

An Interview with Roy Wehrle Volume I (Sessions 1-4)

Interview with Interviewee Leroy Wehrle

VRV-A-L-2013-098.01

Interview # 1: October 30, 2013

Interviewer: Christopher N. Breiseth

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Breiseth: It is October 30, 2013. We are at the home of Roy and JoAnn Wehrle, 2001 Bates Avenue, Springfield, Illinois, 62704, and we are beginning what will be a several-day interview with Roy. We will call each other Roy and Chris on this recording. I'm Christopher N. Breiseth, the interviewer. I live in Ticonderoga, New York. Roy and I are old friends from days of what was then known as Sangamon State University, and have stayed in close touch over the years. We are going to cover the first session, the early stages of Roy's life, leading up to his role in Southeast Asia, beginning with an extensive period in Laos. We probably are going to spend on this first session, at least begin, his time in Laos. We will then move to his time in Vietnam, where he was the Economic Counselor to the Ambassador, United States Ambassador to Vietnam. Those dates, Roy, if I'm correct, you were there from 1964 to 1967. Let us begin. Roy, tell me who you are and where you came from.

Wehrle: Well, my name is Leroy Snyder Wehrle, Snyder is my mother's maiden name. I was born in Belleville, Illinois, actually about February 5, 1932. My family is largely German on my father's side and also on my mother's side. My mother comes from Burlington, Iowa, where her father was a dentist up there, and he is of Scotch stock, as well as German stock.

My father is from German stock that came over from my great grandfather, who came over in 1842, to escape all the wars in Europe at that time. He was a traveling salesman, selling clocks, as a kind of a peddler, out in the countryside around Belleville, where he settled because there were Germans in that area. He bought his way out of the Civil War, and was very prosperous during the Civil War. His son went into the business, and

then his son's son went into the business, which would have been my uncle and my father. So that was the third generation in the Wehrle Jewelry Store in Belleville, Illinois. I was expected to go into that, but it turned out that I didn't. So I think that's my background.

Breiseth: All right. Tell us a little about your schooling.

Wehrle: Well, I went to the Belleville schools, obviously, at that time, and my fondest memory of the high school is of the wonderful teachers that we had. I think we don't appreciate, at this time, how wonderful they were. They were mostly what were called maiden teachers (laughs), in the sense that they were all single. My mother had taught high school around the country, Ironwood, up in the northern peninsula of Michigan, and way out on the western edge of Iowa, then down in Harrisburg and up in Chicago. She taught art in high school, but during the Depression, it wasn't allowed for a woman to have a teaching job if her husband had a job, so she had to give up her teaching at the high school, which is just a sign of how different those times were.

I had three English teachers who, each one was better than the other, and they inculcated in me such a love of literature that came from their enthusiasm for the subject, even though I didn't understand what was going on at that time. But most formative for me was the fact that it was the Depression, and that I had a teacher whose name was Lenore Kreige, probably K-r-e-i-g-e. She taught us history, American history, and we talked about the paradox of poverty. The paradox of plenty and poverty in the country we were growing up in, because it was the height of the Depression, or still leftover Depression, when I went to school, in '38 and '37 and '39. And she talked about this paradox and that paradox stuck in my head. Why is it all of this richness all around me, every place I looked, and yet, all these people and these long lines that my mother called WPA lines. And so I'm sure that had an effect on me when I got farther into college and started really trying to figure out which way made sense in life.

I had another government teacher named Jess Miller. They called her Red Miller because she was a liberal, and that was considered really bad in those days.

Breiseth: Red meant something different in those days than the red state, blue state distinction now.

Wehrle: That's right, it did not mean red state, blue state. (laughing) It meant you were what was later called a "pinko". You were high, way up on the left, and maybe a communist, which she wasn't.

Breiseth: Anticipating, you also had a French teacher, who prepared you for later service in French-speaking Vietnam.

Wehrle: I thank you for that, because that was really formative. In fact, I have, sitting next to me here, the books that we used in that French class. It was such an amazing class because

we started as freshmen together, maybe fifteen of us, and we went all the way through high school. Four years of French, they allowed us to do, because we had the fifteen students and we stuck together. So we read the originals of a lot of the very famous ones, a lot of Daudet. And this was another teacher, who teaches—teachers that are great teach their enthusiasm, and that is infectious. She taught the love of the French language and she was a perfectionist on pronunciation. If she said it was *de long a jour*, you had to say, *de long a jour*, and you would go over that, over that, over that, until it was impregnated in your brain. So, I learned very good pronunciation. She was of Norwegian extraction, her name was Marge Skaar, with two A's, and she was just a remarkable teacher. We had an incredible time going through that and reading Daudet, and remembering *La Dernière Classe*, *The Last Class*, before the Germans came into Alsace and Lorraine, and how sad that was. We read *Les oberles*; we read all kinds of things from the various classics, in smaller pieces. I have those books right here with me today, and I still go back and look at some of those. But that turned out to be, as you said, Chris, formative for me because when I had to speak French, I had a good foundation for it.

Breiseth: And people thought that you were actual, a French speaker.

Wehrle: A couple mistaken people thought that I was French.

Breiseth: Parenthetically, given my interest as a historian, there was a lot of anti-German sentiment after World War I, including in the part of Illinois where you grew up.

Wehrle: Yes.

Breiseth: Was German offered at the high school, and did you consider taking that, rather than French?

Wehrle: German was offered. German went out as a regular language during the First World War. All the papers had been in German, and that all stopped entirely, and it was just what you said. But it was taught, and I was beyond that. In the Second World War, that didn't happen, so I was beyond that, but the Germanness of Belleville had changed during that period. But the memories of the Depression, which has nothing to do with that, those have been with me all my life.

My parents, as I said, were German, and they inculcated in me, a love of nature that they had, and that's, I think, a German trait. In fact, it was primarily their religion. My father and uncle were not religious, but they were religious in terms of nature, but they didn't say it, they just did it. So we went for walks on Sunday afternoons often, often by the old Star Brewery and then back through the Star Brewery woods, and along Richland Creek, almost every Sunday. We went for long walks and short walks and all kinds of stuff, and in the woods we'd see these men sitting there with their little fire in front of them and then a tin, like the Coca-Cola signs, as their shelter. Of course I would ask, "What are they?" And, of course, I was told they were hobos; that was the word that

was used in those days. And they were men who had left their homes, abandoned their family in many cases because they were unable to get work and so ashamed of their situation. They were all over town and, in fact, in front of my uncle's house, over on 305 East D Street, I'd often see these chalk hieroglyphics on the walk, all chalk, all kinds of signs that I couldn't understand. That was the hobo language, of telling hobos where they could get food and where they should stay away from. I would walk around to the back porch of my uncle's house and often find a hobo sitting on the porch having some meal that they had given him.

I remember also, vivid memories of driving across what was called the free bridge in St. Louis, which is now south of the I-70 Bridge, and looking down and seeing, along the cobblestone wharf down there, next to all the fur warehouses which used to be along the Mississippi, all these hovels. They were all, again, the people that had no place to live, and they were called "Hooverilles." That's what my dad said, "There's a Hooverville." Well, you could not see the wharf at all. Right down to the water's edge, that was covered with Coca-Cola signs and all the rest, the Pepsi Cola signs, that they bent and then they lived under that thing. So, for a young kid, that was an incredible experience, to see all that and to see the WPA [Works Progress Administration] lines around. So, in terms of what I grew up in, this paradox of plenty was just in me all the way around.

Breisetsh: Just to consolidate this point, and maybe this is too general a question, but casting forward to what we're going to talk about over the next couple of days, what do you think—of what importance was this exposure to the paradox of plenty and poverty in America, as you spent your time in Southeast Asia?

Wehrle: Well, in some sense that got me to Southeast Asia, because when I graduated from college and when I went in the military and all that stuff, I was thinking about what do I do. I either had the choice of going in the store, which was expected of me, or not. But in college, I got hooked on economics, and that hook came from the paradox of plenty. Why can't we figure this out? Why can't we do better than we're doing? And so, once I got hooked on that as an intellectual challenge, but also a moral challenge; when I graduated from Yale, then I decided that I wanted to work in the developed countries. It looks naïve now, but it seemed to me then, that except for the racial problems, we had the problem knocked, to put it in the short, and the rest of the world could benefit from what we had learned. That seems kind of naïve to me now, but that was my motivation, and so I really wanted to deal with the paradox of plenty in a larger venue. I wanted to go into developmental work around the world.

Breisetsh: Let's not get you to college yet. Let's look at high school in terms of activities you were in that developed some of your leadership skills and your relations with your peers.

Wehrle: Well, I think what later turned out to be leadership skills, came more out of the Boy Scouts than it did anything else. I was introduced to the Boy Scouts when I was eleven

years old. I went in, and I learned that I could become patrol leader and I could rise up through that, and I enjoyed that. I found that I was, well what I just said, I enjoyed it.

In high school, I worked in the yearbook, but I really did not take part in many extracurricular. I was a very shy person. I came from a situation where I had not had—I just didn't have any confidence in myself at all, and I had no reason to have confidence. I did all right in school, but in terms of social and interacting with people, I was a failure. In high school, getting with the yearbook and working in those things, that helped me gain some confidence.

Breiseth: But scouting was the big...

Wehrle: Scouting was the big thing, getting Eagle Scout, and being able to be out in nature and walk.

Breiseth: I'm sure the list is too long, but can you remember some of your merit badges?

Wehrle: I had all the ones that were required for Eagle, you know, the lifesaving and all those kinds of things. I got one in gardening, and that was during the period of the victory gardens. I had a big garden in a field that was right next to where we lived, on the outskirts of Belleville, and I know that I really enjoyed that. I was very proud when the Merit Badge Counselor came out and looked at my long rows of corn and all my good squash and tomatoes and stuff. So that was a good feeling.

Breiseth: My sense is that gardening remained important for you, even as a metaphor, for a lot of what you and JoAnn [Roy's wife] have done.

Wehrle: Well, I guess that's probably true. I never thought about it but it probably is, yeah.

Breiseth: Let's get you from Belleville to college. Where did you go as an undergraduate?

Wehrle: I went across the river, over to Washington University in St. Louis, where my uncle had graduated in '08, in engineering. He then went in the business. He was a very good mathematician. My dad had gone for a year. My father wanted to be an artist, so he went there. Then he went down to Cincinnati, did the Art Institute, then he went to New York Art Institute. And then the war came along and that was the end of that.

I went to Washington University without even questioning it. It wasn't like today, it was just, "So where are you going to go?" Well, my dad went there, I'll go there, it's a good school, and I'm lucky I can go there. I didn't have to pass any tests. I just sent an application over and got in, and that was it. It was very, very simple in those days. But at Washington University my life changed. I was rejected by all the fraternities because I was such a social clod. I didn't know how to make the right words or do the right things. My dad and uncle had both been Phi Deltas, and so I thought I'd probably go there. Well, they turned me right down; this guy is hopeless. But at the last minute, on the last day,

one fraternity said, "We have an empty space, would you like to take it?" Well, I said, "Yeah, I'll take it." That was Kappa Alpha, which was a southern fraternity that was there.

That whole experience, I think, was very important to me because being kicked in the butt like that, it really made me wake up and say what's going on; why can't I do these things? Later, I became president of that fraternity, and I was editor of the *Centennial Yearbook* [a special 1953 edition] at Washington University, the *Hatchet*, and I was very, very active in all kinds of things. So, I kind of got a sense, I'm going to try these things and see if I can do them, and it turned out that I could. I was not the normal president of a fraternity because usually those are very socially adept, and I was not that kind of person. But somehow, I was able to gain their confidence, and that gave me of course confidence. We had some tough times, but it all worked out very well. We had a good fraternity.

The thing I'd like to mention about that, which is lost now today too, is you have to think of who were my fraternity brothers at that time. I went there in 1949 and all my fraternity brothers, almost all of them, except for a few, were all World War II veterans. They had been through hell. They didn't come to college to be playboys. They came to college to make a life for themselves.

Breiseth: And make up for lost time.

Wehrle: And make up for lost time, exactly. They knew where they wanted to go. They knew how to get there. They were determined to get there. They set marvelous models for us young kids coming in. Sure, we went out over to the Dixie Bar on Friday night and drank beer and heard wonderful Dixieland. But the rest of the week, I mean you studied, you did your work, and they were there to help—that was a wonderful experience, and it's very different today.

Breiseth: Now, this is asking you to drop your normal humility, which I have been aware of ever since I first met you. Can you say something about why these older guys, who had gone through the war, which they probably didn't talk a lot about...

Wehrle: No, they didn't.

Breiseth: Why they would have selected you as house president? A younger kid, shy. What started emerging that they recognized?

Wehrle: Well, I tried to model myself without trying, knowing I was doing it to them, obviously, because that's what modeling is. But, by the time I became president, they were largely gone. This was a younger group coming in, that was coming in then. I don't know the answer to that question, but somehow they had trust in me. I mean, I think they had a sense that I was a straight shooter. I don't know what that meant, but somehow, that I would, I don't know, be fair because we had some thefts in the house. We had really

some serious troubles in the house, which is not unusual, and we had to deal with that in a fair, equitable fashion. I'm not sure I know the answer to that, but somehow they had confidence that I would treat them fairly.

Breisetsh: Can you recall any professors that had a particularly great impact on you?

Wehrle: Yes, I can. That's a real helpful question to me. My first class in economics, the first test I took, I got an F on it, and I thought what's going on? It was all abstract, and I was trying to make it realistic. It took me a while to realize that economists are up in the stars someplace in their abstract theories. Once that was explained to me, then I did okay on that class. But then, I took a course in labor economics, which was probably more formative for me than anything else I did in college. I took all kinds of courses in college; I took calculus, and I was in retailing; I was going into the jewelry store. Well, retailers don't take calculus. Well, why did I take calculus? I don't know. I'd heard that calculus was a beautiful subject, had an aesthetic quality to it, even though I didn't know that word at that time. I took it and I loved it. Well, it turned out later that, if I had not taken that calculus, I could never have gotten to become an economist. So, that was fortuitous.

I took courses in science because I really thought that I wanted to become an astronomer at one point, and I was interested in science, always interested in science. But I took this course in labor economics and found out that American labor had been treated like dirt, almost like slaves early on. I heard about the fact they couldn't take their potty breaks, and they couldn't do this in the plant, and it was hot. I read all about the busters that came in and broke the strikes and everything. I'd heard of that from my father earlier, because he'd told me a couple of stories where he witnessed that happening. All that had a tremendous impact on me because it was why were we treating these poor people that way. It didn't make any sense.

Then, as I got more and more interested in economics, labor history was taught by a chap by the name of Professor Sobel, and it was a great class. It taught capitalism fairly, was not against it, but it also told about the warts, and they were more than warts as far as I was concerned, and about the union movement and how important that union movement was. Those days are hard to realize now, but unions were a big, big thing in our country. What they did to change the social contract and everything else in our country, and the part that was played by the Democrats in that was big for me.

Breisetsh: You must have encountered my hero and friend, Frances Perkins.

Wehrle: Yes, I did, the history of what she did.

Breisetsh: As Secretary of Labor.

Wehrle: So I went on and I applied to one of the teachers who was teaching the "History of Economic Thought," as a graduate course on Saturday morning, and I said, "Could I sit in

on this one?" They wouldn't let you do that today in most places. So, I dedicated my Saturday mornings to going and sitting in the class, and I was in heaven. I was absolutely in heaven. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before. I could learn about Marx and what that was, learn about Ricardo, all these great names that I'd heard about in earlier classes, and to try to figure out how those pieces all meshed together and how they evolved to create a theory. Well, that was the hook that got me, I think. So, when I went into the military later, and we were in antiaircraft, and we were up by the Hanford Plant in Washington on weekends. Sitting out on the desert, waiting for the Russian planes to come, which was never going to happen and we knew it, I studied German. I had to have two languages in those days, and so I studied German and decided that I wanted to go to graduate school. I sent a letter home, called home and said I didn't want to go into the store. And that was—that. I got into Yale, luckily, by the skin of my teeth.

Breisetsh: Now, say something about your military experience.

Wehrle: Well, everybody went in the military in those days. That was the way it was.

Breisetsh: This comes at the end of your baccalaureate experience?

Wehrle: No. I went into ROTC right when I went to college, and a lot of my friends were doing that. We all figured we were going to go in the military because everybody did then, so why not go in as an officer rather than an EM [enlisted man]. Then I did that and went in and went down to Fort Bliss for my basic training. Then got sent up to Hanford in the antiaircraft defense, using guns, 120mm, which were enormous size guns. They fire up to 35,000 feet, and they were used in the defense of Antwerp. They were antiques by that time, and we could see the Nike Battalions around us. We could see a Nike Battalion, then there would be an Antiaircraft Battalion around the big Hanford plutonium plants that were up in that area.

The military was good for me. It taught me discipline, taught me not to make excuses for blunders that I might do. It taught me a lot of good things, and I always have valued that. I felt that was an important service to the country, even though where I was, was kind of a joke.

Breisetsh: So you came out a second lieutenant?

Wehrle: I came out a second lieutenant, and then came out of the military two years later, as a first lieutenant. A lot of my friends got sent to Korea because the war was going on. I could have been sent to Korea as a forward observer, and I might not be here now. So, I was, in some sense, very, very lucky.

Breisetsh: So your service was up in Hanford?

Wehrle: Yes. I served two years there.

Breiseth: Which, of course, is still a spot we read about because of nuclear problems there.

Wehrle: Oh, there's waste all over the place.

Breiseth: Why did you pick Yale?

Wehrle: I applied to Harvard, and I applied to Yale, and I applied to one other. I just thought they were good places. I didn't know much about academics; I didn't know much about school. I just knew that, if I wanted to be an economist, I had to get—I wanted to get a doctorate. Well, Yale wouldn't look at me as a doctorate, because I had no background for it. I didn't have anything. But they let me in as an MA because I was an American. That was lucky where it played for me because the MA program, which was run by Professor Robert Triffin, was taking in central bank type people from all over the world. And they had to have a few Americans, because most Americans didn't want to be in the MA program.

Breiseth: So, an affirmative action program?

Wehrle: So, it was affirmative action; I got in. The really neat part of that story was that, once I got in, I made friends with the doctoral students. It was a small class of maybe eleven or ten, and they took pity on me. Here's this poor kid from the Midwest; he's got mud between his toes; he doesn't know anything. But he seems kind of smart, and he seems to be really interested. So, they would tutor me on basic economic theory, which I just didn't understand. And then, after they got me a long ways, they went to their theory professor, whose name was William Fellner, and they said, "We've got this oaf here that is pretty good, and we think we should let him into the doctorate; we think he can do it." Fellner accepted their suggestion.

Breiseth: Extraordinary.

Wehrle: And they let me in the doctorate program. Now, you could no more do that today than you could fly.

Breiseth: That's fabulous.

Wehrle: It's an incredible story really, and that made all the difference because, once I got the doctorate, then that opens doors that a masters unfortunately doesn't open.

Breiseth: Did you have a specialization as a PhD candidate in economics?

Wehrle: Yeah, I think I did. It was primarily on economic development.

Breiseth: It wasn't international economics though?

Wehrle: It really wasn't, no. I don't know if I had a specialty. I wrote a thesis on finance, but that was just because my thesis advisor was in that field.

Breiseth: That's how those things work.

Wehrle: Yes.

Breiseth: The same with me.

Wehrle: I wanted to get out in two years if I could, and I knew I could do it then. So, it was on insurance companies, but no, I don't think I really did have a specialty.

Breiseth: On the socialization, since you raised that early, what did those graduate years at Yale do to build your confidence and your inclination to deal with other people?

Wehrle: Well, those were, of course, as graduate school is, introverted years.

Breiseth: Exactly. That's why I'm asking the question.

Wehrle: You're just entirely into yourself. I remember times I got very discouraged at the dryness and the deadness of the whole thing and trying to learn this and learn that and all that sort of stuff. I wrote a couple times to a couple top economists, and they were very nice. They wrote back to me, and they said "Stay with it; it's going to work out," you know, "you'll make this all work to not be as dead as it seems to you now." But it didn't build confidence very much because I was with people that were a lot better than I was, and I had to just run and work very, very hard to keep up with them. By the time I was done, I was essentially sick by the fourth year. I mean I'd worked so hard, but to get it, that built enormous confidence.

Breiseth: Sure, sure.

Wehrle: I received honors at graduation and was appreciated by top folks like Jim Tobin and Art Okun. Well, you're right in this sense. As I learned that I could communicate with those people and play ball on their ball field at the level that they played as I learned that, and they accepted me, and they accepted me as a peer, that did build very, very much confidence in me.

Breiseth: Which strikes me as very much the same process that you were going through with your fraternity, with the veterans.

Wehrle: Maybe.

Breiseth: That you took them as models and reached up to acquire the skills and confidence that they showed.

Wehrle: Well, I think that's a fair point. I watched and tried to learn, and I think that's a good point. I never thought of it.

Breiseth: Now, before we take our first pause, where does JoAnn come in all this?

Wehrle: My better half? Well, JoAnn and I met at Yale. She was a technical typist, and she came in to work at the Cole's Foundation where I had a research job. The Cole's Foundation used to be out in Colorado. They were fundamental in changing American economics toward the quantitative. They moved to Yale and Jim Tobin, who was to become a Nobel Laureate economist, was the head of the foundation. He was my thesis advisor, for which I was very, very lucky. He was looking for a technical typist, and JoAnn and her sister had come to New Haven. They just were looking for jobs, that's all. And she got a job as a technical typist, to type all the mathematics, which was very difficult to do in those days because you had to put integral signs in, and you had to put sub-commas and all that kind of stuff.

Breisetsh: And correct.

Wehrle: And correct it all. You had to do eight carbons and then you had to correct each carbon. It was very meticulous. JoAnn was a very good technical typist. She'd worked at University of Minnesota for a while before, so they hired her, and so that's how I met her. It turned out that where her desk was, was on the way into the library at Cole's, where I had to go every day. So, that was really nice for me. I got to know her a little bit, and then we worked on a couple of projects together.

Breisetsh: It sounds like an arranged marriage.

Wehrle: Arranged in heaven I guess, yeah. We never had the proper type of romance because I was working all the time. Then she started working with me on the thesis; when we got thesis. She typed in all my cards. Those were the days of the IBM data cards that you put in the machine, punch cards, and she typed all those up for me, of all the data I had from all these four insurance companies, which was an enormous job. We had to work on the computer, ten o'clock at night to two o'clock, or something like that, because that's the only time I could get on the 360, which was a new mainframe they had there, to work on that. So, we got to know each other more by working together than by going out and romancing.

Breisetsh: It sounds like an early example of a computer marriage.

Wehrle: That's right. I hadn't thought about that. And when there was a fire in the neighborhood, we'd go running out, see the fire, and then we'd run back, and we'd get some Chinese food and come back and work. We enjoyed each other and fell in love.

Breisetsh: When were you married?

Wehrle: Best thing that ever happened in my life. We were married on August 29, 1959.

Breisetsh: Fifty-nine. And you got your degree when?

Wehrle: I got my degree in June of that year. My mother came up and my uncle came up to Yale. It was a proud day for me.

Breiseth: And your father released you from the jewelry business.

Wehrle: They were very nice about that. They said, "If you don't want to go, don't. We're not putting any pressure on you at all," and they sold the business. They didn't sell it; they went out of business. It would have been a hundred years in business just the next year or so. They were very good to me. They always were; they always gave me a leash to go. But meeting JoAnn was the best thing that ever happened because that was just wonderful.

Breiseth: We're going to take our first pause and see that this is actually recording.

(pause in recording)

Breiseth: This is a resumption of our first session, the first morning of our interview with Roy Wehrle. This is Chris Breiseth. It's the thirtieth of October, 2013. Roy, we've just gotten you to Laos with JoAnn, newly married, and you've given us a sense of the beauty of the country, and the interesting people that you really became very close to, not only while you were there, but you have played a role in bringing some of those folks over to America. So, this is a commitment that was at the personal level that you've kept over all these years. Start describing your role. You've talked about being an economic analyst. How does that open up into the wider responsibilities you carry?

Wehrle: Let me first continue and take the word you said, *beautiful country*, and it was and is a beautiful country. The valleys and the hills to the north, and the rice paddies--you have to really see rice paddies in the sunlight, glinting in the water before they're transplanted, against the background of hills, to really realize how beautiful that country is. But it's the people also that were beautiful. We were really fascinated by the softness of the people, their humor. We took Lao lessons, and learned how to speak what might be called pigeon Lao. It's a very simple language, monosyllabic, a little bit like the German language. If you want to say, "What is ink?" in Lao, you'd say, "*What's black water?*" You'd be right, that's exactly what it is. It's very, very easy. There's no verbs, except for the present tense, and if you want to say past tense, you just put the word *already* in front, and that makes it past tense. It makes a lot of sense.

So on weekends, we would often go out into the villages, which were farther out the road where we were, into the Mekong Plain. JoAnn would ride on the back of my bicycle, and we would bike out on these laterite roads. Laterite is an iron substance that they made the roads out of. It's the same color as in Georgia, it's a red, a red color, and the laterite dust would get all over us. We'd go out to the village, and we'd spend the afternoon with the villagers, practicing Lao and watching just the day go by.

I remember one time the kids, the children, were just—well, anyplace in the world, the children are just magnificent, and they were in their playfulness. They found a big grasshopper, probably as long as seven inches, a big, big, grasshopper. And they'd run together, laughing and giggling, and they'd throw that grasshopper up into the air and it would fly, and, of course, grasshoppers fly in a descending pattern, so it would fly in a long glide path out. They'd run out into the rice field and get it again, then bring it back. They did this over and over again. I remember about an hour later, they'd throw the grasshopper up, and it would descend almost vertically. It was just completely exhausted, and they thought that was so funny.

So, we did have a sense of the people and of living, what life was like in a Buddhist country like that, another culture. We studied Buddhism to some extent, went to the *wats*, which is a name for the Buddhist temples, and worked with the bonzes, which were the young boys that are going into the six months that they would go into a temple to do meditation and learn about Buddhism. They would always hold our hands; they like to hold your hands. Men hold hands over there, not women and men. That was something we had to get used to. But they wanted to speak English, so that was fun; we'd do that a lot.

In terms of the government work, I worked a fair amount with the hill tribes up north, in terms of doing supplies for them, and getting to know "Pop" Buell, which I'll mention later on. Pop Buell was the American who lived up there. His name was B-u-e-l-l, Pop Buell, that was his nickname. But we'll come back to him a little bit later. This episode in Laos, for me, came to an end on August ninth or fifteenth, 1960, when a young lieutenant by the name of Kong Le, pulled a coup against the government and took it over. So, we woke up that morning with martial music on the radio and in French and Lizo announcements of a coup.

Breisetsh: Spell his name.

Wehrle: K-o-n-g, and second name, L-e. Kong Le. He complained that the Americans were giving aid to the Army, but it didn't get to the troops because the Army siphoned it all off in terms of corruption, money, sold the materials we brought, so they didn't have boots. They were paratroopers, and you can't be a paratrooper without boots. That was kind of the line that he took, and he had control of Vientiane. He didn't have control of some of the southern cities, but from that point on, my first tour in Laos was abruptly changed. We were in a city which was occupied by a government which was inimical to the United States, rather than being friendly to us. It wasn't very long after that, that the dependents were evacuated because of the danger. So, JoAnn was sent out. She was going to take the road down to the ferry to go across to Nong Khai, which is a village on the other side of the Mekong, in Thailand, and then take the train on down, where there was a train. But the river was too high for the ferry to operate, so she then had to wait and get ferried by American aircraft, out of the airport in Vientiane. But she was gone.

We were down to a bunch of men trying to run the AID mission, but there wasn't much to do.

I remember one time, later on in the year, we saw the troops of Phoumi. Phoumi was the government troops that were knocked out of combat, coming back in. The American planes were circling. We were having lunch, with our feet hanging over the banks, looking down at the Mekong, and we said, "Oh, look there!" There were some planes circling, right almost on the horizon, you could see their parachutes opening. That was Phoumi's troops coming up to try to retake Vientiane. They did, in the end, do that, but it took them many weeks.

Breiset: Spell Phoumi's name.

Wehrle: P-h-o-u-m-i, General Phoumi. He was the powerhouse in Laos at that time, military powerhouse. So in time, they came up, and we were evacuated when the fighting took place. There was fighting in Vientiane, but it was not very serious fighting.

Breiset: You were evacuated to where?

Wehrle: To Bangkok. So, I was back down with JoAnn. We went then, down to Penang Island, down off of Thailand, for a wonderful Christmas, to be together again. We had been married, by that time, just a year and a half. We'd been separated for six months, so it was kind of a traumatic start to our marriage. But we had a wonderful time together down there.

Then, on January fifteenth, they selected a small group to go back into Vientiane, to try, to hope that the government was going to retake it, which they did. Then we would be able to help start aid coming back in again. So, on January fifteenth or something like that, I was selected as a small group, probably because I was younger, to go back into Vientiane. Then I was engaged primarily in rice drops over to the Meo, up in the mountains, because they'd been cut off. Some of their crops had been destroyed in the fighting.

Breiset: So, arranging for American planes to drop rice?

Wehrle: Yes. We had a CIA contract with a company, which was created by the CIA, called *Air America*. They provided the air transportation service very well to us all over Laos, regular runs between the different province capitals. I say capitals, but they were little, tiny places of maybe twenty thousand people, fifteen thousand people. Then, we had C-46s, which is a two engine plane, cargo plane, that was a bigger model of the C-47, and we filled those with pallets of rice, sacks of rice put on pallets. I would get in the plane with them, and I would act as cargo guy. They were on rollers, and when copilot said "Drop," he would come low over these villages. Then I would kick with my heels, and that would roll off the pallet into the air and drop down to these people. So, it had come a long ways from being an economist, doing economic development work, to where I

was at that point, but that was my job and that's what I did. I was certainly not complaining about it, but I had no idea where this was all going to go.

Then, one day, on a rainy, kind of monsoonish day, as I remember, probably in March, I got a letter through the postal telegraph, what they called the PTT. The cable came from Walter Heller in Washington, who was the Economic Counselor to the President, in the Council of Economic Advisers.

Breiseth: So we're now into '61.

Wehrle: We're now into '61, probably March of '61. And it said, "Would you like to come to work for President Kennedy as part of the Council of Economic Advisers, as a senior economist?" Well, the answer to that was pretty obvious, "Yes! I'm not doing anything here," and it would mean that JoAnn and I would be back together again. So that was not a very difficult problem to solve. It was signed by Jim Tobin and Walter Heller. Jim Tobin had been my thesis advisor, and it was obviously through that connection that I got the job.

I said, "Yes," and went back there, so then I was back in Washington for maybe two years. Well, I was back there all through the rest of '61 and all the way into '62, until probably about a year and a half, something like that. My job was to be an analyst, and I worked on the President's Economic Report. I remember going into Jim Tobin's office. And I worked with another economist who came out of Harvard, just graduated, whose name was Richard Cooper, who subsequently became a very famous economist at Harvard and who worked in the Washington office when I was out in Vietnam later, so his name will come back in again. He was a brilliant economist, and he was so much smarter than I was, that I couldn't even imagine it. His knowledge of the theory was way advanced compared to mine. So, I worked with those two to do the economic report and Jim Tobin was doing the major writing. But my head was splitting every day when I got back. I could hardly concentrate because I'd been in this humid climate out in Vietnam, then came back, and something happened in my sinuses or something. I remember, it was just so painful. I wanted to do really good, but it was so hard to concentrate on it. I had to really bring myself back up to par because I was really not that sharp.

Anyhow, I worked on commodity prices around the world. I went to Rome for some conferences, working with a couple secretaries of commerce and other things, and did a lot of stuff. Nothing very important, but a lot of different types of things. In terms of learning about government, it was fantastic because we were the eyes and ears of a small organization. Nobody was worried about the Council of Economic Advisers. They had no political clout at all, except through what Walter Heller had with Kennedy. And he did have quite a bit. So, we could be kind of watchers and observers on all kinds of different things, and I could learn a lot about things. Like, for example, we worked for about three months to get rid of a tax on oil going out of the United States. I think that's

what it was, or a subsidy or something, some aspect of helping the American oil industry. We had it all set, and we had agreed on it. The president tentatively agreed on it, said, "Send it over to Lyndon Johnson at the vice president's office," and we never saw it again. It was gone. It just disappeared and never came back, for obvious reasons of Texas, et cetera. So, I learned a lot about that.

Breiseth: Meaning the power of Texas oil.

Wehrle: The power of Texas oil, sure.

Breiseth: In the person of Lyndon Johnson.

