeah, because every high-level, or not high-level, but every important appointment to Vietnam, I gave a lot of personal attention to. And I can cite individual cases of this which I still remember. For example, it seemed to me at one stage in the proceedings that we needed a slightly different approach to the job of [redacted] so I decided to send out Tom Polgar as [redacted] Now the Ambassador at that time was Elsworth Bunker, and I knew Elsworth Bunker well and I knew Tom Polgar well, and I was mindful of the fact that the minute Bunker saw Polgar he was gonna think that I had played a trick on him. That this was not the kind of fellow he'd get along with, that he wouldn't have a good relationship with him, and he was wondering whether I perhaps was doing him a dirty trick, in short. But I knew very well that regardless of what his initial reaction was that Bunker would come to value Polgar very highly, indeed, because Polgar was just the kind of a fellow who could keep one foot in the intelligence camp and the

other foot in sort of the general intelligence-diplomatic camp and keep the whole thing going -- tough minded and all the rest of it. These were during the days when efforts were being made at peace, in the peace process, there were peace meetings in Paris, there were Czechs and Poles and all kinds of Russians, all kinds of people being involved in some efforts to bring about some kind of a peaceful resolution of this, and it struck me that Polgar was just the fellow to understand all those things and be helpful and so forth. Interestingly enough, that's exactly the way it turned out. Bunker told me some time later, he said, "When you sent me out Polgar, I didn't know what in the world you had in mind." He's always very soft spoken and very quiet and dignified and so forth and he said, "I came to have a great respect for that fellow." Anyway, that was my effort to put our best foot forward.

S: And mostly you were able to exercise it through careful personnel selections.

H: I saw no other way to do it. We could do all we could here in Washington to keep the President informed, keep the Cabinet informed, do all those chores we needed to do, but I could see no way that we could make a maximum contribution on the ground unless we sent the very best people we had out there, and that's what we did.

S: Dick, let's turn now and talk in the short time we've got left, and we may have to break off and start again sometime, about the progression from "Restless Youth" to MHCHAOS and the rest of it.

H: I think that would be better if we tried to do that at another session.

S: All right. Fine. Good.

H: Because what I'd like to do in the couple of minutes we've got here is to go back a bit on this question you raised about Laos and Vietnam. As one

looks back at the Vietnamese War, or the war in Southeast Asia, if you would prefer, there isn't much doubt that this was something that the United States should have been involved in, in some way or other. In other words, when the South Vietnamese and the Laotians and any of these people came to us and asked for support against what was clearly in those days the weight of the Soviet Union, Communist China, and the North Vietnamese Communists, it would not have been in the American tradition, at least the post-World War II tradition, to have turned these requests down. The question only is, did we help in the best way, possible, to achieve the objectives we had in mind? I have no doubt that this issue is going to be debated for decades. But we do have a very interesting contrast, in the way the war was fought in Laos and the way the war was fought in South Vietnam. I think a reasonable case can be made for the fact that if the United States had supported a Vietnamese solution to this matter from the very first day -- in other words, rather than moving from training into actual military commitment -- had attempted to keep the level of the war down, support the Vietnamese, teach them how to fight, teach them how to deal with these matters and so forth, that this might have had not only a different outcome but a far more satisfactory outcome. Because in the end, what was the problem here? The North Vietnamese kept sending soldiers south in large numbers, well trained, ready to fight, fighting on their own ground, the kind of a war that we had never understood and were quite unable to fight, where great fire power and so forth was of almost no relevance. It's easy to be a Monday morning quarterback and say things such as I'm saying now, but it does seem to me that my observations at least should be made, because I lived through so many years of this, had a chance to see it with all its warts and difficulties and problems, not only our domestic restlessness and divisiveness over the whole

affair, but something like this is going to eventuate again sometime. And what have we done to ourselves by this exposure, this failure? We're having trouble in Central America right now with the Congress over comparable things, only more so. And I would hope that some sensible, rational people would someday have a look at Vietnam in terms of a different approach, which might in the end have been a better approach. It might have prevented the North from taking over the South, for a whole variety of reasons, because if we had been backing them, then our diplomacy would have been of a different sort. It would have been to keep these other powers off their back, and we had some training leverage. But once we had committed our own manpower and our own blood and so on, we were into a quagmire there that was not only expensive in terms of human life but expensive in terms of U.S. prestige.