Wehrle: That's right, yeah, and that was the way government worked. I learned a lot. I learned some about traveling and stuff like that, and it was a wonderful experience. I mean I was the most fortunate guy in the world to have that kind of job and that kind of education. As time went on, I went down to South America on a trip with Ken Hansen. His name was H-a-n-s-e-n, subsequently died, a wonderful fellow who was assistant director of Budget Bureau. We traveled around to four major capitals in South America and did some negotiations. That was during Kennedy's Alliance for Progress down there. I saw how Kennedy ran that thing, parts of which I liked, parts of which I didn't, but I really got enmeshed into some of that stuff. Through some of those things, I got to know people in the White House because, although I never got into the White House with Kennedy the way Walter Heller and Jim Tobin did, they were the advisers, we did the preparations for his press conferences, which in those days were real press conferences. We don't really have those any more, in my view. We would do warm-ups, and we would pose the questions for the president, what he might get, and then we would practice those. Then, Walter Heller would go over it with the president, and he would practice them with the president. Then, when the president was on, we would all watch on the television set and cheer for when our side won and boo when the Treasury won. Well, usually the Treasury won, and they were always opposite of what we wanted. It was really, really very educational, and I learned an awful lot.

But, getting to know White House people, they had a problem in Laos because Congress was really kicking up its heels about the corruption in Laos. It became a major issue. There were big hearings, and the whole question of constraining Russia, or the Soviet Union in those days, was becoming a big, big thing. Fears about China, but China was considered not the big danger, it was the Soviet Union. The U.S. sought to create a belt of nations to protect Southeast Asia, so that we didn't have what we later called the domino effect of all the Southeast Asia nations falling. And so the White House decided that they wanted a new aid treaty in Laos, so we could create economic stability and protect our dollars in terms of corruption.

They knew that I spoke French, and they knew that I had been to Laos. So, you can imagine the White House, who do you send out to do that? Do you send a Foreign

Service officer to do that? Well, they didn't trust the ambassador out there. This was before Leonard Unger, it's U-n-g-e-r, was ambassador. He had just been sent there, but they didn't know him. It's very hard for the White House to run distant operations like that. Either they rely on the bureaucracy of the State Department or they don't. They tend to be suspicious of the striped pants, if they're going to do the job, that they will carry out the president's orders because, as far as the White House is concerned, the State Department tends to be too friendly to the country.

Well anyhow, they decided they were going to send me out there because they knew me. They called me over. I'll never forget Carl Kaysen, that's K-a-y-s-e-n, was a Harvard economist, and he was working for Kennedy. Michael Forrestal was working with him, and they were special assistants to the president, so they had an office right in the White House.

Breisetsh: And this Michael Forrestal is the son of James Forrestal?

Wehrle: That's correct.

Breisetsh: Who was Secretary of Defense, the first Secretary of Defense?

Wehrle: The first Secretary of Defense, yes that's true. Michael Forrestal was the son of the James Forrestal.

I walked into the office and here was—I'd met Michael Forrestal, he knew me, but I didn't know Carl Kaysen very well. Carl Kaysen had a phone on each ear, and I thought, what is going on? How can he possibly be talking to two different people at the same time? I never did find out how that worked, but that was my first impression of the frenetic atmosphere.

Breisetsh: I think Lyndon Johnson was famous for that as well.

Wehrle: Anyhow, there were just telephones ringing, people going, and I thought this is crazy, it was craziness. So, I sat down, and they told me what he wanted me to do. They wanted to send me over TDY for six months. TDY simply means temporary duty in the lingo. They said, you'll have to go by yourself because TDY, you cannot have a dependent with you. I said, "Well, I'll tell you right off the bat, I really appreciate this. I'll do a good job. I know I can do it. I know that country. I know what it needs in terms of breaking corruption, but I'm not going if my wife can't go. We've just been separated again, and if the United States can't let her go along, if you don't pay her way, I'm not going to do it." And they quickly said, "Well..." They said, "There's no way to do that." And I said, "Look, there's always a way to do in government, whatever you feel is necessary, I know that much." They agreed, and they found a way and we went. We were over there for five months, I guess, six months. We got over there about September, I would guess, maybe August.

Breisetsh: Sixty-one.

Wehrle: Sixty-one, that's right. That same year. No, '62. '62, this would be the year later.

Breisetsh: Okay, because you have that timing.

Wehrle: Sixty-three?

Breisetsh: Sixty-three?

Wehrle: Yeah, it had to be '63.

Breisetsh: Just a couple months before Kennedy is assassinated.

Wehrle: Because I spent that previous time all in the Council of Economic Advisers.

Breisetsh: Right.

Wehrle: So, I started negotiations, probably August or something like that. I got a lot of credit for pulling it off, but it was not a difficult assignment because they had nobody else to go to. I mean I knew that. I knew that we're going to set the terms, and we'll be nice about it, but you're going to do it, because otherwise...

Breisetsh: Give us just a thumbnail sketch of what the terms were that you wanted to achieve for the U.S. Government.

Wehrle: Primarily, it goes back to what I said about the import program, that we wanted to make that so that that was not a way of sending out money cheaply. An importer says he is going to import a thousand dollars' worth of rice. You import ten dollars' worth, and you then get 990 dollars that is sent to you outside the country. That's your money. You only paid ten for the rice, and it says a thousand on the import bill of lading. You get 990 over in Hong Kong, at a cheap exchange rate. That's what we wanted to stop primarily.

The agricultural, the pig program, the chicken program, those were pretty straightforward. That was not a big deal. It was the import program. It was very hard to block this because of the Chinese connections with Hong Kong. They had all kinds of ways of doing what they called phantom imports. So, the problem, to me, was very simple: how do you determine that value came into the country for value received to the United States. And the only way I could figure out to do that, because of the corruption, was we had to bring American custom officers over to Laos, and let them certify and examine and check the imports coming in. Is that value there or is it not there? Well, when that hit the embassy—that I was thinking about doing that—they just went bonkers. They said, "You can't do that. That's sovereignty of their country. Every country is sovereign and they have the right to—" I was pretty young, but it was to me, and maybe because I was outside of all this embassy stuff that I could look at it in a

fresh view. I just said, "That doesn't make any sense. Sovereignty is sovereignty when you have the ability to pay your way in the world, but if you don't, if you're in the thrall, economically, of some other country, you don't have sovereignty, you kid yourself. You may consider you have legal sovereignty, but you don't have practical sovereignty. They will accept this and will do it, and it will be good, we'll get value for our money, and they'll have to accept it or they won't get the money." They said, "Oh, they'll never accept that." I said, "Yes they will."

Four months later, they did accept it. We brought American custom people, over. They did the inspection. It worked very well, and after we got that working for a while, we were able to withdraw it. We did a lot of negotiations with the IMF [International Monetary Fund], to change the CIP [Community Import Program] rate, and we broke the black market. We devised a system which would bet against the speculators, and it worked. The whole thing, as I say, it was really not that difficult to do. It took a little patience, but I was sure it would take place. I knew the Lao well enough to know that it was in their interest and our interest, and that's what makes good negotiations. So, that went on for a number of months. JoAnn was over there, and we had a nice time together. We had a lot of time to ourselves. We weren't in so much of the social circuit because I was not an official person. I got to know Ambassador Len Unger very well.

Now, the other half of the story is that, as I said, the White House did not have confidence in—not so much this ambassador—any ambassador. They wanted a tough import program, and they wanted the Lao to kowtow, so to speak, to these terms that we had. They were afraid that an ambassador wouldn't do that. So, they sent me over themselves, and the ambassador had to accept me as a negotiator because they sent me. And, they sent me over with back channel authority. Back channel is a term that's used for the CIA channels, that if the president gives—and it could be an ambassador, it could be anybody—a way of communicating with the White House that nobody else will know about; it doesn't go through State Department channels. It's a way of talking. They told me that I should report back to them how the negotiations were going and whether I was getting what I told them I was going to get and whether there was any obstruction by the embassy. I was to report back on these back channels.

Well, I got over there, and I did the first back channel, which was, "I'm here and I'm starting negotiations tomorrow," or whatever it might be. Then, after a couple weeks, I had to send back another message. And there I had the question. I liked Len Unger a lot. He was a very fine Foreign Service officer, and later we became good friends. I had ultimate confidence in him. I went over with him what I wanted to do, why I wanted to do it, and he was fully in accord, no problem whatsoever. So, I had to make a decision do I do back channel and go behind the ambassador, which jeopardizes my good relationship with him in the longer run, when he finds out? Or do I tell him, and break the rule that was given to me back there? So, I had to make a choice. Do I stick with back channel, or do I keep back channel but let the ambassador see the cables I'm sending back channel, which vitiates the purpose of it in the first place?

Well, as more and more I thought about it, it was a pretty easy choice. Ambassador Unger was a man of absolute integrity. I would show him. I would ask him not to tell anybody. He wouldn't do it, but he would know what I'm reporting. I was reporting that the ambassador was great. He was fully backing me. He was supporting me in every way that he could. So, that was the end of that. That worked out just fine, and by December, I was back in Washington, reported in. I think I had home leave then, and then the White House decided my next assignment.

Breisetsh: So the White House never knew that you shared this with Unger?

Wehrle: No, they never knew that, no, no. They never knew it. That's the only way I could keep that part good. It really didn't matter anymore. Once the negotiations were successful, nobody cared one way or the other, and I knew that would be the case. So, that was the end of that episode.

Breisetsh: Going back, and if my dates are right, we're really on the eve of Kennedy's assassination. I'm interested in how that was something that you processed. What was Kennedy's, and the people immediately around him, their real interest in Laos? Why did this... because we were not that deeply involved in Vietnam yet.

Wehrle: No.

Breisetsh: Although we were getting there.

Wehrle: Let me do your question in back order, just because I think of the latter first. Let me talk first about the assassination of Kennedy, and how that affected me. That was a very, very traumatic time in my life in the following way.

The way negotiations work in the State Department is that you have your general orders, and then you negotiate whichever points during that day, and you get their position from yesterday, that they're coming back with. Then every evening, you send that back to Washington. Well, it's a twelve-hour difference, so it's their working day. They go over it, and then they send you back negotiating instructions for the next day. They say continue what you're doing, do this, blah-blah-blah, and you ask them for certain permissions. You either get them, or you don't get them.

So, I was on my way to get my instructions that morning. This was the morning that Kennedy had been shot. The way C&R, that's Communications and Records in the lingo of the State Department, works all over the world. It's a big safe. It's got a big iron door that is on the front of it. It's like a walk-in safe, but inside it's big. They have desks and offices and teletype machines and all that kind of stuff, encrypting machines and people working. Then, you walk in the morning and you ask for your secret cable with negotiating instructions, which they'll give to nobody but you. You take those, design your day and you go to work.

Well, here's the shocker. I walked in that morning, and that steel door was closed. I'd never seen the steel door closed. They were open twenty-four hours a day. I'd never seen that steel door closed. On the door was a note, stuck on with Scotch tape saying, "The president has been shot and is in mortal danger." or something like that. He hadn't died yet, as far as they knew. Well, I was completely traumatized. That's not anything that I'd ever even thought about or anybody else had. I went back to tell Charles Mann, who was the director of AID, he was in the AID mission there. I'll talk a little bit about Charles Mann later, but I'll just say right now that he was a very fine AID director in Laos, and his name was M-a-n-n. He was an immigrant from Germany, and he had risen in the Foreign Service, in the AID, to become a director, which was the top you could get to. He was a very fine, fine director in Laos. Well, when I went to see him and told him this he said, "Oh that's terrible," or something like that, and he then said, "Well, let's get together at ten o'clock to go over this or that." For him—and this was part of his personality I guess, he's very methodical and everything like that. "So, there's been an assassination back in America; let's just get on with our work." I wasn't built that way, and I said Charlie, "I can't; this is terrible." I went home and cried—and I'm not a crier, I don't cry very often, but I just went home and just wept in the bed. I just threw myself on it. It was very, very trying. So, I stayed home that day and tried to collect myself. Then we went on with the negotiations.

Breiseth: JoAnn is with you at this time.

Wehrle: Oh, yeah, she's with me, yeah. In terms of your other question, which I'm trying to recall now, which was...

Breiseth: Why Kennedy was really interested in Laos.

Wehrle: Oh, the relationship with Kennedy, yeah. That is really harder to visualize today. But, when I was asked to go to Laos, I was told that this was one of Kennedy's three or four most important parts of his foreign policy, and that the danger was that China was going to move into Southeast Asia and China was going to expand. I think it was one of the famous Chinese leaders at that time who wrote in an article, which I must say, I was very impressed by, of China surrounding the industrial north, so to speak, that the villages of the world would come together. And they would surround the rich countries. China would kind of be their leader. I was not the only one that was impressed by that. That had a lot of impact in motivating what the United States did in foreign policy, even though, looking back on it, it seems absolutely silly given what we know now. You're not going to get people to cooperate in Peru and other places, like Pakistan and China and Mongolia, on such an endeavor. But it had a feeling of a force at that time.

In any event, that was where Laos was kind of a key country because it was a borderline country between China and the richness of Southeast Asia and Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, and Indonesia and all that. We didn't want that all to go. So, that's where

Laos was a key part in Kennedy's foreign policy. He wanted to either hold that, or later on, to neutralize it so neither side had it.

Breiseth: Let's have you give your portrait—I know you did not know him well—your portrait of Kennedy as a key figure in this whole period.

Wehrle: Well, I was only in Kennedy's office maybe once or twice. Once on a question he asked us to deal with, and I was asked to deal with that. The other time was when he was sending me out there. I think that's kind of ceremonial, you know, you're going to work for the boss, okay, you meet him. My impression of him was his size, first. I didn't think he was as big a person as he was, which is not very interesting, but that's what struck me. My impressions of him as a president were kind of like everybody else's. I was just so delighted to have what I thought was a smart person running the ship of state, and I felt very loyal to what they were seeking to do. In terms of foreign policy, I was taken in by—I say "taken in" now, because it was not a very solid theory looking back on it—but the whole domino theory was a big motivation, and I really believed it. China was a danger, I thought. But in terms of particularly answering your question of Kennedy, I don't have a strong image of him. I knew him only because of what other people told me, and they told me he was very bright, and they liked working with him because he was a quick student. We wrote briefing papers for him, and he seemed to swallow them right down. That was not any problem. So, I had a lot of respect for Kennedy.

Breiseth: Any of the people immediately around him that you had a chance to deal with?

Wehrle: Besides Michael Forrestal, and I didn't really have much dealing with Carl Kaysen, no. Later, Bill Moyers, I got to know a little bit.

Breiseth: But that was under Johnson.

Wehrle: But that was under Johnson.

Breiseth: Which we want to come back to.

Wehrle: Yeah, that's later on. At this point, no, I don't think so. But I must say, I did have a lot of respect for Walter Heller, who was the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. He was the kind of economist that you don't see very often. He was very adroit politically, and he knew how to phrase things to catch the president's attention. Heller had to contend with Ken Galbraith. Kenneth Galbraith was ambassador to India in those days, and he was a thorn in the side of the president, because he was always trying to run foreign policy and everything else. If you know Ken Galbraith at all you understand...

Breiseth: That was one of those Highland Scotsmen.

Wehrle: ...you would recognize the reality of what I'm saying. He would send back memos to the president, and then the president would pass them over to Heller. Heller would send

them down to me, and we had to kind of rebuff it, you know, get it back to him. That was kind of fun.

Breiseth: Did you ever get to meet Galbraith?

Wehrle: Oh, yes.

Breiseth: Did he know that that correspondence was taking place.

Wehrle: Oh, he didn't know where it went to or where it came from. No, he didn't know.

Breiseth: Because I got to know him a little bit. I think he would have been—in his later years, he would have been tickled at that.

Wehrle: Yeah, he probably wouldn't have liked that.

Breiseth: Because he was a debater of the first order.

Wehrle: Oh, he was, of the first order. He was very good, very good. So no, I didn't have that much connection with him. I did have connection with, as I said, Ken Hansen, at the Bureau of the Budget, system director, whom I mentioned earlier. I don't even remember who was director of the budget at that time.

Breiseth: Kermit Gordon.

Wehrle: Well, Kermit Gordon was with the Council of Economic Advisers. He was the third adviser. There was Tobin and Walter Heller and Kermit Gordon as the three-man Council of Economic Advisers. And then after that, Kermit went over and became Budget Bureau, but I don't know the exact date.

Breiseth: He was Budget Bureau at the time of Kennedy's death.

Wehrle: Oh he was, okay. I didn't realize that.

Breiseth: I would insert this one story. Kermit Gordon was from Williams [College], which is where I taught, and I knew the group of economists there. During Kennedy's last months, Johnson was head of NASA.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: He took that responsibility. Frequently, Kermit Gordon, in the inner councils, as budget director, opposed Johnson's efforts to get more money for NASA. And the day after Kennedy's assassination, Gordon is called in and he assumes at this point, because he's crossed Johnson, that Johnson would get rid of him.

Wehrle: Nix him, yeah.

Breisetsh: So, he comes in—and I heard this story from Kermit Gordon himself. He makes the deferential comments, and Johnson said, “Now, I want you to continue what you were doing, I have a different need for you.” But he [President Johnson] said, “Could you explain, how does the president spend money?” He [Johnson] said, “I understand how you get the appropriations, because I managed that in the Senate, but how do you move from the appropriation to where the president can spend money?” Which I thought was a great example of a political operative who operated within his parameters.

Wehrle: He had the key question. It must have been that Kermit Gordon moved over there in probably the summer of '63.

Breisetsh: I think he did; he did. Let's get back to Laos. After Kennedy's death, in the next months, what are you doing?

Wehrle: I'm wrapping up the negotiations then, by that time. Pretty much, they were on the downhill by that time, when I was wrapping it up.

Breisetsh: Now, once you succeed with those negotiations, what's your next step?

Wehrle: Well, once we get it all typed up and it's a treaty, it's a treaty, and everybody signs it. Then my next step is I just went back to Washington. I was still at the Council of Economic Advisers, so I report back in there. But by that time the White House is saying, “We like Wehrle's work out there, and we want him to go back out there now, to make sure that this treaty is executed carefully, and we want him to be economic counselor.” So their proposal, when I got back in December, surprised me. I had been there, of course, as a junior officer, and now they wanted me to go back as economic counselor.

Now, the way an embassy is organized is probably not too well understood, but it's fairly simple. There's the ambassador, who is the overall boss of the American relations with that country, in charge of all the American personnel that are in that country, that are official. He has two key advisers who are line officers to the ambassador. One is the political counselor, and the political counselor is in charge of all the political activities in that country. He has the Foreign Service officers working under him, to keep track of the Buddhists and to keep track of this group, and then all that sort of stuff. Then there's the economic counselor, and he's responsible for all the economic relationships between the United States and that country. If there was aid, then he's got to have something to do with the aid. But he's not responsible for the aid because there was a director of the AID mission, as I mentioned before, in this case Charles Mann. He's got delegated responsibility from the Congress to be accountable for all the dollars going into that country on aid.

Breisetsh: Military as well?

Wehrle: No. Just the civil side. So he's got to have a lot to say about where the money should be spent, for what purposes, and then how is value received and the accountability for

that, the audits of that. So, there's a natural strain built, tension, built into it, because the ambassador has the economic counselor, he wants the economic aid to benefit that country. Well, so does the AID director, but they may have different ideas of how that should happen. The ambassador will be more interested in the political effects than will the AID director, because that's his overall responsibility.

So when I got back, Michael Forrestal called me over and said, "You know we have this cockamamie idea that we've dreamed up over here. That is that we'll send you back as—we'd like you to go back as economic counselor to the ambassador, and also to be in charge of economic policy within the mission. So you're program, you're top program officer.

Breiseth: Sort of pulling these two strands together.

Wehrle: So, they're pulling the two strands together. But you can see that creates a certain problem because you've bisected, reporting to two officials.

Breiseth: So this begins your relationship with Mann that will be very important in Vietnam.

Wehrle: That's true, it does. I liked Charles Mann a lot. I found it easy to work with him, and I was deputy director then, when I went out there for a couple of years under him. We had no problem at all because we simply agreed on the economic policy. It was a lot easier in Laos, and so there was not a lot of tension. The tension was always as it is on turf, that he could not be sure what I was saying to the ambassador. I would write the economic cables back to Washington. You learn early in the bureaucracy, as I'm sure you did in your work in Washington, that he who writes the memo gets the best chance of getting the fish.

Breiseth: Right.

Wehrle: And so, I would always want to write the cables, and he couldn't stop me. He would sign off on them because we agreed; but nevertheless, he would never know for sure what I was saying. And that always creates a little tension. But anyhow, I decided to go back. It seemed like a sensible thing to do. I knew Laos very well; I liked Laos. And JoAnn could go with me, and she liked Laos. She loved Laos, in fact. So, we did that, and I was deputy director of the AID mission, which put me in charge of the economic policy. And I was economic counselor to Unger. I really, really—I will say loved Unger; he was just such a good person. To work under him was just a joy. He loved the Lao people. I mean, there was an ambassador who had real empathy for the people. He did all the right things. He wasn't any pipsqueak by any matter. He was plenty tough, but he knew how to meet with the king and treat the king. He knew how to meet the other people. He would have Buddhist monks to come to his home, the high monks. I would go, and they would sit around. That was unheard of, to do something like that. So, he took culture very, very seriously in all these things, so that was a really fine experience. The economic

conditions in Laos were not under great strain at that point. The Kong Le coup was behind, the government is back in, and it was a good two years.

Breiseth: What happens to Unger after this?

Wehrle: He went back to Washington and had a big job there. Then, I think he was the next Ambassador to Thailand. He had a good career, a very good career.

Breiseth: Did you continue to have interactions with him?

Wehrle: Yeah. I would see him when I went back and things like that, yeah. He used to tell me, you know, we'd talk about this and he said, "Roy," he said, "I don't understand," he said, "I like talking politics with you; what's wrong?" (chuckles) So, he really encouraged me to think more broadly than just the economic terms, but to think politically about how things were going. And I liked that.

Breiseth: Before Kennedy dies, are there any dimensions of our policy in relationship to Laos that you're uncomfortable with?

Wehrle: No, I don't think so. No, I don't think so. We wanted a relatively small program in Laos, and it was relatively small. Probably, I guess I would say that later on it expanded way too much, which is a typical American tendency, which we'll talk about more on Vietnam.

Ambassador Unger made me responsible for the pacification program in Laos and Ivan Klecka, K-l-e-c-k-a, was a person who worked for USIS, that was the American information service, whom I had a lot of respect for. He was one of these guys that thinks outside the box, and he was a really interesting guy. Ambassador Unger asked me to take charge of this in terms of doing planning on the security in the countryside. So, I got Ivan Klecka to be on that, and I got a team from the embassy and AID. There was probably a military attaché there, but there was not much military there, and Ivan Klecka. I remember sitting in our office, my office, just brainstorming on what we wanted to do, and what we came up with was the *Mu Ban Samaki* Program. It's M-u, which means together, and B-a-n, which means village, and Samaki means cooperating, and Samaki is S-a-m-a-k-i. Mu Ban Samaki. It has a really good—we wanted something that really worked good in Laos, so we had our Lao friends come and work with us on that. As I said, "That's a term that the communist used when they'd come into a village." They said, "We're going to have"—they call it just, I think, *Ban Samaki*. And so we had a big discussion on whether we could use the term the communists have used. We all decided the heck with the communists, if it's a good term, let's make it our brand and not worry about the fact that they used that. Ambassador Unger backed us on that, and that was our program, what we built in Savannakhet and various other places, and with the IVS. The IVS, International Voluntary Service, was an interesting group of people. I don't know if it's in existence any more.

Breisetsh: Pre-Peace Corps.

Wehrle: It's a precursor of the Peace Corps and very much built along the lines of the Peace Corps. They were wonderful people. A chap by the name of Walt Coward, C-o-w-a-r-d, was in charge of the IVSers in Laos, and I must say, they must have had thirty, forty, fifty people there. They were located in the villages. They lived out in the villages. We integrated them into the Mu Ban Samaki program in the sense that they would then be the people who were working on agricultural programs, and building schools, and building dispensaries. That's what the name of the game was around Laos. That program got later written up in the *New Yorker*. I don't know if I ever saw the article, but I heard about it.

It was working fairly well, I think, in Laos, while we were there, but it's a soft program, soft in the sense that it had no military backup. So, if the Phathet Lao, and Phathet Lao is the name of the communist insurgency in Laos that I should have mentioned, that's P-h-a-t...

Breisetsh: P-h-a-t-h-e-t.

Wehrle: Yes. Lao, L-a-o. They could come in with any military and pretty much take over a village. I learned very early on that he who controls the countryside controls the night, and he who controls the night controls the countryside. That's a very important lesson to learn in pacification. Just because you can go in there during the daytime and everybody smiles at you, tells you nothing unless you know that you can go in there at night. At night you really can't go in if the Phathet Lao have got control of it. So, our program was deficient in the sense that we really couldn't protect the villages from infiltration. But the Phathet Lao was not doing much infiltration. So, it was a pretty good two years with that whole program we started.

We had contact with Vietnam. They came up to help us. Rufus Phillips, which is a name I'll mention later on, a chap out of Virginia. It's Rufus, R-u-f-u-s, Phillips, with two Ls. He was very close to Lodge later on, and others. He was one of those that worked on the Strategic Hamlet Program, which was down in Vietnam. He came up and gave us suggestions.

Breisetsh: Did that follow your program in Laos, or had that already started?

Wehrle: I think that had already started. Well, this is '63, '64. Yeah, it had already started, I think.

Breisetsh: Is there a conceptual connection among you Americans?

Wehrle: I really can't answer that correctly because I really don't remember. I don't remember when we sat around and brainstormed. I think it was pretty much just we conceived it ourselves.

Breiseth: That's how it sounded.

Wehrle: Yeah, I don't remember any connection to that, but I can't be sure of that.

Breiseth: Your effort in that program must have been a source of your long-term bonding with Laotian people, that you were so heavily invested in what happened in their villages and the quality of their lives, their education, their nutrition.

Wehrle: I remember times going down when I heard intelligence from the CIA that there was a group moving toward one of our villages. I remember going down myself and talking to the *nai ban*, the head of the village, and everybody else, that we had this, and they should put some scouts out to make sure that they are alerted. I remember going down lonely country roads on a jeep, hoping I would get back to where the airport was. I never was in any great danger, I don't think, but you know, you're sitting in a jeep with a driver. We had friends who were captured, and it was not very pretty. I remember that very clearly. So anyhow, that was that.

Breiseth: Anything else about in country experience before we take you out of Laos?

Wehrle: No, I don't think so. That was a good two years, and I mentioned how great it was working with Len Unger and Charlie Mann both. It was a good team, good people in the embassy. It was a good model situation for the United States, I think, in those years, and the economic aid program worked pretty good.

Breiseth: Thinking of Roy Wehrle from a Washington point of view, by '64, you're Laos, you're "Mister Laos."

Wehrle: Mm-hmm, from the White House point of view.

Breiseth: From the White House point of view. And is the State Department much aware of you?

Wehrle: Oh, yes.

Breiseth: Len Unger is, obviously.

Wehrle: I came back, and they knew who I was, and they were proud of me. I mean, they could look at me as this guy that's an interloper from the White House, but they didn't. They looked at me as a success story for themselves. So that worked out fine; there was no particular problem. I think the White House, by this time, looked at me as kind of an old Southeast Asia hand, even though I was twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty, I don't know what it was, because I had this experience out there several times, and what I told them tended to turn out to be true. So, I was an old hand at a young age out in Southeast Asia.

Breiseth: With the little bit I know about bureaucracy, what strikes me already in this interview is that you successfully crossed these typical lines of demarcation in the bureaucracy, that you were comfortable working across those lines and were credible to people on each side. That's a skill that obviously becomes important in the Vietnam years.

Wehrle: I think what you say is correct, and I think I would attribute the success of that primarily to Charles Mann and to Len Unger because they made it work. I mean, I made it work, but they made it work.

Breiseth: We'll see a lot more of Charles Mann.

Wehrle: Yes, we'll see more of Charles Mann.

Breiseth: So you come back to Washington.

Wehrle: I don't come back to Washington, I am still in Laos.

Breiseth: You're still in Laos, okay.

Wehrle: Sixty-four, probably April, May, something like that, June. And I get a cable from the White House, through the State Department channels, an open cable coming out saying, "We would like Wehrle transferred down to Vietnam." And since this model that we think has worked so well, of combining the counselor of economics and the aid into one person, we would like Roy to carry that on down into Saigon. Is he willing to do this? Well, I talked to JoAnn and we said, "Yeah, why not," I mean we've got this experience.

Breiseth: Now, it's fairly important to be as precise on dates as we can be. We're into Lyndon Johnson's presidency when this comes to you.

Wehrle: Under Lyndon Johnson's presidency.

Breiseth: Are we in '64?

Wehrle: You know, now that you raise that question, I don't really know if Michael Forrestal stayed on under—it could have been, that came from Bob Komer. Bob Komer, K-o-m-e-r, was appointed by Lyndon Johnson to be his special assistant for Southeast Asia. I don't know the date that that took place, but probably before I came.

Breiseth: Was Komer, do you think, your contact?

Wehrle: I think Komer was my contact, and I think that Forrestal had left.

Breiseth: That should date it.

Wehrle: ...and Kaysen had said to Komer is, you know, they gave him the background. And what the problem was in South Vietnam is that that was heating up, and they said, "Wehrle's

had some experience in this.” That’s what I’m guessing. Anyhow, I got this cable from the White House, and JoAnn and I said, “Well, yes we should do this. The government wants us to do it; we should do it, that’s all there is to it.” There’s not much to talk about. By September 15th of that year, I was then in Saigon.

Breiseth: This is before the election, the Goldwater-Johnson election, when Johnson’s reputation at home was very much to bring peace, and suggested that Goldwater was a wild man and threatened the world.

Wehrle: That is the year of the election, isn’t it?

Breiseth: It’s the year of the election.

Wehrle: I’d forgotten about that, yeah, that’s right.

Breiseth: So, Johnson has got an aura around him because of the Civil Rights Act, and the other one is that he’s regarded as a great liberal.

Wehrle: The Voting Rights Act.

Breiseth: Unexpected, great liberal. So, when you go to Vietnam... The reason I’m pressing this is that, in terms of many negative things we think about in terms of Johnson’s policy in Vietnam, none of those have surfaced in the public or even for you, before you go. So, you go with very much the sense of continuing the kind of thing you were doing in Laos.

Wehrle: That’s right.

Breiseth: Only in a bigger, more complex country.

Wehrle: Right. And we might set the political background for that a little bit because that’s really important. By the summer of ’64, Diem had been dead by nine months or something like that, he’d been assassinated in November of 1963 and the United States had found no way to fill that vacuum. Big Minh came in; he’s a general. Then little Minh came in, and the generals jostled with each other to see who’s going to run the country. But there was no political stability. Vietnam had no politics in the sense that we think of connection to the people. It was just the military running it. By the time I got there, the Buddhists had revolted, and we’d had the immolations, the burnings in the street. The American Embassy and nobody else knew what to do—because it was chaotic. By the time we got there in September, it was the residue of that. It had calmed down quite a bit by the time we got there, but we still saw some demonstrations.

Breiseth: But you knew you were going into a really fevered situation.

Wehrle: A very unsettled, fevered situation, that’s right, and I think that’s important background for the whole thing.

Breisetsh: I have a sense that we should probably pause, but before that, kind of carrying out what you did about Laos in this interview. Why don't you reflect on the Vietnamese culture and the cultural backdrop of the country that you now become so much a part of over the next four years.

Wehrle: It's fascinating, the contrast between the cultures of Laos, which we got to know fairly well, and Vietnam. I did as much reading as I could when I was up in Laos, about Vietnam, the history, and tried to get a sense of that culture. But I got no briefing or anything before going into there. I think, before I answer the question about the culture, I'll simply say that there was a mistake on the part of the United States, not to give a high level person going in a fairly good background on what had happened before, so you knew what the United States had tried and what had failed. A lot of the stuff I had to learn from John Vann and others that I'll mention later on. So, you went in kind of cold and some of the mistakes that I made in Vietnam early on, I attribute partly, only partly, to the fact that I just didn't know what had come before.

Breisetsh: You weren't briefed.

Wehrle: That's right. I was just plodding into—walking across the field and not knowing that that was not the path. But in terms of culture, there was a sharp, sharp contrast between the Lao and the Vietnamese. The Lao were easygoing; the Vietnamese were uptight. The Lao were not ambitious; the Vietnamese were very ambitious when they were going after something like that. The Lao weren't scheming at all; the Vietnamese were very scheming. In fact, if you wanted a good practice in learning how to be a politician in Chicago, Vietnam would be a great training ground because they really put together the coalitions, and they talk politics all the time. Their background as a primarily Confucian country, coming out of China, because they are a Chinese culture country, that's what shaped them and their history. That history was based a lot on family, fidelity to the parents and homage to the parents, and to the land on which they lived. The Lao didn't have that same connection to the soil where they were born and the ancestors that the Vietnamese had. As I'll say later on, when we get into the war in Vietnam, one of our great mistakes was to move the people off the land, move them away from their native ground. They are not the same people anymore. They've lost part of who they are in their soul.

So, the Vietnamese were very, very different. Very bright, very sharp, very nice people. I learned to love them as much as I had the Lao, but in a different sort of way. I got to know them on a very friendly sort of way too.

Jumping to another question you asked earlier, I think one of the reasons that I could be successful in Laos and in Vietnam is because I was so young. I was not what they expected in terms of a stiff counselor, economic, striped pants kind of guy. I had mud between my toes, and I think they liked that. That's just the sense I have, thinking about it right now. I hadn't thought about that before. But thinking about it right now, I think

that helped me connect with both of those cultures because a lot of them were young. So, that was a lot easier for them to deal with in terms of the pride and the face and all the rest of that stuff.

Breiseth: Is it a building block concept to say that, in your experience, the Lao were a Buddhist culture and the Vietnamese were a Confucian culture?

Wehrle: I'd say, I should have added on that the first part is certainly clear, and they were Theravada Buddhists, and that's T-h-e-r-a-v-a-d-a. Theravada Buddhists are Buddhists that are what we might call in this country, fundamentalists. That's not really fair, but they are very literal. They're not the later Buddhists, who have a much more magical and much more metaphysical view of Buddha. There's nothing fancy about them, but they are Buddhist to their core in that sense that they are very pacifist and not self-centered. That's, of course, a big part of Buddhism, not to have all the attachments and all that stuff, and ego.

The Vietnamese are not only, as I said, family oriented and land oriented, but also, they have a Buddhist background. But it's a little different Buddhist background than the others have. They have a lot of animist background. The animist is a term that's related to the folk religions, which relate to spirits and really means nature, a nature religion of some sort. The Vietnamese are eclectic. They put all those together, and you can even call it a synergistic kind of religion. They put all these pieces together. It's very hard to describe, but it's very real. It's not like we think of religion, it's not where you go to church on Sunday and you've got to be there, or a personal god or anything like that. It isn't that at all. It's a way of life, and let's face it, all the religions of the world are basically ways of life. It's only the Christian religion that is a doctrine religion and a personal religion. We're the only one in the world that has that. The rest of them are primarily ways of life, and that's what theirs was. It was interesting to get to know, interesting to be invited into the Vietnamese families, into the family, and have dinner with them and that sort of thing. That's where you really get the insights into what makes them tick.

Breiseth: If you compare the Phathet Lao with Ho Chi Minh and his surround, is there something in the culture of the two countries that jumps out?

Wehrle: (laughs) I laugh because the answer is, of course, a resounding yes. Let's just do a little bit on terminology. The Phathet Lao are what you just said; those are the communist insurgents of Laos. The Viet Minh, V-i-e-t, for Vietnam, Minh, M-i-n-h, were the opponents of the French Colonial rule. They were the insurgency against the French from 1945 on under Ho Chi Minh, as you said.

Then, after 1955, when we had the Neutrality Treaty and the south was put under Diem and the north became communist. The insurgents in the south were called Viet Cong. So, it's V-i-e-t again, but it's C-o-n-g. So, when I speak of Viet Cong, I'm talking about

what was the Phathet Lao in South Vietnam, namely the communist insurgents, the Viet Cong. I think it's important to have that difference.

Now, in terms of your question, yes, there is a big difference. The Phathet Lao were kind of easygoing. Now, if you were captured by them, you wouldn't think they're particularly easygoing because their way of life is hard, but they're not going to torture you. They're not going to do anything like that; it's just not in their nature to do that. The Viet Cong, on the other hand, are tough, tough, hard-fisted, very dedicated insurgency. They have a very hard life, and if they get a hold of you, they're going to torture you to try to get information. They won't do it for the fun of it, they won't do it to harm you, in terms of making a fool of you, but they'll try to get information out of you. Where is that ammo dump located?

Doug Ramsey was an American, who I'll mention later, who was captured, and he was given a really, really hard time. But the hardest part of the time, of course, is just living back there and going through the malaria bouts that you get and the dysentery. I mean it's just unimaginable. But the Viet Cong were a hard-fisted group. Sure, they had desertions from them, but you have to believe that, even though many of those were conscripted, not all of them, but they almost all came from the north. Even if they were conscripted, they were pretty dedicated to their cause. And partly, of course, they were out in the jungle. There's no place for them to go, except when they're close to a town; then they could escape then.

But the short answer is yes, the Viet Cong were very good, and the North Vietnamese forces, the main forces that came down, they were a very, very disciplined group. Nobody left them at all.

Breiset: Were there perceptible tensions between the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong, as you, as Americans representing our interests, would perceive it?

Wehrle: Well, the Viet Minh were essentially gone, because that had been the earlier phase when they were fighting the French Colonials. The Viet Cong were primarily from the south. They were primarily conscripted or volunteered in the south. Even in the early days, when all the Catholics were being brought back down to the south from the north in the barges that we provided in the ships, the communists were—right off the bat, that's way back in '55, '56—were recruiting people from Vung Tau... Vung Tau is V-u-n-g, T-a-u. That's the tip of South Vietnam, on the bottom. They were being recruited and sent up north for training, and they had ships to do that. It was pretty open in those days. Nobody stopped them. So, all that shows you is that they were planning all the way along to take over the south.

The Viet Minh and the others always viewed themselves, and this is really critical, as the opponents of foreign domination over their land. The French had come in and misused them, as far as they were concerned. And they were right, and they were not going to

let that last. The Americans were just the French and American colonials as far as they were concerned. They were just another phase of that foreign domination, and they were going to get rid of them.

Breiseth: We looked at, very briefly obviously, at Buddhism in both countries. You've mentioned the Catholics. Put the place of the Catholic Church and the Catholic identity of Vietnamese into the equation.

Wehrle: Boy, that is a good question because that's really a central question. The French played, you know, their view of civilizing, and they view that, as Kipling said in *The White Man's Burden*, was to bring the rest of the world to Christianity, which was a black stain on the word Christianity, I think. But that was a big part of the motivation going on, was to—even to the American Indians in New Mexico, other places, they always say, "We're going to help these Indians." Well, they turned them into slaves is what they did. And in Vietnam, the same thing.

As you probably know, in China, when the missionaries went over there, they talked about rice Christians. That's what the Chinese called them, and that's a good term because it shows that the local people saw them becoming Christians so they could get rice, so they got good food, and they ate better, lived better. A lot of the Catholics in North Vietnam had a tinge of that. I won't say how much because I'm not an expert on it. I don't know, but I know they were converted, and they got benefits to some extent. So, there was some quid pro quo that was involved in that conversion. In the north, there were many Catholics, many Catholic villages. You had bishops of the territory; it was organized in a very typically Catholic fashion. Diem's brother was a bishop up near Hue, as you probably know. They were all tied into that. Well, when the settlement of '55 came, the United States got an agreement that all those who wanted to go south could go south.

Breiseth: This is the Geneva Accords?

Wehrle: This is the Geneva Accords of '54.

Breiseth: It ends the French role in Vietnam.

Wehrle: That's right; yeah, that's right.

Breiseth: After Dien Bien Phu.

Wehrle: After Dien Bien Phu brought down the French role, that's right. So, Diem wanted all these Catholics in the south because he felt that they would stand against the communists because they were religious, and they would hate the communists, and so they would be his bedrock support. Now, remember that premise because that's a really important premise. Boatloads of them came down to the south. But, think of them coming into the south now. They're coming into an area that is animist Buddhist, not

many Catholics in the south. There were some, but it was not like the north. Also, add to that, a recognition that is true in many parts of the world, that the northerners were fundamentally different than the southerners. If you make the generalization, and I guess a lot of people would criticize me for this big generalization, but I'll make it. The northerners were tougher. They were more tenacious, meaner maybe, in some sense. And the southerners were softer. Not like the Lao, not that much, but to a large extent. So, you have these northerners coming down and being superimposed on the south, taking over villages. Clear it out, and make room for the refugees coming. Probably a million came down. There was a lot of people. So, keep that in the back of your mind in terms of how that would work in terms of the culture down there and what that is.

So, your question of the Catholics was largely a question of northern Catholics coming down, and was Ho Chi Minh glad to see them go? Yes. They couldn't be digested, there was no way they could digest those into the culture that he wanted to build in North Vietnam. So, he was happy they left. Diem was happy in the south because he felt they would be his bedrock. Jumping ahead of the story a little bit, but fitting your question, he used Catholics, Diem did, and Diem is D-i-e-m. He used Catholics into making province chiefs and in making village chiefs down in the delta. It's just like imposing a Muslim into a Christian village almost. I mean it's not quite that bad, but something like that.

So, the Catholic thread plays a big role, and plays it in that premise I mentioned, that you have now something you can depend on. But then, throw that up against what we said earlier, that many of the people in the countryside believe the propaganda of the Viet Cong, that the Americans were just French in American uniforms. They don't care about you. They just want to run the country, and they're making money out of it. They're going to dominate you, and those guys in Saigon are simply lackeys, lackeys of the Americans. They're not your government, and they're not going to reform it. They're not going to make it any better. You have to depend on the Viet Cong to do that, so come fight with us. That's the fundamental theme that is most important to understand in Vietnam.

Breiseth: Final question, and this is before getting into your actual responsibilities, which we'll take up in the next interview.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: You talked about not being briefed, about what had happened in Vietnam before you got there. As you look at, not only your own briefing, or lack of it, and the major American figures at the time you come in, both military and civil, how nuanced was the understanding of what you just talked about in terms of the religious dynamic and the difference between north and south among the Vietnamese?

Wehrle: Understanding of the Americans?

Breiseth: By the Americans of this culture you've just given us a snapshot of.

Wehrle: Well, let's do that in two parts. I mean, I said I wasn't briefed, and I tended to want to blame somebody. But partly, I should blame myself, I guess. I should have come in and said to the embassy staff, "I want to be briefed." Take a guy that's been there for a couple of years that knew a lot about it, and I should have probably done that. But I wasn't smart enough to figure that out and gotten the background. If the government is not going to give it to me, I should have asked for it, and I probably could have gotten it.

How much was their understanding of the things I just spoke about? I don't know because I didn't have those kinds of conversations. I learned this on my own, mostly from the Vietnamese, I guess, but also from other Americans, like Frank Scotton and other people who were what I would have called the old Vietnamese hands, that's how I learned. Well, that was a good briefing; I mean, that's not bad. They understood this very well. They understood that it was a nationalist war primarily. We tend to look at it as a war for freedom for the South Vietnamese.

Breiseth: In a Cold War context.

Wehrle: In a Cold War context, and freedom was our big word. They didn't look at it so much as freedom, because freedom was not a big concept in Vietnam. What's freedom? They'd never known anything about it. They wanted it, but it was kind of like an abstraction. What they didn't want, they knew better than what they did want. They didn't want foreigners running their country. The Vietnamese are a very proud people, very proud, much more proud than like the Lao or something like that.

Breiseth: Just clinching that last point, independent of America's involvement, what did Diem want, vis-à-vis Viet Minh and the Viet Cong?

Wehrle: He wanted them to go away; that's what he wanted. He wanted to be the emperor. In the Vietnamese concept, he saw himself as a modern day emperor with the tradition of Wei and all that backing him up. And he was going to use the Catholics to help him build that. But you can see that that's a contradiction in terms right there. The legacy of the Vietnamese culture in South Vietnam, is not to be Catholic; there's a contradiction that ran all the way through it. I think, in his mind, it was primarily "Our family is now in charge; they put us in charge; we belong here; we have the right to be here, and the Americans don't understand this country. We don't have to listen to them. We'll listen to them, but we don't have to pay any attention to them. They'll give us aid anyhow, and I will be—I'll run this country; our family will run this country, and how the people get along..." It was not like "oh, I want to help the people." Well, yeah, "enough so that I can stay in power," but I don't think he had any vision beyond what I've just said.

Breiseth: From an American point of view, was the Catholicism a basis of our involvement in some sense, as against communists?

Wehrle: No. I don't think it was a basis of our involvement, but I think we bought in a lot to Diem's view, that they would be stalwarts, that we could depend on those. "You can't trust these Vietnamese, you know, but Catholics, you can trust. They've got no place to go, they'll get slaughtered by the other side if they ever lose the struggle they'll get killed."

Breiseth: Really, I'm going to say for the last time, this is the final point, but it wraps up the issue of the Kennedy assassination and this period of transition for the Americans towards the Johnson era. Recall for us the role of Madame Nhu, after Diem is assassinated and as then President Kennedy is assassinated. We have these two assassinations in a matter of, I think, less than a month.

Wehrle: I think it was, yeah, two or three weeks.

Breiseth: Three weeks I think, which were, for those watching, ominous, hints of a Shakespearean play taking place.

Wehrle: It certainly was ominous, and it was building up like a summer thunderstorm that we couldn't control Diem. We didn't even know what Nhu, that's Madame Nhu's brother, was doing. There was talk that he might really be doing some negotiating with the communists. Looking back, maybe that would have been a good thing, but we thought at that time, that would have been terrible.

Breiseth: Evil.

Wehrle: He'd be a traitor, right? And so, the thought that, General Lansdale's thought earlier on— General Lansdale is the great hero of the Philippines. He was the one that worked with Magsaysay. He came in 1955 and really pulled Diem's fat out of the fire. The United States sent him out there, and he helped really protect Diem from some of the uprisings that were taking place. Lansdale was a great believer in Diem, and he helped put him in power. Diem, by the time we're talking about now, he's really gotten the sense of, "I'm the top dog," over the years. You can see how he can manipulate the Americans and all this. "They ask for this, but you just have to play them off and all this, and I know how to run this show." We finally felt so frustrated that there's a big faction, and all the way up to the White House, including Kennedy, I think, that said, "He's going to have to go." So, Lodge was sent out, I think, to get rid of him, or close to that. And they did, but they had no plan for what came after him. That was pathetic; it was just pathetic after that.

So, in terms of—you asked me what Kennedy, in relation to Madame Nhu, and I know that Madame Nhu made some statements. You know what those are better than I do, I think.

Breiseth: Well she said, after Kennedy is killed, she in effect publicly says to Jackie Kennedy, "Now you know what it feels like."

Wehrle: Oh, I had forgotten that, yeah.

Breiseth: That was regarded as very poor taste because Mrs. Kennedy, at that point, was entering sainthood. People were grieving with her and for her. But for Madame Nhu to cut to the chase, in effect, say that the Kennedy people had killed her husband. Now, Mrs. Kennedy knew what that was all about.

Wehrle: Yeah. Well, of course, you can see the other side. I mean, that's exactly what happened. And it's also a good indication of the Vietnamese and their biting tongue, because they really, they really can bite. The end of that story was that they couldn't control him, so they got rid of him. And then they had to deal with the consequences.

Breiseth: It sounds like an awfully familiar story, that we've gone through recently.

Wehrle: Yeah, doesn't it though?

Breiseth: Let's end it on that happy note, and when we come back, let's talk about what it is to be both an economic counselor as well as the lead, or at least the important role you played with the USAID mission in Vietnam.

Wehrle: Okay.

(End of interview session #1)

Interview with Interviewee Roy Wehrle

VRV-A-L-2013-098.02

Interview # 2: October 30, 2013

Interviewer: Christopher N. Breiseth

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Breiseth: Okay, we are back to start another session in the afternoon of October thirtieth at Roy and JoAnn Wehrle's house, at 2001 Bates Avenue in Springfield, Illinois. We just got into your Vietnam experience. We talked a bit about Catholicism and Buddhism, among the contending Vietnamese forces. Maybe the best place to start, Roy, is to ask what your official responsibilities were in Vietnam, as you take up your new responsibilities.

Wehrle: Well, when I arrived in Saigon, I was immediately met by the director of the AID mission, James Killen, Jim Killen, and a couple days later, was taken over to meet the ambassador, who at that point was Maxwell Taylor. These were my two bosses. I had the same responsibilities that I had had in Laos. That is, I was economic counselor to the ambassador, or would become that. This transfer took place fairly quickly in bureaucratic time scales, so that, when I arrived in Vietnam, I did not have that official capacity. That took three or four months before that actually arrived through the bureaucracy. But it was clear, and Maxwell Taylor had been asked whether he would accept me as economic counselor.

Breiseth: Just for dates.

Wehrle: This is summer of 1964.

Breiseth: These are Johnson years.

Wehrle: I arrived in Saigon September fifteenth.

Breiseth: Before the election, the Johnson-Goldwater election.

Wehrle: That's right. And on the AID side, instead of being deputy director, in this case, there were several assistant directors. One was the assistant director for program and economics, P&E, and that's what I was. So, I was the key person working for Killen on the policy aspects, both economic and program, the agricultural programs and all that. The technical part was done by the many experts we had on hog culture and chicken culture, et cetera. But in terms of the program and what the objectives were and how much fertilizer would come in and how that would be dealt out, that would be part of my responsibility. So, that was the plan.

The same tension that was true earlier was still going to be true because I was working for Jim Killen; I was working for the ambassador. As long as we all agreed on what the objectives were, there was no problem with it, but if there were, then there's certain problems. And they did crop up after a while, but this is how it looked to me when I got there. When I got there, the economy was actually functioning. It was not a zing, ding economy going, but the war had been very minor up to '64. A lot of insurgency in the delta, some in the highlands, but not big battles and not enough to really disturb the economy a great deal. Sure, somewhat, but not a great deal. So, we were exporting rubber at that time, and Vietnam was exporting rice. You had pretty much an ongoing economy, and that's how it was when I arrived.

Breiseth: What were the economic problems that your two bosses wanted you to get on top of?

Wehrle: Well, Maxwell Taylor did not have any problems he wanted me to get on top of. There was nothing particular running at that time. He was fully engaged with working on beating the Viet Cong and dealing with the increasing problems of dealing with the government.

Breiseth: He is ambassador. He's no longer serving in his role as a general.

Wehrle: No, he's an ambassador, and he's been that since, I think—I don't know, '62, '63. Lodge was ambassador before him and then Maxwell Taylor came out. Max Taylor had been coming out there ever since '60, '61, when he wrote the famous book, the *Uncertain Trumpet*. He had been an adviser to Kennedy during '62, '63, '64, and Kennedy had great confidence in him. So, he sent him out as ambassador instead of just being the military adviser. General Harkins, up at that point, was the head of the MACV. MACV is M-A-C-V, and that simply means military command in Vietnam. And so that's where the situation was.

Jim Killen, on the other hand, who we'll talk about a little bit later, is very important to this story. He was concerned about the economic programs out in the provinces, particularly our problems, because this is much more complex than Laos. We had many more provinces to deal with, I don't know, twenty, twenty-five provinces. And we had Americans out in each of these provinces. They had different programs in all these, and we had the problems of corruption that we had in Laos. So, he was very much concerned with those, but not particularly with—there was no pressing economic problem on what we now call the macro front, namely the overall economy. There was no particular problem. There was some inflation, sure, and there were problems with enough aid, but they were not major problems at that time.

Breiseth: Given the relationship between the government of South Vietnam and the U.S. presence there, what was your area of responsibility? You were primarily responsible to the U.S. officials, right?

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: Not to the Vietnam Government.

Wehrle: No.

Breiseth: So, were you primarily looking at the impact of incoming U.S. resources on the Vietnam economy?

Wehrle: Yes, I would say that's primarily what I was responsible for. But I had to negotiate with the Vietnamese in terms of how much taxes they would raise because it's a joint project if you're going to control the economy. So, we had to deal with them on taxes, and we

had to deal with them later on, on exchange rate because we ran our program in the following way: We brought in imports. We paid the dollars; the goods came in, the GVN—I'll use that term, that's Government of Vietnam. The GVN would then sell those goods to importers through the central bank. They would get, let's say, a million piastres for those goods, and then we would ask for some of those piastres back. That was called counterpart. They would give us back, let's say, three hundred thousand piastres. Then we would use those three hundred thousand piastres to buy materials in the countryside we needed, to pay for rent for our people in the countryside, all of our, what might be called local currency expenditures, the non-dollar expenditures. So that was a big part of my responsibility, making sure that that all worked and we didn't get gyped or cheated by the Vietnamese, that we got as much as we needed. Because, if they didn't give us enough piastres, we'd have to buy them with dollars, and that was out of the U.S. taxpayers' pocket.

The second half, though, was what I described in Laos, and that's the import program. Were we bringing in enough goods to cover their foreign exchange deficit? If there had been no U.S. there, their foreign exchange would have been going down steadily, because their exports were not equal to their imports. They would have had to devalue; change their exchange rate, pump it up. They would have had to cut down consumption, and they would have had increased taxes. So, we were there to kind of make their life easier in some sense, so they could fight the war. That was kind of the contract between us, that we would do that. So, I had problems on the program side of negotiating this. Negotiating took a lot of detail and a lot of time as we worked with the Vietnamese government. A chap I'll mention later, Clay McManaway, was one of my officers, and he went with me over to the Vietnamese Budget Office—it was really right across a park from where we were—to negotiate those. We were all so busy that I remember meeting Clay, maybe at three o'clock, and we'd quickly jot down the numbers we needed and what he had worked out. Then we'd kind of run across this park. A couple times we got caught in monsoon showers and walked into the Vietnamese office kind of dripping and not very presentable. Who we dealt with were budget officers from the Vietnamese government. They were a residue of the old emperor-led government of Vietnam. They were like antiques, and I don't mean this in any derogatory way, that their training: it was Chinese, Mandarin training, very stiff, very formal, very proper and slow. These Americans come running in and want to sit down for fifteen minutes, half an hour, and negotiate, let's say, the agricultural program for next year in Binh Dinh Province or something that's up north.

I imagine, looking back on it, when I thought about it later, I thought they must have thought, who are these people; they're crazy; that's not the way you do business. You sit down with a cup of tea, and you talk about a few poems by Confucius maybe, or something, and then you talk a little bit about the business. That was their way of doing life and business. But here's Clay and I, running in and saying, "Well, we've got to be back for another meeting." It was pretty hilarious, but over time we got to know the Budget Director pretty well. He was a wonderful person, a long, wispy beard falling

down from his chin. He looked like something out of a book a long time ago, a very thin, angular face, very thin hair on top, and a choke collar, and his kind of mandarin dress on. But we got to know him very well and we worked together very well. He was fair: whatever he told us he'd do, he would do. But he was under a lot of pressure from his own government because they said try to save this, and don't let the Americans do this. Often, we would be—this was all in French, and you would look at him, and he'd say "No, no, *ce n'est pas possible*, not possible." He'd say that over and over, "*ce n'est pas possible*," and then we'd say, in French, "Let's just give it a try; just try." We may have to do that three times to get it through, but usually we then would get it through. He just had to gain some face by being able to do this, and we learned how to play that game. It was okay; it was perfectly all right. We liked him a lot, and we worked with him a lot. So, that's on the counterpart side, getting piastres from the government.

The other side, of course, was working with the Minister of the Economy and the Minister of Finance. That was on the overall import program and on the tax program. So, we'd be working with them a lot on taxes, to get them to raise more revenue. That would be with the Ministry of Finance. The Minister of Economy, we'd be working on the import program and doing what we mentioned before. So that was kind of the major thing, and I did those last two all on my own. I went by myself, met with the minister by myself. Sometimes, if it was a newer government, it would be in English. If it was an older style government, then it would be in French. It just depended what generation was kind of taking charge. They had a lot of government changes while I was there because there was no stability. Sometimes it would be what they call technological or they call it technical cabinet, where their people were trained in economics and other things, but they had no political connections. That would usually be in English, but then when it went back to the more political factions and representing the Catholics and representing the Buddhists and all that, then it generally would be in French. It worked fine either way. That was my responsibility.

Breisetsh: Some general thoughts on the quality and character of the senior Vietnamese officials you dealt with?

Wehrle: No vision. That was the biggest problem all the way through. You've got governments, but they had no end point that they were working toward. There was no vision, no coherence to what they wanted to accomplish. So, in a sense, they were kind of place keepers. They had to do a certain job. They had to do the ministry economy, and they had to take care of business and worry about customs a little bit, but there was no coherence to it. That was true of all of the governments that I worked with. We used to talk on our side, and I used to talk with my Vietnamese friends, where are they going, what are they accomplishing, and what are they telling the people, what they represent, and —that was just their way. When you think about it, or as I think about it right now, maybe in the older days, going all the way back to the emperor or even the French, your job as a bureaucrat was to be passive. Your job was simply to carry out whatever that function was. To go further than that was going to get you in trouble because there's no

larger aim at the upstairs, except the French, to keep the system going and get as many resources out as they can. Or in the emperor's time, it was simply to keep the system going. So, maybe that's part of it.

Breisetsh: And the longer development of your time there and beyond, I assume, is that, as opposed to the Viet Minh and Viet Cong from the north, they have a very strong purpose.

Wehrle: That's right.

Breisetsh: And the government in the south is a kind of status quo, trying to keep things as they are. And as the going gets rougher and rougher, that becomes an inadequate motivating vision.

Wehrle: No, that's exactly right. Motivating vision is a good way to put it because that's just what wasn't there. I'll talk later about John Vann and Frank Scotton and some of these people who had been there quite a while. They would say that over and over again to me, that the problem is that you can't demonstrate to the people that this is not just a new colonial government if they have nothing in it except to take care of themselves. And basically, that's what the Vietnamese did. I remember a lot of them that I worked with. I would raise questions of corruption. After I got to know them, I could be a little bit brash—usually you didn't talk about things like that. I'd say, "How much are you charging for import licenses?" Because to get imports, you had to get a license. In order to get a license, you have to get approval. To get approval, you've got to pay money, right? And he took me downstairs, he said, "You want to see what it's like?" I said, "Yeah, I'd like to see what it's like." I went downstairs and here's this big room of clerks, all sitting in desks, all over the place. They all had papers piled up on their left, and they all had papers piled up on their right. And he said, "This is what we have to deal with." His point was to tell me that "Don't talk to me about corruption; we've got a lot of work to do." And I said, "Okay, but what makes it go from the left pile to the right pile." Then he smiled and said, "Well, it just depends on whether it's worthy or not." But I knew by the smile, that if I would have gone up to a desk and opened up a drawer underneath, I would find a whole bunch of them that were held there because they were not getting the right payoff. As in the military, in the provinces that was all worked out, how much came here and then how much was paid up. All this had to go up, so that I knew that to break through that was going to be almost impossible. It wasn't like Laos, where I could bring in some inspectors and inspect it. We never did break through that.

Breisetsh: Going back to the American side, how savvy was someone like Taylor about things that you were aware of?

Wehrle: Well, first of all, it took me a while to become aware of it, so I don't want to pretend like I got aware right away. I didn't. When we talk about the radio program that will be an example of it. Taylor was flying at thirty thousand feet, if you know what I mean by that.

The rest of us had to fly five thousand. We had to land once in a while and take off. Taylor was way up on the top. I'll tell one story that I think illustrates this.

There's two points to this story. One is, how do you deal with a Confucian culture that is disintegrating in terms of the American point of view? That's really the key point. And how do you do that so that you don't cause them to lose face, but yet you're strong? Well, Maxwell Taylor was a good person, and he was a bright person, there's no question about that. But he did not, in my view—and this is a strong statement—understand Vietnam. He understood military, and he understood talk in the military. But these other aspects that we had to deal with, he had very little knowledge of, nor did he have much interest in it. I would even go further and say that Maxwell Taylor was largely uncomfortable in this position, largely uncomfortable. So, he decided that we're going to have meetings between the two governments. One new government comes into power, and I think this was probably the Ky government, I'm not sure, it could have been two governments, it doesn't matter, and we're going to have meetings. So, we'll have all the American counterparts to all the ministers, and we're going to meet, and we're going to talk about our problems. (laughs) Well, here you've got a long table that stretches probably, I don't know, fifteen feet; a long table, maybe twenty feet. On either side, you've got these fancy chairs put up and a big room. The Vietnamese sits on that side and the American counterpart sits on this side. And now we're going to discuss our problem, our questions and what we can do. That was Maxwell Taylor's idea.

Well, when the American makes a suggestion like that, the other side is going to say yes, I've got nothing to lose. It was the most cockamamie thing you ever saw, because we all sat there stiff as boards, looking across at a person who we, by that time knew a little bit. But nobody knew what they were supposed to do. How do you act in this? This is not a comfortable environment. And so, the two top people talked back and forth. They thought other people would start talking, but nobody else said a word. So you had these formal statements back and forth. We did this for about three or four weeks, or maybe months, I don't know. And then Maxwell Taylor asked us at mission council one time, "Is this a good idea; are we making progress?" And I said, "Absolutely not," so then he canceled it.

Now, if you know dealing with the Asians, you deal with them privately as much as you possibly can, and you speak softly. That's what they're used to. We had Americans who would speak very, very loud to the Vietnamese. That's a no-no; it breaks their culture.

So, in answer to your question about Maxwell Taylor, I think that he felt that his knowledge of the military would get him through and he would represent strength. Since it's a military government, it's a good idea to have a military man as ambassador. They will respect that. I can think of all the arguments that went into the White House, and picking him, because he knew all that. But they were fallacious for the reason that I mentioned earlier. That is that politically, these generals had no political connections to the people, routes or anything. They were floating; they were like flotsam. That's a

terrible thing to say, but they were like flotsam on the water. They had no vision for the country. It goes back to our point before, that they had no vision for where they wanted the country to go. How do you organize a government if you're just place-keeping? Well, you don't really. You just let it go on. As long as the Americans finance it, it will go forward.

John Vann, Scotton, Holbrook, myself, that's what we would talk about when we got together. How do we give this government a sense of purpose so that they want to win the war more than we want to win the war? That was always the thing that went through our mind. They didn't have to want to win it too badly, as long as we protected them. And as long as they were taken care of, then they could play their corruption games and other things. It was like kids playing in a sandbox. And then we were standing guard around the sandbox saying, you know, don't touch these guys. That used to drive us kind of batty because we couldn't see any way through it. Different ambassadors were confronted, and they probably worried about that too. But they never found a way to deal with it, so...

Breiseth: The period we're talking about, the fall into winter, of 1964.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: How many U.S. advisers are in Vietnam?

Wehrle: You know, I'm not sure, but I'd say maybe ten thousand maybe, maybe five thousand.

Breiseth: That would be my impression.

Wehrle: Not a lot.

Breiseth: I thought, under Kennedy, it had gotten up to something like sixteen thousand.

Wehrle: You may very well be right. I'm not sure. I was going to even think it might have been thirty thousand.

Breiseth: It may have been thirty thousand by the year after Kennedy is dead. There is some escalation, is there not?

Wehrle: Oh, yes, there is. A lot of people based it on that, said if Kennedy lived, he would have sent more in. I don't think anybody knows what Kennedy would have done if he would have lived. You can argue the case either way. But I can say this, that when I came there in the fall of '64, it was relatively quiet. There were no great big battles going on that I remember at all. We were working on economic problems and other things, ongoing, without any great feel of duress or anything like that.

We went on home leave in December of '64 because we had not had home leave for quite a while. When we came back in January, it was like a different place because the big attacks had taken place in early January, in the rubber plantations northwest of Saigon.

Breisetsh: January, 1965.

Wehrle: January, 1965, that's right, and the morale—I'd gotten to know the Vietnamese a little bit. I mean, I didn't know them real well, but I knew some pretty well. The one person that I'll mention is Cuong, his name is C-u-o-n-g. I've got his full name written down someplace. I got to know him through the Ministry of the Economy because he was an assistant there. For some reason we clicked. We talked a lot, and he would invite me over to his home. I'd have dinner there, and I found out his background. He was a nationalist, fighting the French with the Viet Minh, while the French were there. And then, when the French were kicked out essentially, and the Americans came in, the Viet Minh—he saw what the Viet Minh were really, after and he split from them. Many of his friends were all killed because the Viet Minh didn't like it when you left them. He turned out to be a nationalist, fighting for the freedom of his country. But the only group he could work with was Diem, and he felt that Diem, over those years, was not really a nationalist patriot. He didn't believe that could work.

Anyhow, Cuong was one that helped inform me early on about a lot of the things that were going on. And he turned out to be right about most of the things.

Breisetsh: Like what?

Wehrle: Well, like the fact that the governments have no purpose; they're not going anyplace. You can negotiate with them all you want, but are they going to accomplish the things that they say that you're going to tell them to do? No, not if it goes against their interests, they won't do it. And it doesn't make any difference what government comes in. His group, they had a Friday night group that they got together, and they were pretty dedicated, all these people. They took over the government at one point; I mean the prime minister said, "I want you guys to run the government." So, they were pretty well-known, and they were all pretty good friends of mine by that time, so I had all kinds of inroads in the government. But they didn't do anything either, because the larger framework was such that if you don't change that, you can't really do anything because that's the structure. And the military dominated that structure.

Cuong didn't get out with the rest of them. Most of those people got out at the end of the war. He didn't get out. He took a boat out, and he died in a boat on the way to Indonesia. I always felt sad about that. He was a little tiny guy, tenacious, smart, active. He was a true Vietnamese patriot. And I and this group that I keep mentioning, Scotton and Holbrook and myself, and Vann, we always felt that if those people could have been found and given the means with which to govern, the resources, that we would have

had a chance. That's just what we felt. We felt that all the way through, that that was the case, that you can't go with people who are alien to the basic core of Vietnam, which is why Diem, and certainly not the military. The peasants had all kinds of jokes about the military, some bawdy, some not so bawdy, but all nasty, because they saw those as martinets, and martinets of the Americans, and the military did very little to dissuade them of that.