S: Well, in a sense, we took their cause away from them and made it our own and vitiated their drive to do anything about it.

H: That's exactly right and I think that a lot of the daggers that have been thrown at the corruption of the Vietnamese and all the rest of it, it's in most cases unfair for this reason that you say -- that they were getting a free ride here and what Oriental doesn't take a free ride gladly.

S: The corruption there is endemic throughout the whole of Asia ....

H: Not only do we not understand Orientals, in our society, but we constantly make mistakes every time we run up against them, the latest being the hostage crisis in Iran. We didn't understand the Persians; we don't understand the Persian mentality; we don't understand the way they do their business and then that result was that we made a hash of it.

S: Well, I think those are very wise remarks about the war in Vietnam, the

way we prosecuted it. I think that, as you say, if we'd let them fight the cause and assisted them as we did in Laos, if nothing else we would have prolonged the war for a very long time while they developed their own strength and their own independence, at considerably less cost to us, at the minimal cost.

H: One of the most unfortunate political episodes, it seemed to me of the era, was getting rid of Ngo Dinh Diem. There was a man whom we could talk to. He was a patriot, he was a Nationalist, who understood his people, and was not nearly as bad as he was painted. Maybe his brother, Nhu, was difficult and the "Dragon Lady" who was his wife, Madam Nhu, was mean and so forth, but in Oriental terms it was not all that bad. The Kennedy Administration really blew that one, and there is no question that getting Kennedy all wheed up over some self-immolating Buddhist monks, was a serious error. That was the thing that started the downward spiral, in my opinion. And then we had South Vietnamese Governments, Prime Ministers, just going through there just like a rotating door to a barroom. The whole fabric, interest, energy of Vietnamese society just being dissipated. Then the intrusion of a lot of Westerners, who in Oriental society, even though they knew we were trying to help them -- well, it's all been written about so much and I shouldn't even bore you or the tape with this, but I can't help thinking that there is a lesson for the United States to learn about other parts of the world, particularly Oriental parts of the world, and that is to start from the premise that we really don't understand them very well, and see what we can do in our educational system, particularly inside the Government, to train people to understand them better. And you remember I made that effort in the Agency at one time on two different occasions to insist that the training people set up a course in the culture of Asia and things of this kind.

Well, the thing would go for a while and then it would just die because people would not assign their officers there. They'd come to me and say, "Did you know that there's hardly anybody in the course now?" And I would say, "Why? And I insist that you send people there." "Well we really don't have time and besides these fellows know pretty well." And I would say, "Well, he doesn't speak Thai." "Well, no, he doesn't, but everybody in Thailand speaks English, so what difference does it make." In short, Americans learn about other people's culture, tradition, religion and motivation very hard, indeed. I remember, this was so much on my mind, that when I happened to visit in Afghanistan, when I was Ambassador in Tehran, and I was having a swim late one afternoon with Ted Elliot in his pool at the Embassy in Kabul, and I said, "You know, Ted, if I was a young Foreign Service Officer starting out these days, I would become an expert in Islam. What you guys in the Foreign Service have got to realize is that being Arabist anymore doesn't mean anything. You've got to understand Islam and all its manifestations. It not only cuts a wider spectrum, it's a belt right around the world. And these fellows are starting to get money now. It's the first time Islamic countries in history have ever had any money -- Iran, Saudi Arabia and so forth. From oil, if you like, but they're getting money; they're gonna become important. They're gonna have a real place on the world stage. Now, why don't you suggest to the Foreign Service that they do give a good course in Islam and really train these fellows about it?" Well, I don't know if anything was ever done about it. I've mentioned it two or three times since. I doubt very much that much is being done about it. But if it's not, we're never gonna get straight with these things. End of my peroration.

S: Well, come back to one, I'm gonna underline one point you made which I think is highly significant in terms of understanding your approach to the

problems in Vietnam, the operational problems, which is that you've drawn a distinction between Vietnam operations, operations in Vietnam, and those in Laos, very much in favor of those in Laos, which says, in effect, that you think well-constructed, well-directed PM operations are highly desirable in the right situation.

H: Absolutely, and particularly when you have a military situation, or a paramilitary situation. No question about it.

S: I don't think most people perceive that about you.

H: I don't think there's any doubt about it.

S: That's good to ....

H: It's the only way to do it.

S: Good point to straighten out. Good, Dick. Thank you very much.

H: Thank you, Jack. God bless you.