Breiseth: You've mentioned two key figures in your time there, key figures in the effort, and in the case of one of them, later, a very consequential leader, Dick Holbrook. And I know Vann is somebody that you have a great interest in.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: Let's hold off on them for a minute. Since you've given us a sense of Maxwell Taylor as ambassador, a general become ambassador. Let's focus a little bit on some of the other ambassadors. They were a key part of your experience in Vietnam.

Wehrle: That's right.

Breiseth: And you've clearly—because I've read some of the summaries of the letters, they had a very high regard for you. So, you have a kind of privileged position to look at their strengths, as well as their weaknesses. One of them that intrigues me, because I knew him as a public citizen, studying him as a politician, is Henry Cabot Lodge, who, of course, was Nixon's vice-presidential candidate in 1960.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: I think Jack Kennedy defeated him in the 1946 election for Congress? Maybe I'm wrong on that, but they were rivals.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: I guess they were rivals for the Senate.

Wehrle: The Senate, I think that's right.

Breiseth: Kennedy defeated Lodge. So, Lodge was on the other side politically of the regime in Washington. Yet the Democrats asked him to come back for a second tour of duty as ambassador. And you served him the longest.

Wehrle: Yes.

Breiseth: Or you served with him the longest...

Wehrle: I served him the longest.

Breisetsh: ...of your time in Vietnam.

Wehrle: I think that's right.

Breisetsh: Talk about Henry Cabot Lodge.

Wehrle: (chuckles) Well, Henry Cabot Lodge was a distant figure. He had an almost enigmatic quality about him because he didn't say very much. He was a mandarin in the sense that he carried himself like you would expect a Boston Brahmin to carry himself. He was a tall person, and so he had a commanding presence in a room. He would usually wear a white suit that set him off. It wasn't quite the old Diem white suits, but it was a little different. He was very well respected, and part of it was this certain mystique that he was capable of making, doing, showing, whatever the word is. He didn't disclose his cards very well, and neither did Maxwell Taylor. That's even in meetings in the mission council.

What is the mission council? Well, the mission council is sometimes called the "country team" in various countries, but here it was called the "mission council." It's kind of the management team of the operation for America. So, in a mission council, you're going to have: In military endeavors, you're going to have the military commander, which is Westmoreland. Then you're going to have USIA [United States Information Agency], which is the propaganda arm of the United States, and in our case it was Barry Zorthian. And then you'll have the political counselor. In this case it would be Philip Habib. I don't know if I've mentioned him before. I think I did, H-a-b-i-b, one of the finest Foreign Service officers that I have ever seen. So, he'd be there, and then you'd have the assistant, or the special assistant to the ambassador. They were kind of like a secretary, and he would be in the meeting. Then you'd have the aid director, in this case Jim Killen. And then you'd have the economic counselor, which would be myself. And you'd have the station chief for the CIA. They would all sit together. The ambassador would ask what needs resolution; who's got a problem? Or he'd come in with a proposal, before he sent it to Washington, and asked for their guidance on it, or whatever it might happen to be. Sometimes they'd ask for reports. They'd say, "Okay, Roy, what's the latest on the economy?" That kind of a meeting. But when you did that with both Taylor and with Henry Cabot Lodge, there was not much response back. It was kind of like, it was kind of enigmatic. You look at him and say, "Well, has he approved that or didn't approve that?" You wouldn't find out until you got in his office with him, and then you would do it. He would let you know.

My advantage with Henry Cabot Lodge was that I knew economics and he didn't. I don't mean to be cute by saying that, but he really did not know economics. I had been there. Max Taylor had told him that I was a solid citizen, so I had a game up on that. I was really very lucky. Early on, when I'd come over to get a cable to go out through Lodge, he'd worry about it, and he'd send it to somebody else and check it out. But pretty soon, he found out that— He'd ask; he'd say to me; he'd read it and he'd say, "Roy, what does

that mean?" (chuckles) And I'd say, "Sir, that's saying blah-blah-blah," and he learned that I was telling him what it said. So, then he would then sign off on it, and send it off. We got along very well that way. His assistants used to tell me that he doesn't like economics at all. Well, it was pretty clear to me that he didn't like it.

So, that made my job a lot easier, but I had to go through Killen to get there, because he was my other boss. And he gave me a lot of trouble, which we can talk about later. But in terms of Lodge, people expected a lot from him. You can think of John Vann and others and their expectations. When Lodge came back they thought, well that means we're going to finally get change. Lodge used to joke about this. I remember one time, and I can't remember the name, we were over at his office with two or three of his advisers and myself, talking about it. He would say, "What do I do?" We were talking about the political chaos, which is what we talked about before.

Breiseth: In Vietnam.

Wehrle: Yeah, in Vietnam. Lodge would lean way back and he'd say, "What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to become a Viceroy..." And this is a term in the colonial world, where you take charge. You are like a political general. You're in command but you're not really. It's their country, but you're really running it, and anyhow, he used that term, whatever that was.

Breiseth: Governor general?

Wehrle: It was like that. "Am I supposed to be governor general of this country?" And he'd laugh. We always wondered what he meant by that because we knew that there were plenty of proposals to him that the Americans should take over the military.

Breiseth: The kind of MacArthur role in Japan.

Wehrle: Yeah. And, that there should be a combined military force, so the RVN [Republic of Vietnam] and the MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam] forces were fighting side-by-side, not one here and one back here, one forward and one in the rear. So, we didn't know if he was talking about something like that or not. It was clear that he wasn't going to tell us anymore. He obviously had a cable from Washington saying, how much power can you take to get this job done—we want this job done. I'm sure there's a lot of pressure like that on him.

Breiseth: At that point, and you have to just maybe hypothesize in retrospect, at that point, what did Washington want? Before, we had the big escalation of troops. I mean what was the vision in Washington as you all received it?

Wehrle: The answer is I don't know. I don't have any idea what they really wanted because all I saw was the cables which were, do this on economics, or do this in economics. In fact, one of the things that we often talked about fits into your question, and that is, we felt

that the United States spent an awful lot of time and money worrying about whether the import program should be X or whether it should be Y, or whether we should make this kind of representation or that kind of representation. But almost no time at all, on the overall objective, what were we trying to achieve? What were the objectives? How could we tell whether we were achieving that or not? So, in a sense, I don't know. We speculated on what Lodge was supposed to do because we knew he was under pressure. I'm sure Phil Habib would know. I got to know Philip Habib very well, but he never said anything to me about it; that's for sure.

Breiseth: Did this group that you talked about, including Holbrook and Vann, did you all talk about this issue with each other?

Wehrle: Oh, yeah, we did.

Breiseth: If you had been brought into the president's office in Washington, would you all have had advice for him on what he should be trying to do?

Wehrle: Oh, I think so. Yeah, I think so. It might have been bad advice, but I think well...

Breiseth: Before the escalation of troops, what would that have been? In other words, what at that point in time, did it seem it was possible and even desirable?

Wehrle: Things were open politically at that point. How open, who knows, but Diem was gone, so we did have some maneuver room. The military, as you and I talked about earlier, we had created space for the military, political space.

Breiseth: For the Vietnam military.

Wehrle: And we let them occupy it. What we would have said is you cannot let the military run this, because that is exactly what this whole thing is not about. We have to have a nationalist revolution. You've got to demonstrate to the people, urban and rural, that this is their country and their leaders are leading it into a new time, which is post-colonial period. And unless you do that, the communists are going to win because their propaganda is very strong. They say the Americans are the new colonialists. And you can't believe these fat cats that are living behind their tinted car windows in Saigon are going to do that sort of thing.

So we would have said something to the effect that we've got to—and we may not know the answer, but there's got to be a way that we find some nationalist leaders, get behind them. It may take some time to do it. Then push that and let them not just shove the military out, but keep them out of being in control. They're still going to have to pay them off, and then they'll be happy with that for a while. Then slowly move it into getting rid of the generals that are no good. Just clean house, and get it out. There's no reason we couldn't do that, I mean I don't think. People say, well that's pie in the sky. But I don't think it's pie in the sky. It means taking risks, and governments don't like to

take risks. So, if things are rolling along, you don't want to upset the applecart and all that sort of thing. But we would have talked about that, and we would have talked a lot about corruption. We would have said, there are ways to limit it, to minimize it. You're not going to rid of it, so that the government can run functionally. We can talk about that later if you'd like.

We would have talked a little bit about the RVN role, and that they should fight along— There weren't very many American forces there, but they had to become aggressive. When there was an opportunity to attack the enemy, when we had good intelligence, they had to go. They couldn't just make excuses and say, you know, well, we just didn't feel like going out that day. And that's what was happening all over.

Breisetsh: Let's summarize your sense of the strengths of Henry Cabot Lodge and his weaknesses.

Wehrle: Well, he did have weaknesses, there's no question about that, because nobody knew really what he wanted done. So he, in a sense, was kind of playing the same game that the GVN did. He would back us on this and back us on that, but we really didn't know what he wanted to achieve out there. People had high hopes when he came out there, but they were disappointed because he really did not achieve anything.

Now, the other side of that is maybe nobody could have because—and we have to be very clear on this—during the time that he was there, that was a really chaotic period politically. We had the Buddhist uprising; we had the immolations that had taken place. That was under Max Taylor. But even when Lodge came back out there, there was the Da Nang Riots, and there was the riots up in a couple of other places. I remember a couple times when it got so serious that they sent all the Americans out of their offices to their apartments. That only happened twice, but it did happen. That just shows political—just, just a maelstrom of stuff swirling around. And Lodge had to live with that. He didn't make that, but he had to live in that. So, to what extent he had maneuver room, I mean that's really beyond my knowledge of it. So, when I'm unhappy with Lodge, it may very well be that I'm being somewhat unfair to him in that sense because it's hard to judge that unless you see the overall picture. I did not see the overall picture.

Breisetsh: Can you reflect on what he saw in you?

Wehrle: (chuckles) I think what he saw in me was somebody to keep the economic devil away from his door. I think that's what he saw in me. I liked Lodge as a person, and I think he liked me. But I think all that he saw in me really was, well, the Vietnamese like him; he seems to be able to negotiate with them well. He keeps the problems away from my door, and so to speak, God bless him. I think that's what he might have thought.

Breisetsh: Because he certainly weighed in later with the general recognition of you and your accomplishments.

Wehrle: He did. He said good things about me later on. One of them, he said, was when we were having policy issues and he was fighting me on it because I was asking him to do something that was politically hurtful to him and to the party. That was normal that the ambassador is not going to want you to do that. That's just natural. But I had Jim Killen against me too. He didn't want to do it either, my boss over in AID. So, when you've got both of them against you, then it's very, very hard to get it on through.

Later on, like you said, Lodge, in a letter to me and privately said, "Thank goodness Roy, you really pushed on that because you were absolutely right." For the longer run, we had to do what you said. So, he recognized that, and that's to his credit, I think.

Breiseth: That's great. His successor was?

Wehrle: A wonderful gentleman by the name of Ellsworth Bunker. Ellsworth Bunker was probably seventy-three or four when he came to that job. And I said "gentleman" correctly, because he really was a gentleman. He acted like one; he stood like one, talked like one.

Breiseth: He'd been head of the American Red Cross.

Wehrle: Is that what he'd been before?

Breiseth: I think.

Wehrle: Is that right? But he'd been in the Foreign Service before hadn't he, or not?

Breiseth: I'm not sure.

Wehrle: I'm not sure either.

Breiseth: I'm not sure. I also associate him with the International Olympics.

Wehrle: Oh, was he?

Breiseth: That may be totally off.

Wehrle: I don't know.

Breiseth: I think he was head of the Red Cross.

Wehrle: He was also a quiet person, distinguished looking, as I've said. And his wife was Ambassador to Nepal.

Breiseth: And her name was Laise.

Wehrle: Is that right?

Breiseth: And she's a sister of a very good friend of mine.

Wehrle: Oh, really?

Breiseth: Yeah.

Wehrle: Well, she was quite a capable lady. Part of the deal that he got was that he could have a T-39 jet, and every month or two he could fly over to Nepal to see his wife, which was kind of neat. And he did that. I suspect that if you look at the overall career of Ellsworth Bunker, he was there to partly see us get out, but that was toward the end. I don't think that was true when he first came out at all, although I'm not sure. Again, I have no idea what was on top of his thing.

Ellsworth Bunker was a very good person to work with because he really got into it. He listened to you very carefully, he was very smart. He would see the weaknesses in what you're doing, and then you would have to argue back about whether that makes sense. And in some cases, I remember a case where he would say, "Roy, I don't know whether we should—why don't you think about that a little bit." He did it in such a wonderful way that you did, you went back and you went through it again to make sure that you were right on this. And if you were wrong, you went back, and he respected you. We had a lot of respect between each other. Sometimes he'd bring Philip Habib into the conversation and say, "Roy wants to do this, that's going to do this or that, what do you think?" Habib was very straightforward too, as well.

Breiseth: Now, Bunker comes in after there's been an escalation of military involvement.

Wehrle: That's right, see that's a different time. When does Bunker come? He comes '67 probably.

Breiseth: So you just have a few months with him.

Wehrle: Well, I had more than that, so it must have been earlier than that.

Breiseth: So, he must have come in '66.

Wehrle: I've got that in my timeline, but I don't remember the exact time. I can look it up and see. Oh, you know, I think Lodge left in the fall of '66. Yeah, and I get about nine months with Ellsworth Bunker. When Ellsworth Bunker was there, there was another deputy ambassador. Ambassador Porter was there under him, and I worked a lot with him. We had all these different kinds of problems. We had refugee problems; we had coastal shipping problems; we had all these things. So Ellsworth Bunker would simply say, "Talk to Porter," because he didn't have time to deal with all those problems. So, I would work with Porter then on these. Then Porter would then say, "Roy's got these down; they're ready to go" or "The AID mission has got this down," or whatever it is, and

would smooth my way that way. That was very, very helpful, working with those... My relations with the embassy were always very good, and I was pleased with that.

Breiseth: To get into some of the issues you had to deal with, which brings your friend Jim into it, is the issue of imports, particularly rice, and to a lesser extent probably, cement.

Wehrle: Yes.

Breiseth: Talk about rice and cement as issues that you had to think about when you were going to sleep.

Wehrle: Let's do that, but let's do it by setting—and this will take me a little bit of time to do—who Jim Killen was and why he was there, because this is really a very, very important aspect of the whole story. It's a story of America too; it's not just the story of Vietnam.

Jim Killen was director and he'd been there about... He came in September. He'd been there, I don't think a year, by the time I got there; I think that's right. Jim was a big, tall fellow, a strapping guy.

Breiseth: A lot of tall Americans in this.

Wehrle: A lot of tall Americans, and they stood out in every cocktail party you went to, except for me. They stood out among all those little Vietnamese.

Breiseth: Maybe that's why the Vietnamese trusted you.

Wehrle: Well, it's a little easier not to be intimidating when you're small; that's right. Jim comes out of the northwest, and he was a lumberjack, felling trees, and joined the union movement and went up through the union as a manager of the union and got into democratic politics. Much to his credit, he got himself appointed to some AID position through the democratic administrations. I don't know which one; it doesn't matter. But he made that transition, which is pretty impressive, from a union leader, to being a high administrator in AID missions. And lo and behold, he was sent to Korea. In Korea, there was a big U.S. Aid mission and faltering development.

Breiseth: After the war or during the war?

Wehrle: After the war. He was there right before he came to Vietnam, so that will tell you the time period. He came to Vietnam, probably in '64. In Korea we were pouring money in, but the economy wasn't going anyplace. The reason it wasn't going anyplace is fairly simple to see now, although not so easy to see then. That is the exchange rate was wrong, and that means that the price between the Korean currency and the dollar was set at such a rate that exports were priced out of the world market. And imports were priced cheaply because the exchange rate always works in opposite ways. If the exports are too high priced, then imports will be very cheap. So that means that you take the

Korean currency, you don't have to pay very many units in order to get imports. So, who does it favor? Well, it favors the people in the urban areas because they're the ones that do most of the importing, not the peasants; they don't have the money. But the peasants are trying to sell their rice, and the entrepreneurs are trying to sell their goods on the foreign market. They can't do it.

Well, why is it true, all over the world, that often that's the case, that the exchange rate is set too high? Well, it's because who has political power in most of these countries? It's the urban populous that has the power. They are the focus one, and if you don't make them happy, you're going to have trouble. It's also the elites. So, that's what was going on in Korea.

Well then, why doesn't the United States change that? Well, we don't change it because it's going to make the country unhappy. The political people are going to scream; the locals, the Koreans, are going to scream and say hey, you're destroying our government. We can't do that; we're not going to accept that; that's going to cause us to lose power, and in the next elections coming up, and blah-blah-blah. Jim Killen, much to his credit, took one look at that, and he was no fancy economist or anything like that, but he took a look at it, and that's often what it takes, and he saw right through it, transparently. He said, "What the heck are we doing?" We're paying all these millions of dollars, the United States, to allow the urban populous in Seoul to have an easy life? That's not why we're given this aid. We're given this aid so they can develop, and that means exports; that means industrial growth. We've got to change the exchange rate. Bless his heart, he was absolutely right.

So, the United States agreed to send an IMF mission. An IMF mission went out there; they vindicated exactly what he said. And then the key, Washington gave him the authority to negotiate that and not to accept defeat, and he did it. So, he came out of Korea as a hero, rightly so, and he did it because he was not the normal Foreign Service kind of guy. He was tough, wily, and he convinced them that that was going to work, and he was right. Today Korea has one of the top economies in the world. So, the point I want to make when he comes down to Vietnam is that he's going to try to do the same thing down in South Vietnam because he knows that that works. Well—and you know what I'm going to say probably, South Vietnam was not South Korea. It was very, very different. And the north Asians are not the same as the south Asians by a long, long shot. So, when I got in trouble with Killen, why did I get in trouble? I don't mean I got in trouble, I mean we had difficulty working together.

Breisetsh: Your ideas.

Wehrle: But we respected each other a lot. I respected Jim a great deal, and he knew that. I respected his strength and his ability to call a spade a spade. I really liked that. He made a couple speeches about me, early on, to show that—down in a conference in Can Tho,

where he said, "President Johnson has his Moyers, and I have my Roy," referring to our young ages. He did that publicly; he didn't have to do that.

Breiseth: This is Bill Moyers.

Wehrle: Bill Moyers, yeah. So, we had a relationship where we respected each other. But, on the issue of rice, we came to a crisis. Now, it's important to make that clear because that's a big piece of the story. Rice, as we got into more and more insurgency, this is not going to surprise anybody to realize that the rice supply is coming in from the delta, which was the main place where rice was produced in Vietnam, would be restricted. Coming in off of the central plains would be restricted. Even up in the middle of the country, Yeongju, Dangjin, those are big rice valleys. If the insurgency takes over some of those villages, they're going to take the rice, and we're not going to get it.

So, it was starting to get much more serious. The rice price was starting to go up, and I argued that we needed to import rice. Well, to Jim Killen that was an admission of defeat because this is a rice surplus-producing nation. My view was pragmatic. During a war, you can't afford to lose the urban areas and the others to economic shortages, to a big inflation, where their living standards go way down. You're trying to get them to be on GVN's side in this war and the countryside too, so you've got to keep the rice price from getting out of control. You don't want it too low because you want the paddy price for rice out in the delta to be high enough to help the peasant. So, it's a balance, and you can argue which way it actually should be, but you can't take a chance of the price of rice getting out of hand. That was my view. That's an entirely pragmatic view.

Now, what's Jim Killen's view? Jim Killen's view is this government does not take this war seriously. Westmoreland doesn't understand that it's not a battle of who kills the most people, it's who wins the most support out in the countryside. And the only way this government is ever going to shape up is you've got to make it tough on them. Let the price go up; let them see what that does. They'll see the price going up in Saigon, and they'll realize that that's going to bite them in the tail. Then they'll start taking the measures to open the roads and get that rice in and do these sorts of things.

My view was, it ain't going to happen; we can't take that chance. It's unlikely that they would react in the consequential way that Killen just argued. We can't do that; that's too risky. They should do all those things, but we're not going to make the Vietnamese into tigers, rather than mice, by this process. It's going to take a lot more than that. Now, I say that because Jim Killen's point of view was a principled point of view and was very deep in terms of understanding some things. But it was not going to work, as far as I was concerned. I could have been wrong; I could have been right, but that was a big difference. We kept playing that back and forth for months and months and months. Finally, Jim allowed for a little imports to come in, but we didn't come to terms on that. Finally, Ambassador Lodge started supporting me on that because it was clear to him, as a political person, that it was risky not to import rice.

So, we imported a little bit of rice because Lodge allowed it. But still, Jim was really hanging back in every cable that I did on this. We spent a lot of work on this. My economic staff was working on all kinds of things to try to figure out what was going to happen. I even sent my special assistant, Dick Crist, down to the rural delta, to check on where the rice was going. It was very hard to find out. I tried to get the CIA to help me but they didn't really know. Is the rice going to come up here; is it going to be captured down there? We had to know those things.

Dick Crist went down there, and a part of that story is he took... I send him down in a little light plane, landed on a road going to this little village. There was supposed to be somebody there to meet him. But it got screwed up somehow and he landed, it was dark, and he had to walk into the village. It was dangerous territory. The next day, he made his contacts down there, and they were very helpful to him. We sent a plane down to get him. He came back and gave me information. But that was what I was confronted with, really trying to find out what's really going to happen on that whole thing.

Well, inflation started moving up because American troops—and we'll talk about that later—their presence created a big inflationary impact because of their purchasing power. So, the price was starting to go up, and we had visits from McNamara about every three months or so. He would fly in, and we'd have these big briefings for two or three days. I had done the briefing for him that morning on the economy, what's going on. He's a very smart guy; he saw the price was starting to go up on rice, He was worried about it, so he called Killen and myself in after that briefing, into a room, and he said, "Now, I want to know what you're doing about rice. Roy talked about that this morning, and there's some problems. What should we do? I want each of you to tell me what you think our policy should be."

Well, I told what I had told that morning, that I thought we should be importing rice. We shouldn't go overboard, but we should make sure that we've got enough, and even enough reserve stock, that we don't get caught. Jim Killen made the speech that I just described a few minutes ago, about the importance of the Vietnamese taking on and facing up to their own responsibilities. McNamara listened to both of us, and he said, "Well, Roy's policy is going to be U.S. policy." That was all he said and walked out, but within a couple days after that, Killen was gone. So they simply said, we're not going to have this kind of fight at the top of this. Killen, he's not on top of things; he doesn't realize, or whatever it was, you know. I was, of course, shocked that that would happen. It was like a giant tree being chopped down right next to me and falling in the forest.

Breiseth: Partly because of you.

Wehrle: Partly because of me, yeah. But, you know, the whole thing was to get the policy right. Jim had hurt himself in other ways that I won't go into now, but he was losing steam because it wasn't working the way he wanted it to work. So, his tactics, he was

becoming more and more disconnected from things. He was not an adroit negotiator, nor was he a subtle kind of person. That was fine for South Korea, but it wasn't fine for the Vietnamese.

Breiseth: In your letters, which I've seen a summary of, each time he comes back from Washington or whatever, he seems more and more depressed.

Wehrle: You're right. I'd forgotten about that, but he was. You'd see he was tired, you'd see bags under his eyes when he'd come back because he was going down a trail he believed in, but it wasn't working.

Breiseth: What happens to him subsequently, do you know?

Wehrle: He went back to Washington. They gave him a job someplace, and he died not a long time after that, not a long time after that, no. But I still have a lot of regret about that whole thing.

Breiseth: Except the policy that you pursued was right.

Wehrle: Not the policy, but about him as a human being. I had so much respect for the fact that he beat all the fancy, striped pants guys, you know? He worked his way up, got to the top, and then was too rigid to last.

Breiseth: This is kind of pulling out of the chronology, but was there any other policy issue you developed in those three and a half years in Vietnam that was really resisted by important voices and that kind of tested your credibility with the ambassador and McNamara and Rusk?

Wehrle: I don't know if this fits the bill or not, of what you're speaking of, maybe yes, maybe no. In the end it doesn't. The big problem we had was when we increased the import program to deal with the purchasing power that was being spread all across the country by the United States. We didn't have the port capacity to handle the amount of cargo ships coming in. And probably to my blame, I didn't foresee that as much as I should have foreseen it. It's pretty obvious that, if you increase the import program, you're going to have to increase the cargo ships coming in. Neither did any of my staff, we just didn't see that coming. Pretty soon, the cargo was coming in, and the port was quite congested. Ships had to wait days and days. Of course, ships don't like to wait to unload. They lose money every day, like a taxi, waiting. We didn't quite understand it because we thought we had enough lighter capacity. Lighters are the small barges that can go up next to a cargo ship, and you can unload on the lighters if you can't get to the berthing space. All our analysis showed that we still had enough, but it wasn't working at all.

From our apartment in Saigon that JoAnn and I had, you could look out over the Saigon River that went down to the South China Sea. You could see it, literally see it, going out through the wetlands out there. And after a while, we could see ships lined up down

that thing. Well, that was scary as all get out because that meant that when the importers put in a bill of lading to send stuff from Amsterdam, the Amsterdam office would not ship because they're going to lose money. So we were scared to death. This got really, very, very serious, enough to cause many, many headaches. What the devil do we do?

I went over to a good friend of mine, whose name was Allain, that's A-I-I-a-i-n, Felix, F-e-l-i-x, who was head of the big French banks. It was one of the major commercial banks, and it was there in the old colonial days of French banking. He was in charge of that, and he and I had gotten to know each other. He spoke beautiful French, and he's probably one of the brightest people I ever met in my life. He was very dedicated to the Vietnamese and to the Americans. The one thing that was true about Allain Felix is that he was pro-American, against all the French negativity. He just said those are crazy people. America stands for something in the world. Why don't people realize it?

Well anyhow, we got to know each other pretty good, and I'd go over and see him. A lot of times he helped me a lot, trying to understand. "Allain, what's going on here? This is happening, and I just don't get it." Then he would do some sleuthing around and he would help me. He helped me an enormous amount. Nobody knew that, but that was a big help. I could often go into a meeting, and I'd have the scoop. And the rest of them wouldn't have it right. So, I asked him about the port, and he said, "Well," he said, "you know, that port is controlled by..." And then he'd tell me a French-Chinese mafia group that controls that because it's a chokepoint. Anyplace that's a chokepoint, is a good place for the mafia to control and get their slice of money and all the rest, and steal. I thought, oh my gosh, how do we break through that?

So at that point, the only time I ever did that, I turned to the CIA, and I said, "Okay, you guys have got connections with everything. I really need help." I knew the station chief pretty well and I just went and talked to him.

Breisetsh: At this point, Lodge is ambassador?

Wehrle: Lodge is ambassador. The station chief was very helpful because in the mission council you all know each other's problems, because you're sharing them all. He knew what that was, so that was where it really paid off. He told me where to go, what time at night, and that somebody would meet me there. So, I went down at night, and I did this maybe two or three times. All black, by some warehouse, and I'd go down, drive down there, and go with this guy, and then we'd go out on motorboats, out into the port. He would show me what's going on and how they would control it out there. It's an eerie place, to be out there, I mean it scared me, to tell you the truth. It was black, and you're zipping around. You'd see this little light, and then you'd see that little light. And I said, "As close as you can get me, I want you to show me the nexus of control, who's in command, who runs it, how does it work, how do they make it work." The CIA put some money into doing that.

When I got all that and put it into my brain, I had to do that all by myself because I didn't want anybody else on that. It was clear to me we weren't going to get through. It was clear to me we were really up against a wall. So I talked to a couple of people, and I thought well, it seems to me that the only way we're going to break through this is the U.S. military. I went to Lodge, a couple people, and they all said "No, we can't do that." I got turned down by the logistics guy in AID. He said, "That's impossible. We can't do that; it's impossible. Do you realize what that would take, Roy?" Yeah, well I don't really care, I just want it done. It got worse. So, then I went to Ambassador Lodge and I said, "We've got to do this; we don't have any choice. Sir, this is it, I've looked at it, and I tell you..." I said, "General Westmoreland will support us." I didn't know that, but I said, "I just feel that he will support us. If he supports us, it's a done deal. Nobody will block him." He said, "Okay." He said, "Roy, go over and see Westmoreland. I've been turned down by Colonel Owen. I've been turned down by these other people."

I went to see Westmoreland that afternoon, I remember, and he accepted it right away. Again, he knew what the problem was. He'd been in the mission council meeting, and he accepted what I said, that there was no other way out. So, once the military took it over, they built more berths. They brought in the SeaBees and they built more berths along the river. They just blasted right through all this stuff. I mean, they took it over; they controlled it, and the mafia was just swept away. Now that's not a full answer to your question because I was only obstructed in that a relatively short time. That was not a longstanding sort of thing. It was just probably three months or so that I was trying to find my way through this. But really, the end of that story is not what you mentioned, because I got full support from the ambassador and from Westmoreland.

I can't think of any other program where I was blocked, I guess, forever, or blocked for a long, long time. I mean refugee programs, aid programs, import programs, all those. Pretty much the way we wanted them to go, they went.

Breiseth: Just those two instances, the rice and the ports, tells me why you were respected by the top military people and the top embassy people as a guy who was going to get the job done. You were not cultured in the traditional State Department bureaucracy, and you had not risen up through the ranks.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: Learning how to protect yourself going up, to get to the next rung. In that kind of emergency, your tenacity, along with your integrity, made you a very valuable commodity to the top people, who felt the pressure from Washington on getting things done.

Wehrle: Yeah, that's right, that's right, yeah.

Breisetsh: Those two things, those are two really important stories. You mentioned Westmoreland. We could bring him up at almost any time, because he's a towering figure, but let's get into your sense of the man.

Wehrle: Of Westmoreland?

Breisetsh: Of Westmoreland. The role he played and your interactions with him.

Wehrle: Well, of course, with Westmoreland I had lots of interactions. As an example, Cam Ranh Bay, which is now one of the finest deep water ports in the world, is a beautiful bay that is on the coast of Vietnam, maybe a third of the way up the coast. It was completely undeveloped; it was just white sands. The military wanted another port for themselves, and we'll talk probably tomorrow or some time, about the construction thing that went on. So he [Westmoreland] asked me to go along with him.

We went up there with some other people on a chopper and landed up there. It was beautiful, just open sand, nothing there, just a beautiful bay. And it was quiet and peaceful. Now, of course, it's a big, bustling port. But, Westy was good about doing that. He said, "I want to know the economic impact if we do this." So he took me along with him up there, and we were able to discuss a good way of planning forward. His people were telling him, now we're going to have to have a lot of laborers, and we don't want any unions, want to mess with unions. I remember, with another guy that was with me, I was saying, "Oh no, that's not right. You want unions. You don't not want them. You want them. If you don't, you're going to have chaos." They did have unions. It was against all their thoughts, but it worked out really fine.

I kick myself a lot because there was a fundamental flaw in the military, the way they treated their soldiers over there. They just gave them open berth to do whatever they wanted to do. And I never raised a finger.

Breisetsh: The American soldiers.

Wehrle: Americans, yeah. I went around, and I saw the bordellos. I saw the shantytowns, where they had the prostitutes, and, of course, I was shocked by all that stuff, the shacks and all that. It was a terrible degradation of the Vietnamese people. I just cannot describe to you what a degradation that was to the Vietnamese. When we got to a Muslim country, we didn't do that, right? Because we couldn't possibly get by with it, and we should never have done it over there. It shouldn't have been okay. You're going over to kind of have your sex dreams, fantasies, all come true. You're going over there to fight a war. I know, I saw the economic chaos that came out of that because the PXs were full of hairsprays and all the goodies that they got for their girls and all that stuff. You can say maybe, I'm just a purist or old fashioned, but it had such a bad effect. And the Americans were seen as such a low life group of people, even by the Vietnamese, who had their own ways of womanizing, but at least it had a certain discreteness to it, compared to this.

So, in terms of Westmoreland, I always felt that I should have tried something. I wouldn't have probably succeeded because I was nothing to the military, but I always felt bad about that, that I didn't do that. So, Westmoreland, I went from being very impressed with him at first. He's a very impressive figure. He holds his chest out. All the braids and things that are supposed to impress civilians, he does very well, carries himself perfectly, speaks with great assurance, is very nice. He's not condescending; he treats everybody very nicely, not an arrogant, big fancy general or anything like that. I was impressed. I thought well, you know, this is war. I didn't understand very much about the tactics or anything, but I knew a lot about pacification, even by that time.

By the time that I got to see better and know more about Vietnam, I disliked Westmoreland a great amount because I thought he was running the war the wrong way. I saw all these casualties—I mean there were casualties after casualties—and what were these boys dying for? We weren't going to win. By that time I realized we weren't going to win. I didn't have any doubt about it, and yet we went on in this fashion of having big major conflicts and securing an area, and then letting it go back to the other side, and then going back again, making promises and then breaking promises. So I really, at the end, I thought he was pretty much a puffed shirt, and I thought he didn't learn from what was going on at all.

What I disliked maybe the most was the fact that he would not listen to counter ideas coming up through his own command channels. One of the most dangerous—and I'm not telling you anything—aspects of the military command channels is that dissent is discouraged, and discouraged is kind of a kind word. It's not allowed, and those who do that, unless they're very, very good or have very good connections, they're going to get in trouble. Time after time, I know from John Vann—and these are real examples, these are not make-ups—that there were people coming that were going to do the briefing for General Westmoreland, and for Harkins before that, and they were simply not allowed to talk. They were not allowed to make their point of view. This happened when Maxwell Taylor was over there, and I hold that against Maxwell Taylor.

I think when you're told that you're going to have a briefing by X or Y or Z, and you've got an hour and a half to do it, and you see that the general, in this case it was Harkins, is using up that time by his own band-standing or grandstanding, or whatever you want to call it, and then it comes time for these briefers to talk and say, well, I'm sorry, we don't have enough time. Thank you very much, gentlemen. If you're the commanding general like Max Taylor was, you don't allow that. you say, I came here to hear these people talk, and I want to hear them talk, because you're superior to Westmoreland. But he didn't do that; he didn't do that. Max Taylor didn't do it. Westmoreland didn't do it, and you say, "Well, that's just the Army." But I say "No, that's wrong."

Krulak was an example. General Krulak was a Marine General that I had a lot of respect for. He was in charge of I Corps. I Corps is way up on the top. It's right up next to North Vietnam, and comes all the way down to right north of Hue, which is right in central

Vietnam. He had a couple chances too—and I know this from John Vann again, and from Scotton too—to brief. He went back to Washington, had a chance to see the president, but, you know, it's the old story, when you're in front of the prince, it's a whole different thing. You can talk when you're having a beer with somebody, about something, but when you're in front of the prince, and you've got all the other princelings around, and you're going to bust that mood by coming in and telling something that completely shakes...

Breisetsh: Did you ever try?

Wehrle: Did I ever try? Yeah, I probably did, yeah. Not back there. I'd have to think about that.

Breisetsh: I mean with Westmoreland.

Wehrle: No, I don't think I ever did, no. Jim Killen did, and I saw Jim Killen get disdained; Westy had no use for him now because he was criticizing him.

Breisetsh: Did you ever have a kind of informal conversation with him, where you took a different point of view?

Wehrle: No, I didn't. Maybe to my shame, but I never did, no. I didn't have that much chutzpah I guess, I don't know. I mean, I did to a couple of visiting generals for whatever reason. I had a pretty good idea. I thought of what the Viet Cong strategy would be, but with Westy I never did, and it's probably because I was a coward. I don't know. I would be willing to face up to that and say that he handled himself in such a way that was really very hard, and that was probably hard under his command, to do it. That was probably why he was able to keep doing that. He sacrificed the main force of his main forces way up north into doing all kinds of stuff, to attract a major attack from the North Vietnamese forces. He wanted to bring them out in the open and fight. He thought if he could do that, he could destroy them. That was his basic tactic. But the North Vietnamese were far too clever for that, and he got beat at it over and over again. In the process, he transferred his troops away from pacification defense, to do that. And then the pacification areas were overrun by the Viet Cong. I mean, that's an oversimplified view, but it's what's there.

So, in the end, I lost respect for him, even though I didn't do anything about it. I thought Abrams might make a difference, but that was after my time.

Breisetsh: You've just raised a big word that hasn't come up all day today.

Wehrle: What's that?

Breisetsh: Pacification.

Wehrle: Oh, that's a big word.

Breiseth: That was something you were very associated with, a kind of original use of that in Laos.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: And then in Vietnam. Tell us about pacification.

Wehrle: Well, a big difference now. Laos was like triple-C ball. I mean way down, the minor leagues.

Breiseth: Community development.

Wehrle: It's way, way down there. Laos was simple, and there was no military force of the United States there. It was a whole different thing. So, I was heavily involved in pacification. When I went down to Vietnam, I had no responsibilities for pacification, except supporting our rural development programs, which were part of it. But the military was essentially running the pacification parts of it, so I really had very little to do with it. I would go out, and I'd hear the reports and the stories, and I was very concerned.

It's worthwhile noting that this is after the Strategic Hamlet Program had collapsed. They had gone through the Strategic Hamlet Program, which was kind of a militaristic way of trying to deal with the problem, putting people in fenced-in villages, which goes back to a point I made earlier, which is he who controls the night controls the countryside. They had this barbed wire... This is a funny thing about it, and I was aware of this from Rufus Phillips earlier, that they spent a lot of time putting barbed wire around these villages. The villagers had to do all the work, which would have been okay if it worked, but at night, the Viet Cong would come right up to their village and say, "Open up; we're coming in." In other words, they weren't going to defend it. So, it was a Potemkin village in a kind of different use of that term because you did all this work to protect yourself from the enemy, and the enemy had so much intimidation over those villages that the villagers knew that they'd blow them up. I mean they'd blow holes. They'd put some holes in, and they'd come in. Then they'd really pay if they didn't. So they let the people come in at night. And the tax collectors came in; they collected taxes. They had a whole kind of invisible government in those villages.

Breiseth: The Viet Cong.

Wehrle: The Viet Cong. And then after Diem was assassinated, then that all collapsed. The countryside was lost in a very short time after Diem was assassinated because all the military commands were in flooey, you know. They didn't know who was in charge. So the strategic hamlets were abandoned. They took down the barbed wire and all that. So, I was there after that, it all happened.

Breiseth: Which is to say from a stateside perspective, the almost simultaneous deaths of Diem and Kennedy left the countryside in chaos.

Wehrle: In chaos, yeah.

Breiseth: As the Johnson Administration, coming in with Rusk and McNamara, had to figure out what the next moves were.

Wehrle: What do we do next, yeah, yeah. That's right, because we'd been through that whole thing. They had to start all the way over again, essentially, and what do you do?

Breiseth: And Westmoreland is your continuity.

Wehrle: He's the continuity. That's right; that's right. So, we started different kinds of pacification programs. We had one program up north called *Biet Kich*, that's B-i-e-t, K-i-c-h, which was premised a little bit like our Lao program, but it was completely based on the indigenous people. We sent—we, I mean the United States and Vietnam—sent troops in that were really highly motivated troops, not just the normal law enforcers. They worked with the villagers. That had been fairly successful, but they were unable to, as we say today, bring it up to scale. You can make it work in a particular area with some really good people, but they couldn't mass produce it. That was true of a lot of the programs in South Vietnam.

One of the saddest days I remember, I don't know where I was, but I was someplace down in the delta, doing an inspection. The word came in—which became world famous—that a village over on the eastern side had been attacked by the Viet Cong and overrun. And the Americans had to destroy the village in order to save it. That hit just like a leaden ball. Had to destroy the village in order to save it, so that contradiction was very much a part of the whole thing. When I'd go out and do those things, the thing that probably distressed me the most, and I'm going to tell you there is a lot of distress, was the fact of the free artillery firing zones and stuff like that. I was aware of that because I'd get reports from our own people out there. They'd be out in the province, and the artillery would be located right next to the provincial capital so it was safe. And all night long they'd be firing. I'd ask them, what are they doing, who are they firing at? They'd say, "Well, they've declared a free artillery zone out here and told all the people to get out. We went out to these areas, and we gave them pamphlets and told them to get out of this area because this was going to be a free artillery zone, because we want to keep the Viet Cong out of this area."

Well, some of the people would move and some wouldn't move because, as I mentioned before, with the Vietnamese, your ancestral land is like your soul. So a lot of people were killed on those free fire zones, and this blind firing made no sense. It made the Vietnamese military feel very good, and when they turned in their reports they would say, "We fired so many rounds," but, I mean, what could be more silly than a report that talks about how many rounds you fired, rather than where they landed and what they accomplished.

That to me just made it clear to me that the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] had no interest in doing anything serious. They would just send those things out. There were strafing missions and bombing missions and rocket missions. And when they'd come in with their reports, they would say so many strafing missions, so many... What were they blowing up, some poor peasant's hut maybe, or whatever? We didn't know, but every time I'd go out in the countryside, I'd come back, and I was just terribly distressed by this.

Colonel Sam Wilson, who was in charge of pacification for AID, was working in AID as a civilian, but he was a colonel. Wilson, and he shows up in a lot of the books because he was a very important guy there, and often, I would go out with him. So, I was gaining his experience as he went on, but even all those people were afraid to say much. Not that they were afraid. They were kind of—I mean, we'd talk about it, and that's what hurt. You'd say, "Well, why are they doing this? That's a negative; you're hurting the cause rather than helping it. You're driving the enemy into the people's hands." But then there was nothing, I guess, they could do. I don't know what it was, but it was so frustrating.

Breiseth: Two observations. One, having read through the summary of some of your letters home, it's clear that in this period you were having, among other things, intense headaches.

Wehrle: Yeah, I did.

Breiseth: Obviously, the stress was very great. I think I told you the last time we got together that I mentioned your name to an old friend of mine from California, who was in USAID and was in Vietnam, named Mike Yaki. When I mentioned your name, he said, "He was the unhappiest American in Vietnam."

Wehrle: Really? I thought I didn't show it.

Breiseth: Well, and we talked yesterday about how, with your staff, you felt it was incumbent on you to maintain morale and to keep an optimistic view that what your efforts were could succeed. I think it's an appropriate moment in this interview, on the kind of cost of this whole effort, to a lot of Americans who were carrying out their duty but had a sense that this was going wildly off the rails, both because of the inability of the South Vietnamese Army, but also the particular way that we dramatically increased the military. Let me ask your reaction. The dramatic increase in resources. That had to have had a tremendously negative impact on the Vietnamese economy just in terms of having hundreds of millions of dollars come into what had been a very small economy by comparison. Speak to that, the economic issue there, because you got involved in that to help control inflation.

Wehrle: Yeah, I did, a lot. I'm trying to figure out what's a good way to get into that. As the economy got under more and more pressure, it was related largely to a U.S. construction program that took place all across Vietnam. General Westmoreland wanted more bases; he wanted more warehouses; he wanted more PXs because this

was a big impact on a relatively small country, of having first a hundred thousand troops come in, then two hundred, then three hundred, then four hundred, then five hundred, finally five hundred and fifty eight thousand, or something like that. They had to have places to live if they were on base camp. We had to have airfields all over the place. He built, I don't know how many different ice cream plants, small ice cream plants, maybe fifty, all across the place so Americans could have their ice cream. We had to have generators all over the place because we lived by electricity. The Army took moth-balled, probably victory ships, and took them out of moth-balls and put generators on them and used those as floating barge generators. We made commercial purchases of generators from Japan, from the United States, put them all over the place, that we could run and get our air conditioners. We had air conditioners working all over the place. All the officers had air conditioning in their base camps and all that. So, that was a big impact on the economy and I had—I'll mention those now. I had two embassy officers who did a lot of the work on the analysis of these pieces that I'm talking about right now.

One is John Bennett, B-e-n-n-e-t-t, I think, or maybe one t. He was a Foreign Service officer and very, very capable guy. And he was very good at working with the Vietnamese. He was very adroit; he was very smart; he had good economic sense. He did a lot of the work on the construction and the impact on their—what the multipliers were and all kinds of stuff like that. I used him a lot in going over and working with the Vietnamese on this. He just did a bang-up job.

The other side of that was the question of the purchasing power coming in from the Vietnamese and from the Americans in terms of increased salaries. The Vietnamese would hire more. The more people we put in, the more they had to hire to staff us, so to speak. If you're going to have five people working in hog production in Binh Dinh Province, then you're going to have to have maybe twenty Vietnamese, so they've got people to work with. That makes sense. Well, then that means their budget goes up. If their budget goes up that means more purchasing power flowing out on the economy from all these people to buy everything under the sun, from imported goods to vegetables to more meat to improve their diet.

A chap by the name of Erland Heginbottom, I think that's H-e-g-i-n-b-o-t-t-o-m, another Foreign Service officer, also did a very, very good job on some of that analysis. He worked with the military on some of these things. Both were just extraordinary officers to who often had to work late at night.

Breisetsh: They were reporting to you?

Wehrle: They were reporting to me, yeah. They were my staff, but I just want to recognize how well and how good that they did on that thing. Later, had a head of economic staff by the name of Bill Sharpe. That's spelled like sharp, with an e on the end. He was then

head of my economic policy staff. He did a very good job too. He did an awfully good job.

So, we had maybe ten people working on all this stuff, and we also had to keep track of the inflation. We had to send people down to the market. There was no CPI, consumer price index. We had to make one, and that was very important because we were deciding economic policy based on that. We had foreign service offices who did that including Ted Lewis who did a great job. We had locals, Vietnamese, that would go down, check the price of fish, check this, check that, and had to put that all together on those things. So, where we're headed right now is a tremendous buildup of American forces over a relatively short time.

The big impact was in the spring of '65. That's when it really hit. Some of the Marines came in very, very quickly, big divisions. They were ready to go. LBJ said "Go," and they came. So, we had to work all that out in terms of what we do about imports particularly. So, let's just play the game a little bit to make it clear what's going on. If we get so many Americans coming in, some of them will go out on the market and buy all kinds of stuff. And then we have so many Vietnamese, and the budget going up by a couple hundred thousand piastres, let's say, and all that money flows out on the economy. Let's just use the term a hundred thousand. A hundred thousand piastres growing the economy. How much of that is going to stay in country and buy goods, and how much can we expand supply of vegetables and other things to meet that demand, and how much can't we? So, let's say seventy thousand stays in country. The other thirty thousand is going to flow out for imports, and it was probably much higher than what I'm stating here now, but we had to make estimates on that. And the thirty thousand that's going to flow out, is going to want to buy dollars.

So, if the United States were not there, what would happen? Well, you'd have the government expanding its budget. You'd have more purchasing power going to buy imports. That would draw down the supply of dollars the central bank has. Sooner or later, they would run out of dollars, and the whole thing would have to stop. Or they'd change the exchange rate and make it more expensive to buy imports and change the exchange rate, pump that exchange rate up a little bit, or a lot. The United States was there, so we were a safeguard for them. You know, they could always say to the United States, "Well we're starting to run out of money, so give us some more dollars." Well, that means give us more imports. So, the circle of causation we're looking at is— let's just take the GVN budget—that's going to go up by a hundred thousand. Some of that, let's say thirty thousand, is going to flow out. Then, we have to have enough imports coming in to absorb that thirty thousand. If we don't, then their dollar holdings are going to go down, and there's going to be trouble.

On the local side, seventy thousand of that is going to go out on the local market, to buy things, and vegetables, no trouble. They'll raise more vegetables if the price goes up. Rice, well maybe, they can grow more rice, but we've got some problems there because

we don't know if they can get the rice into the market. Homes, construction of homes and things like that, that would probably okay. They can get more labor, but manpower was becoming short because Americans were hiring all kinds of Vietnamese to do every which sort of thing, and you've got this enormous construction program of General Westmoreland, which is employing all kinds of laborers. So, skilled labor became very tight. The GVN would come in, and they'd complain, "Roy, look what's going on. You're bringing all these Americans in, and we're losing our GVN workers," because they weren't paid very much, so they went over and worked for the Americans. At the same time, you want to increase our hog program—I'm using that as an example—and you want us to have more hog experts, and we're trying to train agriculturists. As soon as we get them trained, they go work on construction up in Binh Dinh and make four times as much money as they make with us. So, those were the kind of economic problems that we were dealing with. We had to analyze it right in the first place. Then we had to get support for it, but you didn't find Jim Killen standing against us very much on that. Pretty much on that he agreed, because there was really no other way out.

The other way out, and this is where the contention came a lot with Washington, it came in two ways. We can come back to these if you want. The first way was Washington would say a sensible thing: "Why don't you raise more taxes?" Because if you raise more taxes, that will absorb this purchasing power. If you raise taxes by ten thousand, that's going to take ten thousand out of this hundred thousand, and there's only ninety thousand to deal with. "Well, why don't you raise them twenty thousand?" The balance to that, of course, is that the GVN didn't pay their government very much, so they lived by graft and corruption pretty much. We wanted to stop that, so we would then argue for more GVN wage increases; put more in wage increase. So, you can see that you're caught in an endless spiral, going around and around and around. So, those were the kind of problems that we had to try to balance out, and it was not easy, that's for sure.

Breisetsh: Who in the military command that you got to deal with understood all that?

Wehrle: I don't know. I never bumped up against anybody that did. We didn't deal with them very much because those were *fait accomplis*, as you said.

Breisetsh: On the State Department side, who understood all that?

Wehrle: Well, the fact you ask the State Department brings up a point that I was—

Breisetsh: Did Lodge understand it?

Wehrle: I think so. I mean just in the overall, that the bigger the presence we are, the bigger impact on the economy, and the more we're going to have to give aid. I think that cycle he understood.

Your question reminds me of a point I was going to make, number two before, which I forgot. That is, the other pressure on us was the pressure from Washington to have more programs. You can almost say—and this is a little bit of a parody—but you could almost say that from Washington’s point of view, we could win the war if we just had enough economic programs. And if we’re not winning the war, it means that we just are not being ingenious enough to have enough economic programs. So that almost everybody in Washington had had an answer to how to solve this problem. We had Lilienthal over on the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority), and we were going to do some TVA projects in Vietnam. We were going to do this, and we were going to do that. Bless him, Eugene Black, the head of the IBRD [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development], pretty much saw that we were full-up on projects. But most of them didn’t see that because they only saw it through their own eyes. Well, if the TVA worked very well in bringing a better life down in Tennessee, why wouldn’t it work now? Oh, I know what we need; we need an REA program, rural electrification program. My gosh, don’t you realize what that did for farmers in the United States?

Breiseth: Johnson was a huge defender of both of those programs.

Wehrle: Both of those things. So, we had all these bright ideas flowing across the Pacific and banging us in the head because who’s going to do all this stuff? Who was going to put these projects into— Do you realize that this government is over its head already? Well, I mean that was our problem, but that wasn’t Washington’s problem. Washington’s problem was get those programs going. Well, they all had economic impacts; they all had manpower impacts, and they had sometimes very deleterious impacts on what the Vietnamese were trying to do. So, the Vietnamese would throw up their hands and say, “You Americans, what are we going to do? We can’t do all this stuff.” Our answer to that would be, “Well just do it,” you know?

Anyhow, the pressure from Washington, which we can talk about more, and the construction program, those two put a tremendous impact on the economy. Our import program went up from, I don’t know, a hundred million, two hundred million, three hundred million. I think, in the end, it was like four hundred million, and that was a lot of dollars.

Breiseth: I think it reached five hundred million.

Wehrle: A lot of dollars in those days. I’m not sure what it was, if those numbers are right, but...

Breiseth: I want to save, for our next session tomorrow, some of the personalities at the Washington end. I think, start out with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. But to kind of wrap it up for this evening, you’ve said a lot about this already, but I want to make sure that you’ve said all that really came to your mind about the impact of this American presence on the South Vietnamese culture. We talked about the bordellos and all that. I’m not looking for more of that particularly, but just from this

distance in time, it looks like this overwhelming distortion between our resources and all these military figures and the dollars on what was already a fragile economy, (coughs) without much effective leadership.

Wehrle: That's true.

Breiseth: We haven't really talked about General Ky and Thieu, but a government that was kind of incapable of handling things in your early months there, when things were still relatively peaceful.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: You then had to handle them at the point that both the Viet Cong are becoming more effective in the south, and we are coming in like gangbusters.

Wehrle: That's right.

Breiseth: With all these resources. So, the impact on South Vietnamese culture.

Wehrle: Well, if you ask what was the impact of the Americans, I'd say it was overwhelming. It was overwhelming in the provincial cities and particularly in Saigon. Less so, of course, as you go farther out into the countryside. But just the traffic in Saigon, because of all the motorbikes that came in through the import program, it was just a haze of blue smoke in some parts at the time. And the traffic was just immense. So, the Americanization of Vietnam was pretty obvious to most people. I mean they saw the change that took place over a relatively short time. A lot of them tried to stay out of the way of it, but it was pretty hard to stay out of the way of it. There were so many fancy nightclubs, and all the rest, where money was being spent in the city, and all the rest, that it was overwhelming. And the Vietnamese loved it. I mean, I'm not trying to say that they didn't like the material that came in with it. The nationalists are the ones who really cared about something more than this. Yeah, they were very troubled by it. They saw it as the buying off of the Vietnamese people and culture. But, by and large, people loved it, you know, "Wow, this is great," but that's as far as it went. It's nice to have this stuff, and we're really having a good time, and boy, we're better off, whatever. But you didn't buy any loyalty through that. You didn't buy any "I'm going to sacrifice my life so I can have freedom under this yellow and red flag." So, it worked for us because it kept the economy from going down the drain. That was very important, but it didn't work in any larger sense that Jim Killen would have liked to have it work, in terms of buying loyalty and teaching what sacrifice is like and all the rest of that.

Breiseth: Can you pinpoint—the point where you really saw that the Viet Cong were going to triumph?

Wehrle: I can't do that, no.

Breiseth: There's one of your letters where you predict what's going to happen, and you say it was almost two years to the day before some kind of major cataclysm... But let's hold that thought.

Wehrle: We'll hold that. I'll think about that. I'd just say that that gradually grew and grew and grew on me, yeah, as more and more evidence that I had to support that conclusion.

Breiseth: Well, let's save for tomorrow, starting with Rusk and McNamara, and also getting into some of these other unusual guys you got to deal with, like Dick Holbrook and John Vann; really remarkable...

Wehrle: Really remarkable Americans.

Breiseth: —Americans, and stewards of our democracy.

Wehrle: Yeah.

Breiseth: So, that's it for this evening, October thirtieth, and we will resume tomorrow.

(end of interview session #2)

Interview with Interviewee Roy Wehrle

VRV-A-L-2013-098.03

Interview # 3: October 31, 2013

Interviewer: Christopher N. Breiseth

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Breiseth: It is Halloween, 2013. This is the second day of our conversation between Roy Wehrle and Chris Breiseth, and we are going to start with the consideration of two of the major U.S. officials in our Vietnam policy, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. Roy had significant interaction with Secretary McNamara, less so with Secretary Rusk, but since Rusk was a fraternity brother of his, I think we need to at least include him. So,

Roy, why don't you start with both men and give us a perspective on particularly your interaction with them, as well as your reading of them as gifted and important American officials in our Saigon-Vietnam policy.

Wehrle: Secretary McNamara was the key. He was "it" in terms of Washington. We had other aspects we'll talk about, such as Robert Komer in the president's office, but as people talked in Saigon, it was "McNamara is coming in a visit," and he came about every three or four months, and that was it. That's what we worked toward in terms of briefing him and his questions. As a person, of course, it's very well-known that he was very incisive. His questions were penetrating; his mind was very, very quick. He was enamored by statistics, I think overly enamored by statistics, but you had to have your stuff together, and you had to have it in a quantitative fashion for him. If you did that, then you could have a conversation with him, and the conversation would move, and you would know, by the end of the conversation, whether you were on the track that he approved of or he didn't. That's very valuable in a leader, and he was very, very good at that.

I'll say a word about Rusk before going back to McNamara. Rusk was kind of the silent Buddha in back of everything. Of course, the cables all came out signed Rusk, but that's just symbolic almost. We saw very little of him, and we heard very little of him. We heard more of Harriman, as Assistant Secretary, that's Averill Harriman, but our life was really based—my life anyhow, was based on instructions from the White House, from Komer, because the president obviously was daily involved in the Vietnam situation.

Breisetsh: This is Bill Komer?

Wehrle: Bob Komer.

Breisetsh: Bob Komer.

Wehrle: Robert Komer, yeah. He'd been appointed by LBJ, when he became president, to be his White House assistant. We talked earlier about Michael Forrestal, and so in a sense, Komer is replacing him. It's a new administration. Kennedy's gone, and now we have LBJ, and his man is Komer. He was responsible both toward the State Department and to the Defense Department, and so he had a big, big responsibility. He and McNamara worked together, and I think they worked together very well. Komer was, and I guess, is today still, a very bright, bright guy. I think he's still alive. He played a major role in Vietnam, and he's very important. We'll talk about him a little bit later.

I want to give, first, an introduction to kind of what it's like getting ready for McNamara to come. This is a big event. It's like the circus coming to town, and you've got to have everything all lined up for him. I'm going to read from a letter that I wrote to my wife in 1965, on July sixteenth, which was right before a McNamara visit. This gives a little flavor of what that was like.

It starts, and I'm quoting, "I have really been wound up in preparations for the secretary's visit. We have really been moving, and I have had all sorts of papers prepared in anticipation of areas I have been told the secretary is interested in. Also, I have been boning up myself on the situation everywhere for our briefing. Had a real disagreement with the MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] this week on the estimate of the situation report that we were preparing for the secretary, and had our staff do a new one that I thought was more accurate. I felt the MACV paper used words to gloss over, rather than elucidate the situation that I saw. I went to see the ambassador. He supported me, and I went to see Westmoreland, and he was most reasonable, naturally, since he accepted my paper, and we revised the briefing paper, to give a more accurate view, I think, of the situation."

Breisetsh: MACV is what?

Wehrle: MACV is the military operation of the United States in Vietnam, and Westmoreland was the commanding general of that. So, this is an example of the fact that you're going to have conflicting views between the military and the political and the economic because, often, they impede or go into each other's area. This is a case where the ambassador plays the role of being the overall manager, which in this case Lodge did.

Now, when McNamara arrived, he always arrived on his own jet, usually a tanker, nothing very fancy, that he would fly out from Washington. And the thing that was amazing to many of us was that he would come right from his landing at Ton Son Nhut into the briefing. Now, we all know there's supposed to be such a thing as jet lag, and he was coming across almost eleven different time zones. So, people used to make a lot of jokes about how the reason the war is going badly is McNamara has got jet lag when he makes policy. But I don't think that was the case at all. I never saw one instance where McNamara was a bit foggy about something or the other.

So, there would be a big room, maybe twenty people, all the different people in the room, and then there would be the military briefing and the economic briefing and the political briefing. My job was always to give the economic briefing, so I prepared charts. Not like today, where it's PowerPoint and everything else. These were just paper charts with graphs put up and with the points that we wanted to make. The military, of course, had very fancy charts. The military are great briefers. And then you'd have the political statement by the political counselor.

One time, I came in to get ready for the briefing, and I had everything all set up. Then I felt that, before I do all this, I'd better go to the toilet first and make sure I was all set. When I left the room, McNamara was joking with everybody and he said, "I see Roy has departed. I certainly understand. I'd leave the room too if I had to brief on this mess." (laughing) But when I came back, the place was in ribald laughter, and I thought, what did I do? And then somebody explained to me what had happened.

That briefing would take probably an hour and a half. These were significant briefings, fairly long. An example of how it works in your favor is, if you think of the right topics, then you can prepare things. We had had trouble with coastal shipping on one point, and I had asked the staff, my economic staff that I mentioned before, to prepare some charts on this and some graphs, since McNamara loves graphs. They prepared those all. They had maps of the countryside, showing and color coding where we had secure routes of logistics last year and where they're diminished today. When McNamara asked me about coastal shipping and the rice logistics, I said, "Yes, sir, we have some charts here to show you on that." He just smiled all over. He was just as pleased as punch that he had the data that he wanted on that. Then he drew some conclusions from it and made some decisions on it.

So, our view of McNamara was highly favorable. We saw him as a man in charge, a man that was highly esteemed and deserved to be esteemed. Of course, as time went on, the repetitious statements, every time by MACV, on these briefings, (I saw him over many years, many years, two or three,) that "we were winning the war, and we were winning the war because the VC couldn't make replacements and because they couldn't stand up to our air assault and our ground force assault." As time went on, that became a little bit tiresome and a little bit worrisome to a lot of us. So, we heard it, but we could see through it by that time because we knew too much, and we knew that was not telling the whole story.

Breisetsh: By that time, can you roughly say when you started to be jaded about that?

Wehrle: I'll make just a quick overview of how that morale kind of thing went, in terms of what we saw. As I mentioned earlier, by January, February of '65, morale on the GVN side and on our side had collapsed very sharply because of the major assaults by some NVA forces. That means North Vietnamese, forces, in the rubber plantations, northwest of us and in the highlands. This was new. These were bigger assaults than we'd ever seen before.

Then we had the American troops coming in that spring and toward that summer, in '65, after the bad start of the year. Then morale went way up because it appeared that Americans coming in, that we were going to save the day for the Vietnamese. We had the forces to do it. The Marines were coming. They were one of the first to come, and their reputation was incredibly good. That went on for quite a while, things looked better. Then, as things went further along, into the next year, '66 and '67, it was clear that a lot of the things that we said were not turning out to be true. We were saying the VC couldn't recruit. They were obviously recruiting. They said they couldn't get down the Ho Chi Minh Trail because we were bombing it. They were obviously going down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

And by the way, we should note that there was no one trail. This was a latticework of trails, sometimes as many as seven or eight or nine or ten. If you knock out one bridge,

they had another bridge they could use. They were largely under canopy as they went through Laos, sometimes a double canopy. That just means leaves of different height trees that covered everything up. So, that wasn't working, and we talked about doing lots of different things. There would always be, when McNamara was out, I remember so vividly, always some new technology that MACV was touting, that this is going to make the difference.

Breiseth: Which would be General Westmoreland making that point.

Wehrle: That's General Westmoreland, yeah, that's right. It would be one of his briefing lieutenants that would be saying that we've got these sensors now. They're very, very good, and we're dropping them by parachute up along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which came from—really, came all the way from Haiphong and Hanoi, all the way across west, and then down into the mountains along the Lao border, mostly in Laos, partly in Vietnam, and as it got farther south, of course it was all in Laos. We talked before, that Laos has a long border with Vietnam. I remember them briefing us and saying "Well, now we have a way of finally closing this trail off." And that is with the sensors. Well, that didn't turn out to work very well.

We had funny stories about the elephants getting blown up by our bombs, and not so funny, because they stepped on the sensors. But the idea was that those sensors would be set off, and then we could then send bombers in to get them. There was a lot of argument for going into those areas and penetrating with our own forces, which would violate the sovereignty of another country.

Breiseth: So these sensors were being dropped into Laos?

Wehrle: Into Laos, yeah. Of course later, we did burst the sovereignty of Cambodia by sending troops into Cambodia, but we never admitted to sending them into Laos. So, after a while, it became clear that this technological fix or the technological fixes, simply were not working. The Vietnamese, North Vietnamese and the leadership, to their credit, I must say, learned how to adapt to our technology, even severe technology like Agent Orange. Even the B-52 bombers coming in. It was hard for the VC to do, but they did it. And it was not clear again that the strategy that Westmoreland... I must say, if you give him credit for continuity, which I don't, his view was continuous. It was always pretty much the same, and it was always rationalized.

Breiseth: Did McNamara show any skepticism of Westmoreland's consistent picture?

Wehrle: He asked increasingly penetrating questions as this went on, but no, he did not show skepticism. And if he had, he probably would not have disclosed it in a meeting like that.

Breiseth: What seemed to be the things he most wanted to focus on when he came out to Vietnam?

Wehrle: Well, of course, I was most aware of things on my side.

Breiseth: Okay, focus on your side.

Wehrle: Well, my side, what he was concerned about, how damaging was inflation and whether there would be enough rice for people to eat. That became a continuous question. The other was, is the construction program—which we'll talk about later—the U.S. military construction program, excessive? In other words, is that placing too much burden on the economy? He was very, very aware of that and was very concerned about it. He was also concerned about refugees, and are we taking care of them? But I don't remember ever, him getting really involved in whether we should be creating refugees, which was the deeper question involved. And then he was very concerned about whether we had enough resources coming in for the military. We had enough port capacity. He's very good at capacity kinds of things and resources. His mind worked that way, and he was very comfortable doing that. He spent a lot of time on that kind of stuff.

Breiseth: Reflect a little bit on just how you and he interacted with each other. In asking this, having seen some pictures, you look unbelievably young in these pictures. Realizing the people that you were a colleague of, and in some ways a superior to, I've got to believe that you're—I figure you were about thirty-two or thirty-three at this point.

Wehrle: That's correct.

Breiseth: But looking twenty-five. How that affected how he responded to you, as well as other major people that came through from Washington.

Wehrle: Well, I had quite a number of meetings with McNamara because of these briefings. I don't recall any time that he didn't treat me with absolute respect in what I was saying. I never got any condescension. You'd often get condescension from the older Vietnamese or the older, what I might call bureaucratic Americans, because they did really resent my youth. I did look like a kid. But I guess when I opened my mouth and started talking and putting the pieces together, they kind of forgot that because I did have a gift for speaking fairly clearly and authoritatively. That, I think, saved my neck several times. McNamara and I got along well, we had mutual respect for each other, and when I needed the backup, he backed me up fully.

Breiseth: In the letters that you shared with me before, your father writes that you had two great strengths, that you had very good policy judgment and that you had a way of articulating complicated issues and being tactful in the way you did it, and that you'd never let success go to your head. This is a father's view, but it strikes me, from knowing you over the many years, having gone through this story with you, that that's a fairly important insight into why you were able to carry the burdens you were carrying, in a credible way, with the top people, up to and including President Johnson and Kennedy before that.

Wehrle: Well, I think, as I told you, earlier in my life, I felt very insubstantial.

Breiseth: Right.

Wehrle: And I think that's important because I carried that with me. It wasn't that I didn't have confidence of what I could do, but it was very clear that I was no peacock, no proud peacock. I mean, I was glad that I could do this, but I knew that it was a tremendous task. There was no room for ego or that sort of thing in all this, and there's a tendency to go to ego because you've got a lot of power. But either because of my parents and how they raised me or whatever, that was never a concern. I like people. To this day, I love the work that I'm doing today with different people, meeting them, getting to know them and treating them fairly. I don't know why, but that just gives me a lot of satisfaction. So, I had a lot of chances to do that over there. (laughing)

Breiseth: While we're on that topic, and later, we're going to get into issues of satisfactions and frustrations with the job. Say something about your interaction with the Vietnamese, including fairly senior and very senior Vietnamese officials, in terms of your style as an American, interacting with them.

Wehrle: I've never thought of this before, but as you asked the question and I reflect on it, there were two ways which I dealt with the Vietnamese. There was the Mandarin Vietnamese, still lots of them around, and I mentioned that before. They were very formal, very stiff, very straight, very French. They had accommodated themselves to the French Colonialism and they would accommodate themselves to us. That was what a Mandarin does. It usually used to be toward the emperor, but now toward others. With those I was very straight, very formal, very polite, very courteous, very slow moving, repeating things, asking them, and using— In the French, there are ways to be polite that have never been dreamed of in the American language. It's a fun language to use that way because you can play with it that way, and I used it to the maximum that I knew how.

Then there were the younger, the Young Turks, and they were often the ones that were in government when I was there because they were, as I called them yesterday, the technical cabinet. With those, I could really let down my hair a lot, you know; lots of times that was in English. My big advantage with them was my youth, because I was young. I did not intimidate them with fancy talk or being old or looked down at them. I respected them a lot, and they knew that. And so we had—I would never call it camaraderie, but it was a working relationship toward a common goal that was good. I think I was lucky in that sense, youth paid off for me. I was not a stodgy old bureaucrat from their point of view, and they weren't either.

Breiseth: Did you have any direct interactions with Ky and Thieu?

Wehrle: Very little. I would meet them at receptions. Except when we talk later on, whenever we talk about the negotiations on the exchange rate, that will be the time that I had some

relationships with them. But basically, they were always that next level up. I heard about them, but I didn't deal with them.

Breiseth: Any more thoughts before we move on, about McNamara? Maybe, although this gets out of our outline a little bit, maybe your interactions, if there were any, with McNamara, when you made trips to Washington, and/or what you discovered among the people you were dealing with in Washington, their view of McNamara, because he becomes, more and more, the kind of centerpiece of the war from an American public opinion point of view.

Wehrle: Right. That's going to be a very short answer because in Washington I dealt primarily with Bob Komer and people in the State Department. I dealt with McNaughten, I think that's M-c-N-a-u-g-h-t-e-n, a brilliant person over in Defense. He was Assistant Secretary of Defense. But I did not deal at all with McNamara when I was back there, nor did I really have any knowledge of how his views evolved. They were evolving, and if you look back on it, by the kind of questions he was asking toward the end, when I was over there, you could see that he was becoming much more doubtful about this answer, "we are winning," coming back the same answer every time he asked it over those years and yet, not much improvement. Of course, after Tet, then that all kind of collapsed.

Breiseth: Which is '68.

Wehrle: That was January of '68.

Breiseth: How about Cyrus Vance?

Wehrle: I don't remember. I obviously dealt with Cyrus Vance.

Breiseth: He's the Deputy Secretary of Defense.

Wehrle: Right. Later on, after I was out of government, I worked with Cy Vance in a group from the Council of Foreign Relations in New York to try to get us out of the war through negotiations. I got to know Cy Vance fairly reasonably well at that point. But during my time in government, he was a name that a lot of people said very good things about. They liked Cy Vance because he was partly an independent thinker. But in terms of having dealings with him, no I did not have.

Breiseth: I told you, I took a group of students from Williams College to Washington in the spring of '67, and we spent time with Vance in his office. Of all the people we met, and we probably met thirteen people over the course of four days, the students were most impressed with Cy Vance.

Wehrle: Is that right? Yeah.

Breiseth: And he was very candid about the Viet Cong and their strengths. That was not all that was being presented to the American public.

Wehrle: I'm not surprised to hear that, no.

Breiseth: Anything else on Komer and your relationship with Komer?

Wehrle: Yes. Let's talk a little bit about Robert Komer. He was a government servant before he got this job. I can't remember where he was, maybe in the National Security Council, over in State Department, I can't remember. But as I said, he was the key guy for me. A lot of our instructions coming out of Washington came from him because he was speaking for the president. So this was not a normal country, where the instructions would come out of the State Department. The State Department is bypassed in many ways. That's the reason why Rusk was not in the picture very much. McNamara was in charge of military, the president couldn't run that. The president could run the political side, and I'm sure he chose Lodge and coming back, for various political reasons. Komer was the one that was pushing us on negotiations and things like that, so he was very, very important to us. I liked Bob Komer. He had eyes that were just absolutely penetrating. They would just go right smack through you. And he had similar qualities of McNamara in terms of being quick. He'd see through the problems very quickly. Now, it's fun to work with people like that because you start talking, and they see what you're saying. They grab it, they go with it; you return it. It's a little bit like playing ping-pong. Bob Komer was one of those kind of people. The conversations were fun; they weren't just—they might scare you to death because he comes out with some conclusions you don't like, but that's not the point.

So, when I went back to Washington, which was three or four times for consultation, I would always go to see Komer. I would always go to see him, and he was very gracious. He was a good person. He was very tight, very hardworking. He was a workaholic, and he almost had to be in that position. But in terms of where we were in Vietnam, we were under pressure from Washington all the time with all the different ideas that people had because, imagine this, in Washington you have all these people. They're all worried about the war, different departments all over the place, Congress, everywhere. It's a real worry, and they all have ideas. If we'd only do this; if we do A; if we do B; if we do C. So, they would tell the president this, and they would tell other people this, and the president would tell guess who? Bob Komer. "Why don't we do that? Why don't we have a rural electrification program? Look what that did for America; I mean it changed people's lives."

Breiseth: Under the New Deal.

Wehrle: Under the New Deal. Why don't we have that? And then somebody would come out of Kentucky saying "Well, why don't we have a TVA program? They've got water running out the gawoo out there. They could have dams all over. We could have electricity, and

that would tie into the REA program, the rural electrification.” And why don’t we do this with refugees, and why don’t we do this with that? Why don’t we have a radio program and give people radios out in the countryside? So, the point I’m making is that if you think of this as a picture, an image, it’s like a funnel. And in Washington, you have the upper part of the funnel. Everybody’s pouring stuff into that funnel like mad, and Komer and others were then sending that out to us. We’re the little, small part where the water has got to go through, and it just can’t go through. It’s just impossible to take all those things to the Vietnamese government.

We’ll probably talk, in the economic situation, more about some of the consequences of that. But I’ll just lay out one of them right now, and that is when you have an overburdened GVN.

Breiseth: Government of Vietnam.

Wehrle: Government of Vietnam. At the present time, with the present programs, and then you double those programs. What are they going to do? Well, they’re just not going to do anything very good. They’re not doing much good right now, and that’s a generalization. Some of the agencies were very good, but as a generalization, they were not doing very much. Yet, you add more work to them. Well, they’re just going to back away and say “Why are you doing this? Oh, it’s those crazy Americans; we have to do this.” I mean, they didn’t have their heart in them. And if they didn’t have their heart in them, you know it’s not going to work.

So, Bob Komer was kind of our guy for this. I remember one time going back on a visit, and I went over to the White House and talked to Bob. We were joking, and I said, “Bob, I’ve got the answer to the problem.” He said, “You do? Oh, wow, what is it?” I said, “Right over here in the corner, we’re going to put in some exercise equipment for your room, put some boxing bags. And we’re going to put in some things you can kick, some things you can pull. And every time you’re frustrated with Roy out in Saigon, because he’s not getting these things done, I want you first to go over and hit that bag about twenty times, and get all your frustration out. Then come back and write me a cable.” Well, he thought that was pretty funny, (chuckles) and I thought it was pretty daring on my part, but we laughed about it. But it made my point, and it’s often true that it’s said by foreigners that Americans make their point of criticism by some sort of snide stuff like this.

Well, anyhow, it didn’t change anything because Komer was under these pressures, and it wasn’t his fault. This was just the situation we were in, and we both knew it.

Breiseth: Hearing that and, of course, being in Washington from ’67 to ’68 myself, in the poverty program, and ultimately Lyndon Johnson was our boss, Komer sounds like he is a faithful reflection of the man he reported to.

Wehrle: That’s right.

Breiseth: That he was LBJ's alter ego.

Wehrle: He was; he was. He was LBJ to us.

Breiseth: Which, of course, you have to be.

Wehrle: That's what his job was; that's right. So, I'm not criticizing.

Breiseth: You mentioned the radio program. What was it? That was a big responsibility of yours, wasn't it?

Wehrle: Well, it really wasn't, but I got nailed on it. The radio program was a program that was started in the summer of '64, maybe fall of '64 before I arrived. My memories of this are rather fuzzy, but basically it was a radio distribution program. I think that's when the transistors had come in or something. I don't know my timing well enough, but I think it was. So, radios could be portable, and they could be fairly cheap. You could get them out into the countryside. We now talk about cell phones out in the countryside around the world; well, this was kind of the precursor of that. I think the idea was, wow, we can really impress the peasants because we'll import bundles, bushel baskets of them, and then we'll get them out in the countryside. Well, anybody knows, working in aid anyplace in the world, that when you bring something of value into the country, the hardest job in the world is to get the aid to the end user. If it's fertilizer coming in, you want to get it to the farmer. It's very difficult because people are going to siphon it off along the supply chain. They're going to siphon it, sell it themselves, and it disappears. We used to make jokes, if you want the bulgur wheat from America to feed the people, you'd better get a teaspoon, and take it out, and put it in their mouth because it won't get there otherwise.

Well anyhow, that should have been clear on the radio program. I knew that much about it. When I got there in September, it was October before I started looking over the program. It was a very complex program, even by that time. Radio was just one of the many programs that I was looking over. I paid hardly any attention to it at all. It seemed to be working; the imported radios were coming in. Well, by the time I went back on home leave in December, there had been stories coming back from Vietnam to Congressmen back in Washington that these radios are being stolen along the supply chain, and they're not getting to the farmers, and these people are making all kinds of money out of selling these radios. I was in Washington, and they said, "Well it's Roy's program." So, I got really blamed for it.

I'll read a little bit of a letter that I wrote to my wife about this subject, which describes how I felt. I guess what I should add next is that this got pretty serious, because the House Oversight Committee got involved in this. They were coming out to do hearings in Vietnam, and I had to testify when I went back to Washington on this subject. I remember in the Dupont Circle Hotel one night, starting at about four o'clock and working until twelve or one that night for hearings the next morning, going over all the

papers that I had on this radio program. It was a mess; it was a mess. So, I had to decide what I was going to do.

So, here's what I'm quoting from, the letter right now. I quote right now saying, "The low cost radio import mess gets worse and worse, the deeper I dig into it. I don't really know what I can tell Washington, except that we goofed and didn't stay on top of the program as we should have. It went off the tracks back in December. That was when I was still dizzy with the maze of programs, and then I left to go to Washington. These may be extenuating circumstances, but there is no getting around the point that I missed this one. I don't intend to try to hide anything from the Congressional Committee. I'm just going to lay it all out. The Congressman has already said, from New York, that he... The Congressman from New York wrote a letter, saying he would find out who was the responsible official for this, and he would have their head." Then I said, "I should be so lucky...." (both laugh) to get a little humor into the letter. That's the end of the quote.

I did testify, and I did just that. I said "*Mea culpa*," I said, "You know, I'm responsible for that, and I didn't do a good job. There's not much more I can say." I think that really satisfied them. I think, if I had played a game of cover-up or something like that, they would have just kept digging. But, they didn't dig any more than that. I think they were satisfied that we did mess up and lost some things. So that was the radio program.

Breisetsh: Were you able to bring some improvement to the program?

Wehrle: I think it was about over by that time. I remember talking to Jim Killen, "What do we do?" He'd say, "Well, it's essentially done." They'd come in; we'd done it, and they had stolen most of them. My friend Cuong that I mentioned earlier, he had warned me about it earlier. He said, "Roy, you'd better look into that radio program," right before I was going to Washington. I didn't do it. I should have, but I was doing something else that I thought was more important. He knew; he smelled that there was rot all over the place.

Breisetsh: By the way, in that testimony in Washington did they get into other areas of your responsibility?

Wehrle: No.

Breisetsh: So, it really was focused just on that.

Wehrle: It was focused just on the radio program. Later on, when we talk about the reevaluation of the piastre, then the Moss Committee oversight operation into other stuff.

Breisetsh: We'll get into that, and we'll also get into your frequent contacts with Congressmen coming out to Vietnam, where you're kind of one of their major entertainers.

Wehrle: That's right.

Breiseth: It's the upper echelon of the Congress that you're dealing with. It's quite intriguing. We talked a lot yesterday about Ambassador Lodge. In light of having talked about McNamara and General Westmoreland, are there some other thoughts you wanted to wrap up our consideration of the man who was your longest term ambassador, and therefore your major supervisor for the major time.

Wehrle: Well, you're certainly right; everything that you just said is correct. Lodge is a very hard person for me to criticize—even though I will say some critical things about him—because he was so supportive of what I needed to get done. In that sense, the mission, the economic mission we had to carry out there, he was right on target. His assistants too. Tony Lake was his assistant. Tony Lake went on to be a National Security Adviser under, maybe Carter? I don't remember. But he supported us too, and so did Philip Habib. So, we had some very important support on economic policy.

But whether Lodge changed policy very much or whether he was realistic about getting—he wanted Ky to be successful.

Breiseth: General Ky.

Wehrle: General Ky. And maybe he was even sent out by the president to make sure that Ky was the key guy, that we backed him and that he was successful.

Breiseth: And this is his second tour. Lodge's second tour as ambassador.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: So, he was there under a Republican, correct? Did he go out...

Wehrle: Yes, that's right.

Breiseth: Under Eisenhower, and then he came back under—or did he go under Kennedy?

Wehrle: He went out under Kennedy the first time. That was with, probably with, the instruction that Diem had to go. So he had a real nasty assignment that time. And then, once we had a military government, they sent in Ambassador Taylor, a military man. Then, after that kind of went nowhere in terms of the government, then they sent out Lodge. I think his job was to solidify the government politically and try to move it toward a civilian government, which he essentially did. The military then went and took charge of that civilian government. They were elected. Ky was the key thing, and after Ky failed, then Thieu came in, T-h-i-e-u. But, I think Lodge was very discouraged by what had happened because, I think, he couldn't find any political traction. That may not be a criticism of Lodge; it was very hard to find. It's easy for me to make criticism. Why don't we get the Vietnamese to have an effective government? That's easy to say. But doing it. I mean,

where would the United States have been if we hadn't had a George Washington and a revolution? We probably wouldn't be here because that's very hard to do.

In any event, Lodge, as I said earlier, is a person who keeps his thoughts to himself pretty much. You say he's taciturn? Yes, he is taciturn, and you don't learn an awful lot. He has a nice smiling face; he's very gracious and all that, but he keeps his ideas to himself. Over the time there, I started out with a lot of respect for Lodge, and my friends felt the same way. We all felt that this is going to make a difference. So did the Vietnamese. And that's, of course, hope riding on a change.

Toward the end, I became more critical of Lodge and felt that he really was not giving us much direction. That was, I guess, a major criticism. We didn't know where we were going, what was he trying to accomplish? . Maybe he couldn't tell us, I don't know. But it certainly didn't give us much direction to work with.

I've got a paragraph here that will tie in Taylor and Lodge, and to give a little sense of what I felt at one point, and this is just one. So, I'm reading from a letter to my wife again, and I started with, quote, "I do not feel Taylor was comfortable in his job here. Though a fine and very intelligent man, he was not the right man for the job. Lodge will get us more involved politically, but he is a loner, it is said, and he does not use his staff very well. No telling where all this will lead." So, that was the transition between the two people coming in at that point.

I will read from another letter now that is written on August 29, 1965, again, about Lodge. This is kind of an early part of it. It says, "Thus far, Lodge is making a real effort to be very friendly and gracious with everyone, including myself. His reputation, you know, is of a person with hardly ever a kind word, as a person aloof, with hardly ever a kind word. So far, he has not lived up to that reputation. I've gotten to know him a bit, certainly not well, and I would guess that would be difficult. He is a quiet, sentimental person, very touched and troubled by the poverty of Saigon, and of the suffering. He really has not showed his hand yet in terms of policy. He has appointed me to be his sort of board of governors—he appointed me to his board of governors. That means the mission council, where we discuss what's going on in the country. I didn't sit on Taylor's council until very much toward the end, and so now I have a better sense of policy, of what's going on in the country." That ends that quote.

I have one final quote I'd like to read, on Lodge, and it reads as follows. This was a letter to my parents back home. "I think that Ambassador Lodge has a fairly good perception of what needs to be done. There is a real question of whether he can get all the Americans out here to do the right things. And there is, of course, a question of whether the Vietnamese will stop fighting among themselves. Taking a very global view of the present situation, a couple of things stand out very clearly to me. First, we must give eyes to the night and mobility of the U.S. forces. In an alien land, such a force is blind. The eyes must be supplied by the Vietnamese, by villagers providing intelligence on the

VC. This must be done and can be done. If not done, U.S. power cannot be brought to bear in a discriminating way against the enemy. Second, the Vietnamese leadership must evolve a spirit, philosophy underlying justification for the war, which is more than beat the communists. Third, the government must put better people into the government and follow up to see that the government really performs to help the people at the lower levels.”

Now, it was so difficult to pull these things off. You can criticize Lodge, but I don't know what his instructions were. And I didn't walk in his moccasins. So, from where I was, he was effective on my side, very effective. And when I needed his support at the top level with Thieu and Ky, on taxes and other things, he was right there. I wrote the script for him; he'd just read it, and that was fine. On the larger view though, which is what really counted, and those are related to some of the three things that I read above, we who worked around Lodge were never sure that he really had those in his stomach, that those really in him, and he really wanted to accomplish those. So, we don't know whether he sought to accomplish those and failed, or whether he really kind of went along with Westmoreland that our strategy is okay; let's just keep going.

Breiseth: I'm taking this a little out of sequence because I think what you just said introduces a major, major topic. This is the interaction you have with a group of American officials who are in the second rank, but of great consequence to carrying out our policies, and who would have been under Lodge ultimately, in their assignments, would they not? Most of them?

Wehrle: All of them.

Breiseth: It's with that group that you have an ongoing conversation or conversations about where we're going as a country; what's working in Vietnam; what's not working; what are some of the contradictions? We'll probably come back to this group later, as we get to some of the real dilemmas that you faced towards the end of your tour of duty. But why don't you introduce us to this group and say a little about each man, some of whom people will recognize because they go on to be major figures in our foreign policy.

Wehrle: I guess I'll start with the fact that there were a number of Foreign Service officers who normally would have been posted in capitals and places like that around the world, who were placed out in the provinces. These were relatively rural areas without much amenities or anything. They volunteered for these positions. Now, in each province, there would be a civilian representative of the United States who was in charge of what happened for the United States in that province. We called them *prov reps*, provincial reps. There were a number of embassy officers who volunteered for those jobs. Now that's interesting because that's not their normal pattern, and you think they might jeopardize their promotion by taking a step outside the normal roles. It's very important what assignments you take and don't take.

So, one of these people represents that, and his name is Frank Scotton, it's S-c-o-t-t-o-n. Frank was assigned to one of the provinces, and he'd been there for a while. So, these people, some of them learned Vietnamese; some didn't learn Vietnamese. But they all lived close to the people, and that's the point I want to emphasize. Frank Scotton was one of those, and he had a really good rapport with the Vietnamese. You are also tuned in to the military then, because the military, they're right next door. In fact, you probably mess with them half the time and you hear about their daily goings and comings. You hear the jokes, and who the butt of their jokes is and all the rest of that.

So, Frank Scotton was one that I got to know. I didn't have as much of a relationship with him as I had with some of the others I'll mention. But, I did have quite a bit, and he was very, very helpful to me.

Another person was John Vann, who is a most unusual person that went to Vietnam. I think anybody that knew John would agree with me that he was not only unusual, but he was exceptional in his patriotism and his love of the Vietnamese and of the United States. I won't go into descriptions from him because he's been written up in the very, very well done book by Neil Sheehan, called, *A Bright Shining Lie*, which refers to John Vann's life and death in Vietnam, through the helicopter crash. But he was there for years and years and years. He was a province rep, so that shows you another example. He was a military man, but he was in charge of a province for a while as a military man. He went back home and came back as a civilian. Then he was a province rep and a whole region rep. A region would be like six or seven, eight, ten, provinces, on the civilian side. He was a long-term critic of the way we were running the war. I got to know John fairly early. I would go down to visit him in the provinces. The reason that these people became close to me was because I needed that sort of information. I didn't need more cables; I needed to know what's really going on in the countryside for a whole bunch of reasons. So, these people were invaluable to me and to others. Some would tune into them, and others would see these people as mavericks because they were critical of what was going on.

Another person who was really unusual and a great servant in the United States was Jerry Hickey. Jerry Hickey is H-i-c-k-e-y, wrote first a famous—he's an anthropologist and he came from, I think, the University of Chicago, I'm not sure. But he's a well-known anthropologist. He came over under the Michigan Contract, which was way back in 1955, to bring professional people over to help the Vietnamese under that first regime with Diem. He wrote a book called, *Village in Vietnam*, which was about the delta, which I read before I even went there, which gave a sense of the culture of the delta and how the politics works within the villages down there, a brilliant book. Then later, he was up in the central highlands, where he really spent most of his time and became an expert on the Montagnards. Now, we talked before about the Meo and the Yao and Lao and the hills up north. Well, the Montagnards were simply a French name for the hill people of Vietnam. As we said before, there's a chain of mountains that goes all along the west of Vietnam and abuts Laos. That's where the Montagnards were, as well as up north in

the top of North Vietnam in the area to the west in a much larger area geographically that abuts China. There are whole different tribes of Montagnards there.

So, Hickey's job was to understand these people and to be an American presence up there. He risked his life and was almost killed several times by the attacks of the Viet Cong on the various outposts where he was with the Montagnards. He loved the Montagnards and they loved him. He was just an extraordinarily wonderful person. He lives in North Chicago. The last time I talked to him, he was up in Evanston. He told the entire Vietnamese story in his book, "Window on War." One footnote to that is that when he came back, he was shunned by all the American colleges that he tried to get a job with as a professor because he had worked for the Americans in Vietnam. A shameful aspect of American treatment of those who gave so much to try to make success of what was U.S. policy. Jerry Hickey is an American hero.

Breiseth: Not unlike the experience of the military veterans who came back and were sort of blamed for the failures of the Vietnam War.

Wehrle: Yeah, people spit at them; it's just shameful. That's the only word I can think of. So, Jerry Hickey and I became really, pretty good friends. He would come over for dinner, and I would have him with other Americans, so they would absorb his wisdom. Some did; some didn't. So, he was part of a group that I depended upon a lot, along with the two that I've just mentioned.

Another person who I remember so clearly was Richard Holbrook, Dick Holbrook, that's what he went by. He was a young Foreign Service officer, but he was a whippersnapper from the very beginning. I mean, even as a young Foreign Service officer, you knew Dick was not going to be contained by the normal vessels of Foreign Service. I'll tell just a quick story on that. We had lots of receptions with the Vietnamese. One time, it was with the agriculture department, and I was fairly new there at the time. We went over, and there must have been twenty people in this room, maybe more, chit-chatting, French flying all over the place. Dick Holbrook was there. Dick and I got started talking about something or other, and he had this idea of how you reorganize the agriculture department. He said, "I think we ought to do this and that," and he got a couple of the Vietnamese together. I remember him bending over the table with a piece of paper and writing on there a diagram of how they should reorganize their agriculture department. Well, you know, that's (chuckles) beyond the bounds of anything that anybody would ever think of telling the other government at a cocktail reception; not what they should do in a public place like that, or even not if they were not asked or in a private place maybe. But that was Dick Holbrook. He got ideas; he was bouncing right through them, and that's the way he was.

Dick Holbrook was the guy also who was going to think for himself. All these people are independent thinkers, and Dick became a good friend. He then became special assistant to Ambassador Porter, who I had special relationships with. His wife was over in

Bangkok. He [Dick Holbrook] would carry letters for me back and forth to my wife, and I would do the same for him. I had a lot of respect for Dick. I always liked Dick, and I'm sorry that he's no longer with us anymore. I'm sorry that he couldn't have served his country more than he was allowed to serve it when he was up at the top. He had a lot of warts, but that's not the point. The point is he was a brilliant guy and he was tough. Yeah, he had a big ego, that's no question about that, but he was a big person, so maybe he could support that. This was the group.

Breisetsh: Besides the conversations with him, what did the two of you actually work on together, you and Holbrook?

Wehrle: I don't remember any projects that we worked on together. The ambassador had appointed myself, a chap by the name of Ed Martin, M-a-r-t-i-n, I think, and John Vann, and probably Phil Habib to work on corruption. We kept complaining about corruption, which we will talk about later a little bit more. We worked on that together, but I don't remember Holbrook being on that project. Most of this group I'm talking about, we were not into projects. We were into having supper at night, drinking beer and just sharing.

Breisetsh: Conjugating about the war.

Wehrle: Sharing, yeah, conjugating and sharing the information that we had, and worrying about where the United States was going to go.

Breisetsh: Now, you mentioned Habib. Habib was not normally part of this group, but you've said to me privately how much you respected him. Can you say a little about him, and then we'll come back to the group.

Wehrle: I'd really like to say Phil. He was not in this group at all but Phillip Habib was the political counselor, and as you can tell by his name, he's a Mid-Eastern person.

Breisetsh: Lebanese.

Wehrle: Lebanese. He later played a major role in negotiations in the Middle East. I had never met a person quite like him.

Breisetsh: Of the hostages in Iran.

Wehrle: That's right.

Breisetsh: Right.

Wehrle: I had never met a person like Phil Habib. He was a short fellow with a round face, shining eyes, a big smile, and a craftiness, and street smart stuff that I had not seen in foreign service officers. I don't think of them as street smart; I think of them as maybe

some other kind of smart, but not street smart. But Habib was, and he was crafty, and he was tough; I mean really tough. If you're going to make an argument to him, you'd better have it right, and you'd better be able to defend it. So, I loved Habib. I thought he was number one, and the ambassadors did too. They all had the same respect for him that I had for him. We would meet for breakfast in the morning, and we would dope out what we're going to do. Now, the key thing of this, which I hadn't thought about until you asked that question, is we would, in many ways, be antithetical to each other. That would be a normal tension in any embassy because, if the United States is going to come in, and you want something from that government, that's going to cause political stress, strain, maybe overthrow the government; I don't know what. So, there would be that tension. We knew that; we talked about it. We said, "Look, I'm going to come in and I'm going to want more taxes, and you're going to want less taxes, and I'm going to want this; you're going to want that, but let's forget that, and we're going to work together. And I'm going to be fully frank with you on what I want to do, and I don't play any games at all." And Phil said the same thing, "I'll tell you the political situation; I'll tell you everything I can tell about it, so you know, you can't tell anybody. You've got to promise to keep this confidential." I said, "You know I'm not going to do that. We're together on this; we're working for the same team." So, all the way through, and that's a considerable thing, we worked together. Every cable that went to Lodge, we had worked it out so that we were agreed. So, it wasn't going to be that Lodge would get the cable and say, "Okay, check it with Phil Habib," and then it's going to come back on his desk. One reason Lodge liked myself and Phil Habib is because we didn't give him the problem. We took care of it ourselves. Habib was number one. I can't say too much about Phil Habib. He was just great, just great.

Breiseth: Let's go back to the group. What kind of emerging consensus did you guys come up with as you talked about the problems of America and Vietnam?

Wehrle: (laughing) I think that's too formal, on terms of us coming up with anything particular like that. We had lines of thought, which we agreed on. And the lines of thought we agreed upon, one of them was corruption, which we said we'd talk about. We can talk about it right now.

There are different kinds of corruption, and I mentioned that earlier. One of the most corrupting forms of corruption is when it becomes your lifestyle. Well, why is that so? Well, it's because you spend fifty, sixty, seventy percent of your working hours making sure that everything is working for corruption. In other words, that you've gotten the right amount from the different people you've appointed down below as province chiefs, if you're at the regional level, and that you're getting money from the businessmen that you were told they'll give security through, if you get that, and that your wife is bringing in the right amount from this part, and she's dealing with that part because the wives were heavily involved in all this. You're getting the right amounts going up, and you're really just so mad at this guy that's up in Saigon who wants an increase or who wants to get cut into it. You never had him in it before; what does he

want in it for? And then you've got to work and find out why does he want in it? By the time that you've worked all that out, you don't have much time to worry about whether you're fighting the Viet Cong or whether you're getting the rice delivered or anything else. So that's a functional aspect of corruption, functional in the sense that it destroys your effectiveness in terms of what you are supposed to be doing. So that when Lodge asked us to deal with the corruption issue, that was one of our major things that kept coming up. That has to be changed just for this reason alone; for no other reason than just this.

Well, I don't know what happened, because we gave him our report and we never heard any more about it. But, let's just focus on that for a second. A lot of this, what I'm saying now, comes out of my own knowledge, but also comes out of the Neil Sheehan book. It's laid out in that book, *A Bright Shining Lie*, very, very clearly, that the main reason, the main two reasons that Diem would appoint a province chief and his successors—military would appoint a province chief, is are they loyal to you? That's first; that's foremost. For Diem it was Catholic. For Thieu it would be, are you part of my team or not, and do you have anything against me, or whatever it might be. And then, secondly, is that you will do a good job of the corruption. You will make sure that you get a cut from all the construction that goes up there and everything else that goes up there. Those two considerations were primary. Well, it's pretty hard. Both of those are difficult if you were trying to have a meritocratic army, because meritocracy means you select number one, who's going to be the best commanding general of that division, and who's going to be effective; not whether they're loyal to you, because that's not the key thing. But for them, because of the coups and because of the threats of coups and because of the rumors of coups were all the time circulating in Saigon, that's what they spent a lot of their time worrying about. Diem did too. And he thought he had himself protected, but he didn't because we got into a couple of his generals, and that was the end of it.

So, corruption is bad in the sense that goods would come off the ships, and then they'd be stolen on trucks going out of the port. We then started putting military police on some of those trucks, and that helped a lot. But then sometimes the Americans would steal it. The whole truck would disappear, and the Americans would be heavily involved. It was just too enticing. So, the problem of corruption of this sort, we were worried about it. We were concerned about it. We had given up, I had given up on economic warfare. That was a big thing, and Bill Mazzocco, that's M-a-z-z-o-c-c-o, I think, Mazzocco, he was an expert. He was a very smart guy from Washington, on economic warfare. Economic warfare means that you deny the enemy what they want through the economic system. In other words, if they want rice, you stop them from getting rice.

Well, I went out on one trip one day into the country on a major highway, and looked at what that means when you're doing inspection out in the countryside, on a monsoon day that it's raining, or on a hot tropical day when you're sweating to pieces. And you see these big... the French call them *Camion*. They're great big trucks, all loaded with bags of rice and bags of this. Police inspectors have to dig down in there and find out if

they've got some ammunition going out to the Viet Cong. I just learned in that one day, that this is task impossible. So that's a form of corruption, but that's going to happen.

Breisetsh: What was impossible? Finding out whether they also were toting arms?

Wehrle: No, stopping it. You knew it was going on; we knew that. But stopping it, it was impossible because there were payoffs at every one of these inspection points. And if you paid off the right amount, it was going to go through. So there's all different kinds of corruption, but basically we felt—this group of ours, and we talked a lot about this—we all were of one mind on this—that corruption was a corroding influence on the government and meant that the government was really a caretaker government. They're taking care of themselves, not doing their job. And so, the larger problem that we were confronted with, and we talked about all the time, is how do we get the Vietnamese to take this war effort seriously? How do we get them to care as much about winning this war as we care about winning the war? To us, that was amazing.

Breisetsh: And as much as the Viet Cong cared about winning the war.

Wehrle: We weren't even close. The Viet Cong were determined to win. They had a determination, and they were willing to take casualties. They were willing to do whatever, deep sacrifices. They were going to win the war; that was their determination. And we thought we could wave them off, that through our technology and through Westmoreland's use of main force attacks, but no.

Breisetsh: We've talked about this before, but I think in the immediate context of what you've just said, say a little bit, by way of summary, of why you and your group thought that this group of military leaders, political leaders of South Vietnam, were not capable of raising the kind of commitment that we hoped we had and that you knew the Viet Cong and Viet Minh had.

Wehrle: That's a really good question. We felt, and got affirmation from our Vietnamese friends, that the military were looked upon as just kind of children by the Vietnamese people. They were very young; that's true, they were very young, and if you think of the Vietnamese...

Breisetsh: Like your age.

Wehrle: My age, yeah, just young whippersnappers. If you think of the Vietnamese culture, the Vietnamese culture, unlike ours, is very honoring of the elderly. In a Confucian way, you honor them.

Breisetsh: Revere.

Wehrle: Yeah, you revere; that's the right word. Well, how could you revere Ky and Thieu? These were just young, snot-nosed kids, to use a bad term. I mean they were just nothing, and

they had no political connection to the people at all. They weren't part of any nationalist, or even part of a Catholic group. They had no group to back them up. They were simply running the government because they had the guns, and they had the money. And so, the Vietnamese, we know the Vietnamese looked at them as puppets of the Americans. Why did they do that? Well, because they saw that the Americans had gotten rid of Diem, so they made space for the military to come in. The Americans did that, and in that space, they allowed Thieu and Ky to run their show.

Now, later on there's going to be elections, and Thieu is going to be elected. But the Generals were the only candidates that people could vote for. There were no political parties; there was nothing else. It was just kind of a joke. So, we were pretty confident that that was almost like a fact, rather than a view, that they had no political standing in the eyes of the Vietnamese people, and certainly not in the eyes of the people down in the delta or anyplace else there. That was pretty distant, but there was no figure that they could rally around, like you said, the Ho Chi Minh or the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong had a very simple mission. I mean theirs is very clearly to identify. Get rid of the foreign invaders; get them out. We got the French out. Now, we're going to get the Americans out, and then we have our country back. That was pretty straightforward. They also lied a lot and said they're going to do this and that socially, which they generally didn't do. But their main mission was very, very clear.

Breiseth: One of the topics that we wanted to look at is the negotiations that you were part of, that dealt with the government of Vietnam. That was a fairly central responsibility for you at one point.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: Talk to us about negotiations.

Wehrle: Well, there are a lot of different kinds of negotiations, so I'll concentrate primarily now, on the economic negotiations. Then, maybe later, we can come back to the exchange rate negotiations, because those are very separate sorts of things. GVN negotiations, as I said before, consisted of two sides. One is how much aid do we give them in dollars, and then how much counterpart, or piastres, do we get back. Because we give the government dollars, they sell the dollars, as I said before, to the importers for piastres, and the importers send the dollars to the foreign suppliers. The GVN get piastres, and then they give us a portion of those. That helps us run our programs and support our costs. So, we had a lot of negotiations on that. The toughest negotiations, I think, were on the rice program and how much rice we'd give them and how much taxes they would impose, those sorts of things.

During the spring of 1965, I was in major negotiations on the overall economic situation, particularly taxes and their budget, because when you think about it, if their budget is too large, that's simply going to increase our aid program. In other words, they have

control over our aid program because, if they increase purchasing power through their budget, then people are going to spend more. Then there could be more imports, and then we're going to have to finance those dollars to avoid inflation because their exports were piddling by this time. So, I had really big negotiations going on with the Minister of Economics about their taxation policy.

Breiseth: And his name was what?

Wehrle: Oh, they changed so often I can't tell you. One was Thanh, T-h-a-n-h; another was Minister Tom, T-o-m. But they changed, and that made it so difficult because you think you're pretty far along, and then the government gets weak. Then we'll say, "Oh, it's just a caretaker government now." Well, you can't negotiate with a caretaker government because it will be gone, and then you've lost the whole thing. The negotiations went on for quite a long time. They went on through the spring, and they went on until about July. I think we closed them off, maybe like—that's not quite right, but it's like July first of 1965. I'd been negotiating since maybe March, or something like that.

In truth, I kind of liked the negotiations. I thought negotiations were kind of fun. It's a game, back and forth, and you have to judge your negotiator and what makes them go. You've got to have a game plan, and you've got to do some feinting and suggest you're going to go through tackle, when you're really going to go around end. It's all those things are there. So, it makes it kind of a game, but a very serious one. It goes on day after day. I was on those. I was supposed to go on home leave, and then the ambassador asked me to stay on and complete the negotiations, which was the right thing to do. It was absolutely the right thing to do.

As we got into the negotiations in March and April, Charlie Mann had been Director by that time, for about six months, I think.

Breiseth: Replacing Jim Killen.

Wehrle: Replacing Jim Killen, who had left.

Breiseth: We're going to spend a lot more time on those two guys.

Wehrle: I think I've got the timing wrong now. This was '66; I said '65. I said spring of '65. There were negotiations then, but the larger negotiations were in the fall of '66. The point is valid, whichever time it was, we had negotiations in the spring of '65, and then we had them in '66. Charlie Mann and I, as I've said, we worked together very well in Laos. We respected each other. I liked him, but I knew from the minute that he was appointed in Vietnam, when I first heard the rumor, that this would not work. It's one of those things that just hits you in the stomach, and you say to yourself, oh no, that won't work. You take the person, everything you know about him, and you put him in this situation and you say, no, it doesn't fit. Well, it didn't fit at all. Charlie was over his head all the time,

and that's not my disrespect for him at all, he just wasn't cut out for that kind of a job. He had no subtlety to him at all. The Asian culture requires subtlety, requires a lot of different kinds of things, and he was just straightforward. I'll use the term German. He was just, "boom! boom! boom!" He was like a Prussian sergeant, "Boom! boom! boom! This is the way it's going to be." Well, it doesn't work that way over there.

So at this point, we had myself trying to negotiate, then we had Charlie negotiating, which was his responsibility as AID Director. This is the tension I mentioned earlier. I mean from the chain of command, the money goes from Congress to AID to Charlie, down to me as his assistant director for programs. That's the way it goes, and that's the accountability. But we were negotiating major amounts of money. In fact, it was up to nearly \$500 million from the import program at one point. It was three hundred, four hundred, in that range, generally. So, these were big amounts of money, and Charles's view was, that's my responsibility. The White House view was, we sent Roy out there to be in charge of economic policy, and what's Charles doing messing around with him? But I want people to understand that, from Charles's point of view, he was doing what he was supposed to do. He was not messing around. He was doing what he was supposed to do.

Well, word came back to the ambassador from the GVN fairly quickly that Roy is saying X and Charlie Mann is saying Z, and the ministries don't know who's in charge. Ambassador Lodge immediately said, "Well, that's got to stop." I am the manager; the boss, and that's what it's designed to be. So he said, "I want Roy to do this." He called both of us over to his office and said, "This is a situation that can't go on. It's not going to work for the United States. So, I want Roy to be the sole voice of negotiation and all the responsibility is placed on him. Is that clear?" Well, I thought it was clear, and we went back to work. Charles was getting hit from Washington and a few other places by this time. He'd gone to a meeting in Honolulu, and he hadn't fared very well. Charlie is a great guy, but he's not very articulate, and he tends to talk too much. He tends to say the same thing maybe six or seven times. Then, on the eighth time, he says, "Now what I meant to say was..." And by that time, smart people are really done with him, you know. They just can't stand that. And that happened to him in Honolulu, from what I heard, anyhow.

So, anyhow, he was under pressure, and he was feeling pressed. Then this happened on top of everything else. So he was really, really pressed, and he lashed out at my staff. He made fun of the staff that worked for me and criticized them. I went up into his office, and I said, "Charlie, I will simply not accept that. We can do whatever; work things out ourselves, but I've heard what you have said." He said, "Yeah, well, that's right. Your staff is not doing their job." I said, "That's my job; you tell me that. I will not have my people slandered." So we had a really to-do about it, but we knew each other well enough that we came out okay on it. Charles said, "I cannot do what the ambassador asked me to do." And I said, "Wait a minute; don't tell me that." He said, "I have the responsibility from Washington; I've got to be at these negotiations." So, I reported that

to the ambassador, which I had to do. He then sent a letter to the ministers, saying that my negotiator is Roy. And he called Charles over to his office, and read the riot act to him. That was the end of it. It was too bad that it had to be so rough as it turned out to be, but Charles thought he was right in a legal way. He was wrong in terms of the situation out there. So, I continued the negotiations.

Breiseth: What were the real issues of the negotiations that you two disagreed on?

Wehrle: Charlie Mann and I didn't disagree. I don't think too much on what we wanted.

Breiseth: Just, it was who had the power.

Wehrle: Who was going to be the U.S. vice and tactician; who was going to do it. What we were negotiating with the Vietnamese on it was the level of budgetary support, and particularly the amount of taxes that they would put in place, because, if they didn't have sufficient taxes on, then we have to absorb all that through our dollars, because you've got to get rid of that purchasing power. By spring of '65 and fall of '65, we had American troops coming in like every day. So, the pressure on the economy was becoming much, much worse.

The Vietnamese were saying to me, "You want us to increase our government; you want us to do more programs." Yes, that's right. "Well, how can we do that if you don't let us expand the budget?" And we'd say "Well, that's going to cause inflation, and we can't do that." "Well, how do you expect us to do this? And now we're trying to expand our agricultural program because you want to do a hog program or a chicken program. But we're losing people every day because they're going to work for the American contractors, because they're paying three times what we can pay them, four times, five times, six times, what we can pay them. They can go out and work and build an airfield and make all kinds of money. How can we do this?" So, the point of this is that in these negotiations, we'd get caught up into all kinds of conflictual situations where what we were asking for one purpose, for United States policy, was in direct conflict with what we wanted to achieve on another one. So, part of the reasons those negotiations took so long is we had to work those contradictions and complications out. I had to bring MACV into it, and we had to work it out as best we could. But even in the end, there were lots of contradictions. This made for long days and long negotiations, which after a while didn't turn out to be so much fun.

I'd like to read something that I wrote in a letter about these situations. It will show how it seemed to me at that point, when all this was going on. I'll start with the thing that we just mentioned about the ambassador. I said well, "The ambassador..." This is a quote. "... called me over yesterday, and the ambassador said he was not satisfied with the way Charles is running the economic policy aspects of USAID. He said Charles was too inarticulate to get ideas across to the government. Told me he would give me full

authority to run the negotiations, and he said he explained all this to Charles Mann.” Well, that’s what we just said a few minutes ago.

Here’s an example of a day, and part of reflecting back on this is to try to remember how my days went and how they were in some respects. As I’ll say, just a blur, because so many things were going across my desk each day. I’m writing this over to Bangkok, to my wife, JoAnn. I say, “Put in another long day. Got to the office about six o’clock and left at eight-thirty, fourteen and a half hours. What really bugs me now is the really big decisions facing us, and mostly me, in the economic area, they are facing us every day. What surgery is needed now in the economic front? What have we done so far that has not worked very well? What, then, should we do now? And the construction program, how much can the economy take? Bemusing these two questions will pass my weekend. With Charles gone, I will have much more time to get these policy questions in order.”

Now, with Charles gone, Charles had—and a lot of people do this. I’ll mention Jim Grant later on, who was my boss back in Washington, and I can understand it. They’ve had a hard day, and then they want somebody to reflect with them at the end of the day, almost philosophically. They want comfort, comfort blankets around them. So about six-thirty at night or seven, Charles would say, “Come up immediately; I need to see you.” His office was the next floor up. So, I’d run up, and the deputy might be with him at that point, and then we’d listen to these long... They weren’t harangues. They were just long, endless discussion of what do we do about this and what do we do about that. He didn’t really want us to tell him what to do about. He just wanted to talk about it. So, he took up a lot of our time. That used to drive a lot of us who worked for him a little bit batty because we were so busy and trying to get these things done, and then we’d have to sit there. But he’s the boss, and whatever he said, we had to do it.

In talking about the negotiations, I can put this in. It’s a little bit off the point because it’s talking about shipping agents, but that will fit back into what we talked about, the port. I said, and this is a quote, “Tired, but feel a little better. Had dinner with five of the U.S. shipping agents, and I am almost learning to talk their lingo. Oh, what problems. Port is now full, and cargo is not moving. Political situation is only made worse, and a bad situation even worse. Anyhow, it was a useful and interesting evening. Feel I’m getting a little bit accomplished. Porter and Habib bought my tough cable on taxes today. Really worried over that cable this morning and was happy to see it went, unless Lodge would have stopped it. The minister I’m working with is really tough, and we will be in trouble, as far as I am concerned. From here on out, it is no holds barred, and the U.S. is going to come out on top.” There’s a little bit of bravado pushing me, so that I don’t let it go some way wrong. But that was an idea. That’s another quote. That’s an idea of how kind of a day went or how difficult the negotiations were, and they were difficult.

Breiseth: These shipping agents, by the way, were Americans?

Wehrle: They're American shipping agents, yeah. They were shipping something out from the United States. So, I think that gives a little bit of a flavor of what those negotiations were like. In the end, in negotiations like that, both sides realize that they've got to come out, so they then tend to come together. With the Vietnamese, it took a long time because a lot of them were not used to this. I wasn't either, but we got what we needed. And when I went on home leave, the negotiations were over, and we got it signed on the dotted line.

Breiseth: What did you accomplish?

Wehrle: Well, we accomplished that. We had an aid agreement for a year; that's what we accomplished. We had it all nailed down and how much they were going to get, what they were supposed to do, and all the rest.

Now, we're talking negotiations, so it's probably a good idea to talk about another form of negotiations we had. This was not at the same time, but it was the next year. In the world of air commerce, you have to have negotiations for landing rights in different countries. If you have an airline like Pan Am, which we had then, you have to have an agreement with any country that Pan Am is going to land in, and there's very complex. There's landing rights one, two, three, four, five; they're different levels that you have to have negotiated. The embassy normally negotiates those. Well, in the middle of this war, our landing right contract, our treaty or whatever it is, came out. It was done, so we had to start a new negotiation. So, I'm negotiating now with a different minister, but that was my job as economic counselor. I knew nothing about this, and I really begrudged it because I had other things that I thought were much more important. But that was part of my job. I had an embassy officer with me, and they knew the stuff pretty well. We knew what we had to get, and we thought, well, this will be a snap, right? Landing rights, why wouldn't they let us land? Oh, no, not the Vietnamese. They went through every one of those little things as if...

Breiseth: This is landing at Tan Son Naht?

Wehrle: At Tan Son Naht, yeah. They went through the whole thing as if there was no war going on, just two sovereign countries negotiating, and jiddles and joddles. We went through that thing in weeks. I kept thinking to myself, this is going to work. I mean, it's got to work. There's no question about that. So, we'd shave off this, shave off that, do this. It was really...it made me kind of sick because it was all little tiny things that diplomats can spend their time on, which had no consequence as far as I was concerned. We went on and on, and pretty soon, the day of our landing rights expired, and we were still negotiating. The time had come up, and I thought, what happens now? I assumed that we would agree that day as often negotiations need a deadline to get completed. Well, this was clearly a deadline.

Then I got word from one of my staff that the Pan Am plane coming from Hong Kong was approaching Tan Son Nhat and was told that it couldn't land. (laughs) I thought, oh my gosh, what would happen if this hit the *New York Times* headlines, "Pan Am Plane Not Allowed to Land in the Country in Which American Soldiers are Dying to Protect It to Have a Landing Field at All." I had these visions of these headlines coming up, which made us look like absolute fools and made the Vietnamese look like...

And so I said to the minister, I said, "I've got this call; it just came in. If you want to verify it, you can have your people verify that the Pan Am plane is circling Tan Son Nhat right now and is not allowed to land because we haven't agreed on these." Then, I said what I just said to you. I said, "Is this what you want in the *New York Times*?" I said, "We have to agree, and we have to agree right now, at this minute." Well, he was all flabbergasted then, and he went out and made some telephone calls. He came back and he said, "As I told you last night, Roy, we've agreed to this." (laughs) He told me that. He said, "It's all agreed." Well, that's how you save face, as if he had told me last night. I said, "Yes, sir, I remember. That's right; you're right. We are all agreed. Can we sign on"—because we had the documents all out, "Can we sign on the dotted line?" "Yes." He signed it, and we called Pan Am, and Pan Am landed.

Breisetsh: Wow.

Wehrle: That was a scary time for me. I thought, I'm flying blind. I don't know what's going on. So, that's that story.

Breisetsh: Now, the issue of the ports and the notion of all this material. Let's look at this, and then we'll take a break.

Wehrle: Okay.

Breisetsh: All this material coming in, with ports that are inadequate to handle this much traffic and the economic issues, in terms of the shipping companies, because the last thing they want is to sit idle with paying men onboard and with a cargo groaning to be offloaded.

Wehrle: That's a good way to put it.

Breisetsh: And just, kind of the physical limitations as you confronted with undeveloped ports for the amount of ships coming in. How did you deal with all that?

Wehrle: Well, it was a mess and you described it very, very well. There were about three berths for deepwater ships when I got there. Maybe that's wrong, but it was something like that. Historically, that was plenty, didn't need any more. But, as the American troops came in, and as we described how that increased the burden of goods coming to port, and the construction program going on of the military, we had cement coming in like mad, and we still ran into a shortage of cement. I remember mission council meetings

where the ambassador looked me in the eye and said, “Roy, what’s happening on cement?” Because the price was going up, and people couldn’t get it. I guess my smart aleck answer would be, “Yes, sir, we don’t have enough.” I knew that, and that was part of the shipping thing.

As I looked out my balcony, I could see the Saigon River going down into the South China Sea, going through this wetlands. And I could see the ships literally piling up down there. You described it very well, that’s the last thing ship owners want. I didn’t know what to do. I knew nothing about ports. We knew this was going to happen to some extent, so we assumed that there would be enough lighters to take the cargo in. “Lighter” is the barge that the ships can unload on. So, we unloaded. We thought we’d have enough lighters to do this. We did some analysis; my staff did some work on it, and it looked like it would work up to a point. Well, the more the demand went up, as I think I mentioned earlier, the more it clogged up. It literally clogged up to where almost nothing was happening down there.

Then, I think I mentioned yesterday, that I had my friend Allain Felix get me some information. Then I had the CIA—I think I talked about that yesterday—take me out on a night on the motorboat, and go around and check it all out. We found out that a Chinese mafia controlled that. So, we had to do something, and the only something we could think of doing was the military coming in to run the port.

So, here’s a quote from a letter that I wrote to my wife, which talks about the negotiating. It’s a very short quote, which kind of wraps up where I was at this point. I said, “My secret negotiations on the port continue, and though I have had an unsatisfactory meeting with Colonel Owens yesterday morning, I had a fine meeting with General Westmoreland last evening. He was, as usual, understanding and perceptive. I think, just maybe, just maybe, we can pull this one off, and the military will come in. It’s a scheme that I’ve been pushing now for many months, and people didn’t listen, but I think, now it’s going to work, and I am really quite encouraged.” That’s a culmination of pushing on what earlier was a string, but now was a stick that was pushing through.

Colonel Owens was fairly low down, but once I got up to General Westmoreland, he saw the problem immediately. He knew what the problem was from our mission council meetings, and he backed the military coming in. Now he had a self-interest in doing that because he had a lot of stuff coming in. He wanted to build, as I said before, ice cream plants and all kinds of stuff, and tactical air force fields. He wanted to do that. I knew that, and he knew what my problem was. So, he pulled it out of the fire, and Lodge supported it. There were a lot of people that said, “That’s crazy; you’ll never be able to do that. You can’t have military running civilian cargo.” You can imagine, there were a lot of nay-sayers around, saying that wouldn’t work. But to Lodge’s credit and Westmoreland’s, they stuck with it, and we just simply said, “We’ve got to make it

work.” You had to tear through that mafia because there’s no way you’re going to find a way through that. They really had it all locked up. That turned out good. It took a while...

Breiseth: So you brought in the military to deal with the economic mafia that was in control.

Wehrle: And it worked, and those cargo ships got unloaded. Then the whole thing was smooth, and we didn’t have to worry about it anymore.

Breiseth: I think this is a good time to take a break.

Wehrle: I do too.

Breiseth: We will resume this afternoon and talk about your trip to Huế.

Wehrle: Oh, good; that will be a change of venue.

(end of interview session #3)

Interview with Interviewee Roy Wehrle

VRV-A-L-2013-098.04

Interview # 4: October 31, 2013

Interviewer: Christopher N. Breiseth

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Breiseth: We’re resuming in the afternoon of Halloween, 2013, in the home of Roy and JoAnn Wehrle. I’m Chris Breiseth and interviewing Roy Wehrle. We said, at the break, that we were going to come back and talk about a very special trip you made to Huế. I assume this also allows you to talk about some of the things you did in the countryside as part of the larger issues of development, often referred to also as pacification, as part of the American strategy to strengthen the South Vietnamese government and society. So, why don’t you talk about the trip to Huế.

Wehrle: The trip to Huế. Now, in talking about Huế, that's H-u, and that's e-acute in French, Huế. That is the capitol of ancient Vietnam; we should be aware of that. That's where the emperor lived, the last Bao Dai, but all the emperors lived there. Vietnam is really three parts. There's Central Vietnam, which is Huế. That is the center of that section. Then there's Northern Vietnam, which, of course, Hanoi is the center, and there's Southern Vietnam, which is Saigon, which includes primarily the delta, one of the richest rice growing areas in the world.

Breisetsh: Which is now called Ho Chi Minh City.

Wehrle: Now, Saigon is Ho Chi Minh City, but I will always know it as Saigon.

Breisetsh: Saigon.

Wehrle: As do many other people. So, the trip I'm going to describe right now was up to Huế. So, imagine yourself in the imperial capital of the kingdom of Vietnam, which lasted for thousands of years. *Sinic*, that is a Chinese culture, steeped in Confucian ethics and Confucian beliefs and fealty to your parents and to the emperor, highly hierarchical and long, long, long lasting in tradition.

I was asked, by the RD [rural development] minister to go up there. It turned out I went up there right after Buddha's birthday. Buddha's birthday is a big celebration in all Buddhist countries, and so it was in Vietnam. Buddha's birthday has a lot of reference in terms of history. I think it's interesting to anybody who's interested in Vietnam's history to be aware of, if they're not aware of, how a lot of the uprisings first started in Vietnam, and how they were related to very cloddish and unthoughtful decisions by the Diem family.

Anyhow, I'm going to read a letter that I wrote to my mother and father. I wrote this on May fifteenth of 1965. I will quote somewhat extensively from this letter to tell this particular story, which I think is very, very useful.

"I was up at Huế this week, for a day or so, with the Minister of Agriculture. A most auspicious anniversary." Referring there to the Buddhist anniversary. "You may remember that it was just two years ago, on Buddha's birthday, that the trouble between the Buddhists and Diem first flared in full. At that time, Ngô Đình Cảnh..." and that's C-a-n-h, "... which was Diem's brother and the Catholic Bishop, then 'dictator' of I put in Central Vietnam, who was receiving a Catholic big shot, who was sent from Rome to determine whether Vietnam should have a cardinal. More specifically, whether Ngô Đình Cảnh should be made a cardinal. Cảnh wanted, of course, a good show, many Catholic flags, but no Buddhist flags, which might suggest to the emissary that not quite everybody in Central Vietnam was a Catholic. So, a decree was issued that on such and such a day, no Buddhist flags would be flown.

The day the delegate arrived, and, by coincidence, was the 2,507th birthday of the Buddha. Well, this did not go down very well with the populace. And crowds formed, protesting this not flying the flag. And ugliness and bullets and deaths ensued. The rest is history, ending in the death of the other two Ngô brothers in Saigon. Anyhow, Huế, when I was there, looked very pacific and also very colorful, with the flags of Buddha flying everywhere. Huế is the soul of the Vietnamese dynasty of yore, and it is a city steeped in history, with the old palaces. I stayed in a hotel built by Cảnh, in hopes of having a wonderful view of the Perfume River, which tranquilly winds its way through Huế. I saw a lovely sunset over the river and watched a lovely sunrise the next day. The river, calm as glass, and the sun's rays piercing out of the clouds, one by one. The yellow flags adorning the multitudes of small sampans and boats docked for the night in the sleepy river. Behind lie the mountains, rising sharply to cut off a view of Laos, which lies immediately behind, almost so close that I felt I could call across and talk to my good friends who live in Thakhek or Savannakhet, in Laos.

The minister went up for our meeting of all the Vietnamese agricultural people who are in charge of that part of the country. They asked me to give a speech, which I did, in French. I believed I talked of what we have learned in the last twenty years about the importance of agriculture in economic development. It was a great pleasure to have many people come up at the big reception following that evening, and have them tell me how much they enjoyed my speech and how stimulating and inspiring it had been, and how it opened up new vistas for them in what they could accomplish. One said he thought I must have been French, because my accent was perfect. Of course, this swelled up my head to a rather grotesque size, and I must say, I enjoyed meeting all the Vietnamese. The officials are mostly young, and all have been graduated from the Agricultural School, which was started and developed by USAID [United States Agency for International Development] in 1957. The officials are eager, interested, and very devoted to their jobs, and it really warmed my old cynical heart to hear them tell of what they hope to accomplish."

So that's a long discussion, both of history and of that trip. What I guess I would add to it was how pleased it made me to see this kind of inspiration in the Vietnamese. I had to deal a lot with cynical Vietnamese in Saigon, and to see these young people, who were clearly imbued with their work and what was going to happen up there, was a delight for me.

Breiset: I think you should share with us, the nice encomium you received on the speech.

Wehrle: I got back, and Doris in the office said, "I just got this back in from up in Huế, and it's a report received from the province rep, Clyburn, up in Da Nang, and the quote is, 'In a follow-up critique of the program by Roy Wehrle, it was revealed that Wehrle was a sensation. People are eagerly awaiting his return visit.'" And then my cynical secretary added, "What did you promise them, the moon?" (laughs)

Breisetsh: Parenthetically, you probably can't answer this specifically, do you have any idea what happened to those eager young Vietnamese? Did they get out and come to America? Did they stay and become part of the communist regime after?

Wehrle: I have no idea, but I speculate that a number of them were conscripted into the army.

Breisetsh: That's the ARVN.

Wehrle: ARVN. And many of the agricultural officials complained to other American officials that they train these people, and then you, the Americans, want all this work done, and then the Army takes them away. It was not a government that coordinated between these two things like that. So, I suspect, that that's probably what happened. Some of them may have quit to get higher pay working for the Americans. A continual problem that we had all the way through is that the GVN paid their people almost nothing. You could not really survive with a family on the living that they were paid, and we didn't want them to increase their budget. So, it was a conflictual situation, and they almost had to do some kind of corruption. These people that I was talking to, they were single, so they could make it, and they were pretty idealistic people. You could just tell by— I was talking a lot about the new rice developments coming out of the Philippines Rice Institute and these were wonderful breakthroughs in those years. The green revolution, which everybody knows about now, that was just happening, and it was kind of like a miracle really. So, I was talking a lot about that and the part that it played. These people really caught into it. They invited me back up in another year, and I went back and gave another talk up there. And the one person who was talking about my French back there said, "Well, you fooled me for about five minutes." And I thought wow, if I can fool for five minutes, that's pretty good.

Breisetsh: In French. *C'est superbe*.

Wehrle: Superb. So, that was a great trip up there, and I want to add an addendum onto it, which is not nice at all. That is that one of the great battles in Vietnam took place in Huế the next year. I was going up with the Minister of Economy that time to work on refugees, and I got to see Huế after the battle. I have to tell you, it was one of the saddest sights I've ever seen in my life. The temples were all upturned. It was destroyed, and weeds were growing all over the place, where the battle had taken place, destruction everywhere. I assume by now, that that's all restored, and it's in good shape. I believe that's probably true, but when I went up there, the ravages of war just hit you right smack in the face, and how many people died in that whole area. I thought back on the placid view of the Perfume River, when I had been up there, and how beautiful it was. It was just an absolutely beautiful sight. I guess the word tranquility would be exactly the right word for it. Then what I saw later, what a contrast.

Breisetsh: Well, while we're thinking of trips and both your trips to Huế, you also made some trips to Washington. You've just given us your sense of young South Vietnamese, idealistic,

with whom you really bonded. Tell us your response to Dupont Circle on your return in the spring of 1965, to Washington.

Wehrle: Well, there would be two things, I guess, I would think about when you ask me that question. The first would be my reaction to getting back. I'd been in Southeast Asia now for, I don't know, five years, something like that. I'd been back for a while, but the period of the sixties escaped JoAnn and myself because we were overseas during that period. That was a transformative period in American history. So, I knew very little about that. We were concentrating on what we were doing over in Vietnam.

I arrive back, and I generally stayed at the Dupont Hotel, which I liked, up on Dupont Circle. I got there, and I went there, and I was in shock again. Maybe I shocked easily by this time, but here were these young people, but they looked different. They looked like they were almost a different group. They had this long hair, and they were dressed very funny. They were dressed in old, cutoff jeans, and all kinds of colored blouses. They were perfectly peaceful. They were kind of lolling around Dupont Circle. Dupont Circle, I always thought, was just a regular park. It was a proper place. What was going on, I didn't know, but that was my first introduction to the hippies of the 1960s. They were the flower children, I guess, at that time, and they were probably very opposed to the Vietnam War. It was a shock to me. It was obvious, you know, something was going on in the United States. I didn't know what it was, but I could tell something was really going on.

Well, I was back with Max Taylor for the visit, and we'd come back on one of those fancy jets. I had a lot of meetings scheduled at Foggy Bottom—Foggy Bottom is the term used for the State Department—that day. I was walking down the street toward the State Department, when I heard a honking. I'll just tell you about that day because it turned out to be, for me, a quite remarkable day.

The honking was Art Okun, who was the head of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, and who had been one of my three thesis advisers up at Yale. Jim Tobin was, as I said, the head of it. But the second guy was Art Okun. Now, Art Okun was, at this point, head of the Council of Economic Advisers, which Walter Heller had been on earlier. Art Okun was an extraordinary economist. The fact that I had an association with Art and Jim Tobin on my thesis was a blessing which, you know, I never merited. It was just a marvelous experience, both very, very bright, and Art was very, very quick. We had to work together a lot, Art and myself, on that thesis, and those theses were major theses. Mine was turned into a book later on. I mean, they were a major piece of work.

So Art happened to see me, which is really something, walking down the street, and he pulls over. He says, "Get in, Roy." He took me then, down to his office in the Council of Economic Advisers, up in the Executive Office Building, which lies right next to the White House, to see some people there that I still knew from the council when I'd been there, but mostly just to chat in his office. Then he called Kermit Gordon and said, "Kermit,

look who's here." Kermit Gordon had been the other member of the Council of Economic Advisers when I was there, and now he was head of the Budget Office. He later became head of the Brookings Institution.

So, I'll add to that, but I want to just read from the letter that I wrote to JoAnn back in Bangkok, from Washington, on Dupont Plaza stationery, about this quite remarkable day. It says, "Well, I am sure full of news, being here in Washington. Had an excellent day; couldn't have been better. It went something like this. Two fresh eggs, *New York Times*, walk to work, water being squirted into the reflective basin at Washington Park, and managed only seconds from bursting into bloom. Walked past such and such a building and then heard a horn honking and saw Art Okun waving me over. Got in with him and rode out to the council, and saw many old friends, mostly secretaries. Had a good talk with Art. Dropped in to see my friend who was Ken Hansen's secretary. Said hello to Bill Capron, and dropped over to see Kermit Gordon, and then went over to the State Department."

So, I'll continue it. That's the end of the quote. When I was talking to Kermit Gordon, he said, "Well, we'll get you in to see Walter Lippmann because he's really against the war. Well, that did not happen, but I went on over to the State Department to start my day over there. I thought, first I'll drop in on Averill Harriman, because he was in some sense my boss in the State Department. He let me in right away, and we had a nice chat. And, of course, he wanted to know what's going on in Vietnam.

Then, I went over to see Bill Komer. I just wanted to see Komer in the White House. When I was talking earlier to one of the others, they said, "You should see Bill Moyers." So, they arranged for me to see Bill Moyers the next day. Then, I went back to big meetings at the State Department, briefings and that sort of thing. At the end of the day, my head was swimming from all the different people I had met and .talked to and what I'd seen and all the questions that they peppered me with all day long.

So, I did go over to see Bill Moyers the next day, and he was very concerned about the refugee program. He was concerned about the fact that we're driving all these people out of the countryside. I told him that his concern was valid, that this was not the right way to win the hearts and minds of the people, that our program was contradictory. We were, at one point, trying to make a social revolution in the countryside, based on economic improvement, and at the same time, we were having free artillery zones and driving people out and driving these people homeless, into the city, which was an alien environment to them, and where they were cut off from their ancestors land, which in Vietnam is precious, to say the least, and that this contradiction in the program was going on. Well, he was aware of all that.

Breisetsh: Construction versus destruction.

Wehrle: Construction versus—well, that's a good way to put it. We were destroying, at the same point we were trying to construct. Moyers said that he had talked to the president about this, but the president said he had to go with the military, which is, I guess, one way of solving this problem, by avoiding it.

Breiseth: I read that later, after you left Vietnam, McNamara gave a speech, I think up in Michigan, that Moyers wrote, that reflected some of the very concerns you just identified.

Wehrle: Oh, really?

Breiseth: And Johnson was furious, and that began part of the erosion of confidence between Johnson and McNamara.

Wehrle: And Moyers wrote the speech?

Breiseth: Moyers reflected in it, I think it's in Halberstam's book, regretted that he pushed the speech on McNamara. But it was Moyers's belief.

Wehrle: Yeah, yeah.

Breiseth: Which McNamara was ready to articulate.

Wehrle: That's interesting. That's an interesting dilemma and contradiction.

Breiseth: What else did you pick up in these conversations in Washington about where they saw the war, or they feared the war, was going.

Wehrle: Generally, Washington's view was that they were skeptical. They were all in back of it, of course, because that was their thing. They were all in favor. They wanted to hear from myself or anybody else a positive view. They listened respectfully when you told them about some things like I had just mentioned. But their hope overall was the same as Westmoreland's, that if we got enough troops in, we would be able to squash the North Vietnamese main forces, and then the country would be all right. They were simply not aware of the weakness of the GVN or the political fragility of having military people try to run a revolutionary government which was not a revolutionary government.

Breiseth: But that's a point that you were making to them.

Wehrle: That's the point we were making, but it kind of washed off because, as you well know, the primary world view always washes off the subsidiary world views that are conflicting with it. So, their world view was what they had been told. And they believed that up to the—close to the end. McNamara believed that.

Breiseth: Was it a good thing you didn't have a meeting with Lippmann, Walter Lippmann?

Wehrle: Probably, because he would have bashed me to pieces. I know he would have.

Breiseth: Or, conveyed your point of view in a highly visible article.

Wehrle: No, he would not have. Lippmann viewed this as like the Afghan wars of the British against the Afghans, and the overextension of empire. He saw it within that broad vein, and he would have just said to me, "Roy, you're a young kid, you just don't understand this." And in many ways, he would have been right. In many ways, he would have been right because my whole heart was in this thing when I went over. I really believed all this, though I don't believe it now. I think the best one can say is that we bought some time and that that may have prevented further erosion of Southeast Asia. But notice, I said maybe overrun. I'm not at all sure that would have happened. And, even if that's the case, the loss of American lives and wealth did not merit what was going on.

Breiseth: Let's take you back to Saigon and what were critical relationships for you with Jim Killen, who was the AID director, and, therefore, one of your two bosses. A guy you respected tremendously, but with whom you had increasing divergence of opinion about what was needed in the countryside in Vietnam. Jim Killen.

Wehrle: Well, we talked quite a bit about him before, and I won't repeat that. But I will say what I said before, that he was a towering figure. He was a towering figure in his confidence in himself, because of the background in Korea that he came out of. But he was in an alien environment. He was not in his home turf. He wasn't a lumberjack any more. He wasn't arguing for his labor union against really rough odds, against tough corporations, which he probably did in a masterful fashion. He was in Vietnam, in a war in which the stakes were very, very high, but our ability to leverage the GVN Government was not very high. They were not very high because we had pretty well taken over the war. We were running it, and that cuts your leverage way, way, way, way down. That's an important point. He did not really understand the culture the way he did understand the culture, I think, in Korea. I think he judged that right, and in my view, he's an American hero for what he did up there. I think the Korean people, to this day, it's now the eleventh largest GNP in the world. The eleventh largest economy in the world, and it came out of almost nothing, I mean, it was just as poor as Ghana was in 1947, just as poor. And look where it is now, and look where Ghana is. But he also did not understand, I think, and this is maybe overstating it on my part, but I really don't think he understood the countryside. I don't think he understood the importance of dealing with corruption out in the countryside.

The short story that I'll tell here is that back in '63, '64, a lot of this was connected to Rufus Phillips, who as I said, was close adviser and assistant to Lodge during his first ambassadorship, and was heavily involved in the Strategic Hamlet problems, and was pretty close to Diem. He was a big wheel in other words. They had tried to deal with corruption, and so they came up with the following plan. They said in every province of Vietnam, of which there are many, there will be an American rep, which we call prov

reps, which I mentioned before. And there will be a MACV rep. And there will be a province chief that is part of the hierarchy of government, of the Vietnamese government. So they said well, okay, if these three people come together on something and they all sign off on it, then they will supervise all resources for that project, each will keep their eye on the other. Though they could all collude, it's less likely that that will happen. At least there will be restraints, and it may not be perfect, but it will help a lot. So, they agreed on that. So, if there's cement coming in or fertilizer coming in, or corrugated roof coming into this province for project X, Y, and Z, they will agree on how much it's going to take, and AID will provide it. They will sign off on it when it arrives, and they will sign off to whom it's given when it is distributed, all three.

The province rep, USAID, will have most accountability because it's his resources that are coming in there. So, the province rep, they decided, should be somebody who lives out in the countryside, knows the countryside, and is there all the time. So, some of these people were, like I mentioned, Frank Scotton before; some of them were IVSers. A lot of them are IVSers.

Breiset: IVS standing for?

Wehrle: That's International Voluntary Service that we talked about in Laos.

Breiset: Pre-Peace Corps.

Wehrle: It's really Peace Corps. The more you think about it, it is Peace Corps, but it's right that program was started. All these people were very idealistic people. They believed in what they were doing. They weren't there for the pay. They were there partly for the adventure and partly for their belief. So, the idea was that they would live out on the countryside, and all prov reps would not be like American officials in the sense that they get paid to have a house and servants and do representation. They would simply live on the land, so to speak. They would rent a place and get a per diem. They could eat with the military; or they could eat alone and go to the market. They would be a figure that people would see around, but they would not be ostentatious. Well, that was the plan. Whether it had time to work or not we'll never know, because James Killen, when he came in about a year before I came, he saw that as being against everything America stands for. America is a great country in the world. It's got to be represented the right way. You've got to have people out there who have health insurance, who have a house. They have servants, and they live at the style that is proper for the United States, just as if they were a French official that lived out there. This idea of roughing it by the Americans demeans everything that America stands for and demeans our president. The Asian people look up to officials. They expect that, and that's how they gain authority. The authority is in how they dress and how they live.

Breiset: MacArthur syndrome in Japan.

Wehrle: MacArthur syndrome in Japan, exactly. Jim Killen then killed it. He was director, and he could do that. They still had a province rep out there, but the signoff didn't work for a bunch of reasons. They stopped that, and they pulled a lot of the reps out. They wouldn't let IVS people be there because they said they're just young whippersnappers. They don't know anything. They can't represent the United States. And they can't be responsible for resources, which, of course, is not true at all. They can be as responsible as anybody else, maybe more so, because they're more idealistic. In any event, I'm just using that story as an example. The consequences coming out of that are quite significant. The Americans were part of the landscape, but they didn't stand out like a skyscraper. They were just part of the landscape out there. They were working; they knew what's going on. They had insights and knew the people. They may have had a beer with a couple of Vietnamese people in the evening, and they know what was going on. There were very few walls between them and the people.

You couldn't really take the Viet Cong propaganda. The Viet Cong propaganda, of course, was that all Vietnamese officials are puppets of the Americans, and the Americans lorded over them, and the Americans were running everything. So, the less that there was a presence of the Americans in terms of visibility, the less that propaganda would stick with the people, because the people would say, "Wait a minute, I know this guy, Chris Jones, over there. He's not the..." The province chief is not a puppet of his. I can tell you that right off the bat. Anyhow, that side of it was washed away, and that part of our program was pretty well lost.

Now, I talked about Killen before, and I lauded him for the fact that he saw the fatal flaw in the—if I can call it that, in the American approach: that the Vietnamese really were not pulling up their socks and doing their work and fighting their war. He wanted us to have a rice program that would do that.

Breisetsh: Want to take a pause for a minute.

(pause in recording)

Breisetsh: Roy, we were talking about Jim Killen, and we took a pause. Do you want to pick up the story? We were talking about some of the divergence between your view of what should be happening in the countryside and the United States activities and what your boss, Jim Killen, had.

Wehrle: Right. I just mentioned a little bit about the countryside, and I was saying that he saw—and I say I lauded him for that. He saw the fatal flaw in the fact that we were not really able to behave as Americans, in such a way that the Vietnamese would feel responsible for the war. I call it the fatal flaw, it's so fundamental to what was going on over there. And it used to drive a lot of us a little bit batty because we talk about all these other things, all this, how much that, how much this, but we never talked about that. Well, that's fundamental to everything else that we talked about.

Another thing I would say about Jim Killen, and I say this in really great respect, as I have all this, is that he was really starting to lose it towards the end. I just mean he was losing contact with what was happening in Vietnam because he was abrasive. That was his background. He would talk rough with the Vietnamese. I remember one time we were in a meeting, and we were talking with the Minister of Police. The Minister of Interior and the police are within the Ministry of Interior, and, for some reason, which seems funny to us Americans, the Vietnamese police were dressed in white. They had white uniforms, and that used to just bug Jim Killen. He'd say, "They look like Mickey Mouse." I said, "Well they do to you, but the Vietnamese have had white uniforms like this for a long time." Well, much to my dismay, one time we were in a meeting, and he started letting the Minister of Interior know that they should change those uniforms. Well, the last thing Vietnam needed was different uniforms. I mean they had a lot more problems than that. The minister was, as all the Asians are, I mean, he was just very placid. And you could see in his face, "What is this?" He showed essentially no emotion, but I'm sure he thought, what are you doing, trying to tell me how we should have our police dressed.

Jim had personalized the AID mission to a large extent, brought a lot of his people in. He had a personalized style of running it. That always presented me a problem because when he'd be gone on home leave, sometimes for a month or more, I had to run the AID mission. It's hard doing that when you've got a different style, because you don't want him to come back and then say "Well, you screwed up this."

So, I think the third thing I would say about Jim is that he was increasingly out of touch. He was increasingly tired too. You could see it in his eyes. When he came back from Washington, he didn't have that zip he used to have, of we're going to do this and we're going to do it, and Roy, blah-blah-blah. So, when we had the confrontation on rice—which I've already mentioned—with Secretary McNamara, it's not surprising that he was then recalled to Washington. I think McNamara told AID that they didn't want him there. I think there were also other factors pointing to the fact that Jim seemed like a good appointment to Vietnam, but it really wasn't working out very well, not very well at all, Jim was withdrawn. My quandary was that I thought it was time for Jim to go. That's always a hard thing to say because you don't know if it's mixed up in your ego or mixed up in other stuff. It's very painful.

I then had this big pile on my inbox, that I'd been waiting for Jim to come back; things which were more in the way he wanted things done that I didn't want to jump into. It was a big pile of stuff. But on the other hand, I was happy I didn't have to do those because I had more than I could do anyhow. Then, when I found out that he wasn't coming back, I was really in distress because that whole inbox that I'd been slightly putting aside was my inbox, and I had to deal with it then as Acting Director, so that was another thing.

Breisetsh: But, there were some satisfactions in being really in charge.

Wehrle: Yes, there were. I hadn't thought about that until I read back through these letters. I've got one letter here that I will not read, but it said, you know, by jove, it's really quite something to be running an organization of three thousand Americans and six thousand Vietnamese all over this great country and to be in charge of it. It's kind of fun. Fun in the sense that can you make it work. Are you clever enough to make it work? Which means being able to work with people so that you bring the best out of them by supporting them by being a coach and being a cheerleader for them. That's part of what leadership is. Also, being able to spot where things are not working, and where they're blocking information, and you're able to cut through that and then take disciplinary action, if you have to, against somebody who's not doing the job right.

As I mentioned before, I really liked working with people. So, this was kind of supreme, working with people. I decided to have a staff meeting every morning with the key staff, which would probably be eight or ten people. It was fairly short, no pontifications, no long stuff, but boom, boom, boom, this is what we have to do; the ambassador wants this. Then, about every week or so, or two weeks, I had all the regional people come in, and we had meetings with them. I instituted new means of communication, so everybody more or less knew what was going on. Jim segmented things a lot, segmented a lot of information, so the people in RD didn't know the fact that something else was happening. It was very, very complex; so that helped a lot, doing that.

It's funny, but looking back on it, in some sense it was easier to run the mission than it was to not run it because I had to deal with Jim Killen or I had to deal with Charlie Mann, go up and listen to those long harangues, or I had to go to the Minister of the Economy and find out that Charlie Mann had told him X, and the minister wanted to know, "Was that U.S. policy?" And I said "No it wasn't." Well that's a terrible situation to be in.

Breiseth: Well, since you brought it up, you've given us at least a glimpse in the role you had to play unwittingly in Jim Killen's leaving.

Wehrle: Right.

Breiseth: What about the role that you played in Charlie Mann's leaving? What were some of the issues that the two of you disagreed on that led to his transfer?

Wehrle: Charlie Mann, we didn't come into any big policy disputes. We had disputes about who should be carrying U.S. policy to the GVN government, but that was taken care of by Lodge. That was solved, and that was over and that was gone. Then Charlie Mann got a deputy, and he kept asking me over and over—and I'd forgotten about that until I read the letters—to be his deputy because I was assistant director for program. I thought about it a little bit, and then I thought that would be a real problem because then I am completely under his control. So, I had enough sense not to take that job. Then the deputy came in, and Charlie Mann simply excluded him from everything. He was a pretty good guy. I liked working with him, but Charlie kept him out of everything. So, he

was just useless. Charlie was really, in some respects, really hurting himself. And he hurt himself back in Honolulu, so it wasn't to do with me, I think, that he was relieved out there. We had no great big disputes about anything. I think we pretty much agreed on it, but he was not really involved in a lot of that stuff. I was working on with Habib, and I was working with the military on the ports and things like that, that normally he would be involved in. In a sense, those pieces of the AID mission were broken off, that related to economics. And I was running those, so he didn't have much to do with it.

Breiseth: At this point, just kind of review the bidding. Of the things you described, what fit under your economic counselor role to the ambassador, and what fit under your role with AID?

Wehrle: In one sense, that's very easy to answer; in another sense, it's not very easy to answer. As economic counselor, I was responsible for economic policy toward the Vietnamese government, but, in fact, AID and our aid program was also economic policy to the government. So, which was which? That's, of course, why the White House wanted them put together. So, in a sense, the dollar parts that I was bringing in, those were all under AID, and they had the AID signature. AID had to sign off for the dollars and all that kind of stuff. But the policy itself and how much taxes we should ask them to bring in, all that, that was all really related to the ambassador and to the economic policy side, because that was policy, economic policy. To separate economic policy from aid or development policy, as I said earlier, was a fool's errand, because it was all inter-related.

Then you have the whole slew of AID programs, which are technical assistance and agricultural assistance and building schools and dispensaries and hospitals. Those were all under AID, and those were under my office to plan the programs. But execution of the plans were under Charlie Mann. That worked all right.

Breiseth: We haven't really focused directly on the issue of construction.

Wehrle: That's true.

Breiseth: Let's do that. It brings together a lot of the elements we've been talking about. You talked at one point that the amount of aid we were bringing in was in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and part of that is for basic infrastructure construction and construction related to the U.S. military presence. How did all that work, and what were your real de facto responsibilities for all this?

Wehrle: Well, that's a fascinating subject; it really is. It worked, and it didn't work. We'll look at both sides of the thing. You start with the fact that the pressure on the Vietnamese economy, as I keep talking about, was pretty incredible already. I've talked about the manpower problems caused by AID programs; everybody wanted the manpower. Some weren't paid enough; who gets the manpower? Major construction makes everything all the more difficult, because the Vietnamese have to build all these things; That puts a lot of strain on the economy as it increases purchasing power because you're going to

have to pay those people. They're going to spend the money. Their living standard is going to go up, but who's going to supply the goods? If this were a normal economy, well, you have factories going to work. You have people start producing things; and they start exporting. That's not Vietnam. This was war. So, the impact on the economy is going to be very high on the financial side, the purchasing power side, and we've talked about that.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the extent of it, but I'd like to read first a short paragraph that I wrote to my mother and father about just this aspect of construction and kind of what that meant for me. I'll quote starting right now from this letter that was written about the twenty-fourth of April, 1966. "I worked all day in the last several days on an economic analysis of the impact of the \$500 million U.S. military construction program..." I'm now interrupting. So that's \$500 million; that's a half of \$1 billion. That was a long time ago, so it was a very big number. "...construction program on the economy of Vietnam. This is an immense program, and we have done a three-month study of its effects..." We means our economic staff. "... and are coming up with recommendations. Took a two-hour off at lunch for a nice swim at the Cirques Sportif. This makes a wonderful break to the day. I'm getting in better and better physical shape, and this makes me feel better and have less headaches." Blah-blah-blah. That's enough of that. That's really the key point I wanted to make was about the \$500 million.

Now, you talk about \$500 million. You say, what is that for? What are we building stuff over there for? Well, we're building stuff in support of the war effort, for our five hundred thousand troops that we have over there. Well, what are we building and why do we have to build so much? This takes us back to a basic policy of MACV and of the Defense Department, that nothing is too good for our troops in Vietnam. If we ask them to go over there and risk their lives for the American people, then at least they should have as good a standard of living as they can while they're over there. This was a policy determination that was made at the highest level.

Number two. Westmoreland was very keen on having a great amount of air support. I think if you were to question him, he would have said that's what is going to really make the difference, the reason there will be no Dien Bien Phu—and Dien Bien Phu was the battle that broke the back of the French—when the French garrison in this area of Dien Bien Phu was surrounded by the Viet Minh forces and then capitulated. The reason Westmoreland said that will never happen, and he made these statements, was because of our Air Force, our air support. We'll always be able to come in with air support. We can always re-supply with our air support. We can drive the enemy away, whether it's B-52s or whether it's rocket attacks or Gatling guns or whatever it might be. So, you have to build a lot of airfields, and you have to have a lot of diesel for electricity, and you have to have fuel for the jets. You have to have a lot of stuff.

So, if you put these three things together, you've got to supply the ground forces with their resources, which includes ammo and all kinds of stuff. You've got to build the

tactical fields for the Air Force to operate out of, and you have to give them an American style of living, in a primitive country. Then, it follows from that, that you have to do a lot of construction. Well, let's look at what some of the construction was, and I think this is important to give us a sense of what I called an immense construction program.

This comes from the book I mentioned earlier, *A Bright Shining Lie* by Neil Sheehan. It's on page...I think I've got the page number here. Page 621 through page 625 in Neil Sheehan's book that I just mentioned. I won't mention all of the things, but over these pages I extracted some of the key pieces, and it will give you a little sense of it. They had to build four new jet air bases to add to the three they had at Tan Son Nhut. They had to build six new deepwater ports, with twenty-eight deep draft unloading berths for freighters. They had to build four central supply and maintenance depots, twenty-six permanent base camps, seventy-five new tactical airfields long enough and big enough to handle C-130 Hercules Transports. He had nineteen, but he built seventy-five more tactical airfields, twenty-six hospitals with 8,280 beds, two-story prefabricated headquarters for himself and many for the other four thousand people in headquarters. Two hundred and twenty communication facilities, hundred and four million square feet of warehouse, 5.4 million square feet of ammunition storage, tank farm capacity to hold 3.1 million square feet of ammunition storage and the equivalent amount of barrels of POL, thirty-nine million cubic meters of dredging, two thousand to three thousand miles of new hardtop road, four hundred and thirty-four thousand acres of land clearing.

And for the amenities of the troop, they built three dairies to do recombined milk, and to assure they had enough ice cream, they build forty small ice cream plants around the country. Hot food was flown out to some of the bases, and it was insulated by containers in helicopters. The power supply was completely overrun, and the Army tried to bring in mobile generators, but in the end, had to buy commercial generators, one thousand three hundred commercial generators in Japan and the United States, and ship those over. They also had to have floating ships taken from the Marine reserve, which were turned into floating generators on barges. And then I'll quote here. "The amenities were completed by constructing an additional air conditioned world of PXs, movie theaters, bowling alleys and service clubs, generously supplied with soft drinks, beer, whisky and plenty of ice cubes to keep the drinks cold. Milkshakes, hamburgers, hot dogs, steaks, all at giveaway prices. The PXs were also emporia for every electronic device, music players, watches and all the gifts that the men would give to their Vietnamese women. It was difficult to keep hairspray in stock because the Vietnamese women loved the hairspray."

Now, in reading that, you could see that I was a little bit disparaging all this. Why should I do that; who am I to do that? I didn't risk my life to fight out in the fields. The reason I do is because it put an enormous burden on the U.S. taxpayer in a situation which the soldiers were there for one year. This is a value judgment that I make, but I think that they did not have to have an American standard of living for one year that they were there. A lot of the time they were out in the field, but the staff that was safe back in the

headquarters could have lived in a manner that was not quite as ostentatious as this was. And the Vietnamese were aware of that. We were living like kings over there, and the PX system put all kinds of goods on the market. The military argued, "Well, Roy be happy. They put those goods on; then you don't have to bring them in yourself." It certainly made a very bad display, I think, of almost a flaunting of wealth on the Vietnamese. Often you had the rich Americans living right next to slums on the Vietnamese side.

So, the end of this little talk about construction is that we had on the economic staff three excellent foreign service officers: John Holmes, Earlan Hegginbottom and John Bennett. They and their staff had to do all kinds of analysis to try to figure out what was the real economic impact. That was very complicated, and it got into a lot of pretty high, fancy economics.

Breiseth: Maybe this is a good place to have you talk about the inflation problem and some of the things that you personally recommended doing, and that got done, that had an impact on the whole economy of the country.

Wehrle: Well, as we mentioned, part of our negotiations had to do with the rice program. I introduced that before. That's where Jim and I had the big difference. In the end, we brought in enough rice so that the price was pretty well kept where we wanted to keep it. We had inflation of about 35 percent one year and about 40 percent the next year. These were big, but the main thing is that they were not out of control, and they didn't go into hyperinflation, which could easily have happened in this situation we were in. So, in the rice situation, we set the price high enough that it encouraged the paddy farmers to ship their harvest to Saigon. (Paddy is the form of rice coming out of the field in the delta and other places.) We did get a lot of that rice in because we kept the price high enough. But we didn't let it go any higher than that because we brought enough in from Thailand and other places to have stockpiles, and we could control the price. As long as we had enough warehousing of rice, we could release that. If the price went too high, we could bring it back down. And if the price was getting too low, we could withdraw any imported rice coming on. That would drive the price up. So, that part was all pretty successful and not too complicated in doing. I don't know if that gets at what you're talking about.

Breiseth: In those kinds of interactions, what are you doing with the Economic Minister of the South Vietnamese government, and what are you doing with our own government? What role do you play between those two governments?

Wehrle: Well, that was part of our negotiations, of course. I would bring them in immediately, into what price do you think it takes. They really didn't know. They would talk to the Chinese merchants. The Chinese merchants controlled the rice, period, in South Vietnam. The rice merchants would always tell them what was good for the Chinese rice merchants, and the Chinese were very shrewd merchants. They were tied in with French

merchants and that whole side. I'll come back to that, but that reminds me of one thing that I was thinking of when we talked the other day. That is the extent of the French businessmen still in South Vietnam.

When I came into South Vietnam, I knew it had been a French colony. I knew all this. I'd been to Laos; that had been a French colony. But, I didn't see any evidence of French, except for the banks and my friend, Allain Felix. The signs of French business were not very visible. But, I kind of wondered in terms of being an economic counselor for American business there, what's really going on. One time, Allain Felix asked me to come to a get-together that the French business community was having. I thought oh, that's great, now I'll see what's going on. He introduced me. I walked in, and there must have been thirty businessmen in there. The smoke was as thick—you couldn't even see the other side of the room, and drinks all over the place. These people are all standing up talking, like a reception, and I did not recognize one person in that room. And I knew my way around Vietnam pretty well. I mean I knew a lot of Chinese merchants; I knew the shipping. I mean I knew a lot of people, but I did not recognize one person. Then I realized, that's the subterranean economy of Vietnam. They've still got their fingers in it because of the fact of their colonial access. They're still tied in with the Chinese merchants, and they're controlling an awful lot of what's going on.

Breiset: When you use the word mafia, dealing with the shipping, port issues, who were these people ethnically?

Wehrle: Mostly Chinese.

Breiset: Chinese.

Wehrle: Most entirely Chinese, almost entirely Chinese. These French businessmen and the Chinese were just in thick with each other. They were tied, of course, in with the Vietnamese in the same way they had been during the colonial period. They were the sycophants of the French.

Breiset: Did you make any presentation to this group?

Wehrle: No.

Breiset: Or you were just meeting them over cocktails?

Wehrle: I just went around shaking hands, and I met as many as I could because I wanted to see all the different businesses they were in. Some were in tobacco; some were in rice.

Breiset: At a thing like this, did you ask for their business cards?

Wehrle: Yeah, I probably did; yeah, I probably did.

Breiseth: And spoke to them in French.

Wehrle: Yeah, it was all French.

Breiseth: Did they seem impressed, interested?

Wehrle: Oh, no, not—no.

Breiseth: That an American was—your job was dealing with them in French?

Wehrle: I was just there. No, I don't think so. They were kind of impressed that I was a friend of Allain Felix, and that gave me some headway. But mostly they were just doing their thing, and I was just an interloper who was coming in. And, of course, they hand out business cards because that's what business people do, you know?

Breiseth: Sure.

Wehrle: Oh, yes, *merci bien*, blah-blah-blah. And I'd say, *merci*, blah-blah-blah-blah, and go on with it.

Breiseth: Were these good years for those French businessmen?

Wehrle: Yeah, I think so. But, going back to the Vietnamese question you asked me, I would go over it with the Minister of Economy and the Minister of Agriculture, what were good price targets. First of all, you had to convince them that we should control the market. Well, that was alien to their view, even though it was controlled all the time by these business groups that I've mentioned.

Breiseth: Forces.

Wehrle: Yeah, other forces. Then, once you've gotten over that, which wasn't too hard to do because they tended to think not in free market, so you were just kind of talking their lingo a little bit.

Then, you had to go on to the question, well, what should the paddy price be? And they really didn't have a clue. Even the Agricultural Minister didn't have a clue. We had the cost of fertilizer; we had worked it out as much as we could, and we were not very confident of it. But we set a paddy price at, I think, fifty-five piastres per kilo, or something like that. Then we'd have a price of maybe eighty piastres up in Saigon, and that would allow for the distribution difference enough to pull it up into Saigon. Then we worked with the Economy Minister, and then once we did that, and he agreed with those things. Then we just kind of carried it out. He would work with us, and there were Vietnamese warehouses.

Breiseth: What was your enforcement mechanism?

Wehrle: Releasing rice. Oh, you mean if they cheated on it?

Breiseth: In terms of price; in terms of the price.

Wehrle: The enforcement mechanism is that we control the reserve supply, which we brought in from Bangkok. We had absolute control of the market. We were very worried about theft and other things, but we did not have trouble on that. We made it clear that could not happen. We couldn't allow that, and there couldn't be any riots.

Breiseth: Is that the only food stuff that you involved yourself in?

Wehrle: Yes, only food stuff. That was really hard to accept because this had been a food surplus country. So, a lot of people, like Jim Killen, they just couldn't stomach that. That was just a step too far. But, we also brought in enormous amounts of cement. We had crises in cement because that was used in all this construction I mentioned. And we brought in enormous amounts of fertilizer. Always, we had trouble in all those, in terms of it getting the supply chain to work down to the end user. The rice supply chain was a different thing because the rice was coming into Saigon. They had no reason to let theft take place because they're going to get a good price in Saigon. So, we had the market on our side. But, when the fertilizer was going out and it was subsidized, then it was remunerative to steal the fertilizer and then go sell it. We had a lot of trouble with that in terms of keeping it. We did a lot of steps to try to stop it, but it was not stoppable completely.

Breiseth: Is there anything else to say about the coastal shipping areas, that you haven't talked about?

Wehrle: Well, I'm glad you mentioned that, but I can say that pretty quickly. You could see that what we'd been worried about is the supply chain of imports coming into the country to mop up excess purchasing power. Most of that all came into Saigon. So then, you have the subsequent problem: how do you distribute that to the other parts of the country? Delta, it's not too hard. You put them on trucks, and they go down there. Those roads are pretty much open, except when you get way out. The roads going up to the central highlands and up to Da Nang, a lot of those roads were cut and you couldn't use them, and anyhow, it was an enormous amount of goods. So, we needed the coastal shipping, and then Jim and I had differences on that too. He said they should solve it; they should go out and get their stuff. It wasn't going to happen, and in the end, we had meetings with McNamara, and again he said, "Go for it."

I think we leased about three coastal ships from Korea or someplace. That worked fine; there was no problem. You just had to get to the point where you realize that it's not business as usual. You've got to think outside the box, and just do it, that's all.

Breiseth: In terms of the Americanization of Vietnam in this period, you were a pretty important instrument.

- Wehrle: We were a bad boy in that sense, we really were.
- Breiseth: I'm not using it in the negative, but just the factual taking over of significant parts of the Vietnamese government and society and economy.
- Wehrle: Absolutely.
- Breiseth: You were a player.
- Wehrle: If Americanization was bad for that economy, I mean bad for the political side of that economy, which it was I think, we were largely responsible for it. And that brings back Jim Killen saying, "You know, you can't let it go this way." Well, that's the way it went.
- Breiseth: Right.
- Wehrle: We can't win the war with the main forces, but that's what we stayed with, and that's the way it was.
- Breiseth: You wanted to talk a little bit about the ambassador from Italy, d'Orlandi, and maybe that's a good segue right now. The other topics I want to get into are the congressional visitors that you were managing.
- Wehrle: Well, let's talk about d'Orlandi. As you can tell by my kind of tone of voice, there are certain people that I have a lot of esteem for. Jerry Hickey was one that we talked about this morning. I was thinking back about that over lunch. Jerry Hickey wrote a second book which is called, *Window on the War*. He wrote that when he came back in the United States, as kind of a reflection on it. There's two ways you might be interested in that book. One is if you like to eat. Jerry Hickey loved to eat, and he understood cuisine. In the book, he talks about different restaurants in Vietnam that he went to, and I must say, it's mouthwatering to read his love of that food that he had. But, the point of the *Window on the War* is that he makes very clear the problem of not understanding pacification. When we get on to talking about the military later on, you'll see that his view of support for the Montagnards was really what General Krulak, the fine Marine General, came to understand later on and what John Vann advocated. So, you'll see how that fits into all this.
- Now, to jump to d'Orlandi, and his name is a small d, capital O-r-l-a-n-d-i, d'Orlandi. He was the Italian Ambassador to Vietnam. Well, why would I have anything to do with the Italian Ambassador? Well, I had to do with him because Mike Forrestal told me, before I left Washington, he said, "Be sure and look up d'Orlandi. He's a good friend of mine, and he and I think his father were major parts of the anti-communist resistance in Italy during the dark days when the communists just about engulfed Italy. And we, in the American side, working, particularly CIA, worked very closely with d'Orlandi. He was a great, great, great pillar of strength." So, I went out with great respect for d'Orlandi,

having heard this, and called him up very soon after I got there. That's before my wife left. He invited myself and JoAnn over to his place.

I want to describe just a second, his apartment. It was very spacious, very, very big, and beautifully furnished. He held himself like...well, I don't know what to call it. He just was so beautifully erect as a person and spoke with such elegance, beautiful English, that I was very impressed with him. Now, he's a different kind of person than I'd ever met before. I'd never seen this kind of aristocratic European. But that's what he was, and he expressed it in everything that he did, how he bore himself, his graciousness, his politeness to JoAnn, and all that sort of stuff. Then I asked, "What's over there?" There was a big table on the one side of this spacious apartment, a big, broad table. And as you walked towards it, you saw it was all full of soldiers; these were all toy soldiers that he had arranged. He had them arrayed in an attack on Jerusalem, back in the times of Saladin. Do you remember Saladin, the great Muslim general that beat the crusaders to pieces? He's got Saladin's troops coming in against the forces of the crusaders, and they're going to whack them to pieces. It was beautifully arranged there. I'd never seen anything like that before, and we laughed and joked about it.

What I'd really like to say about d'Orlandi is that he had a different cut on the Vietnamese war. He saw it as largely a political, anti-colonial war, which is what JoAnn and I saw it as. He was very articulate on why it was so. He didn't speak with ambivalence; he spoke, boomed, "This is what it is. You Americans are missing it." He was really very rough on "you Americans". He said, "You're doing this; you're building this; you're doing that; it's got nothing to do with it." I listened very carefully to what he had to say, and I learned a lot from him because early on, I didn't know what was going on; I had no idea what was going on. So, I learned a lot from him.

I must have had maybe seven or eight dinners and luncheons with him over a year and a half, and when I left for home leave in '66, he said, "Well, I've got to go pretty soon." I said, "Don't go until I get back. I want to see you when I get back." I don't remember whether I did or not, but that was the kind of relationship that we had. Sometimes it would be lunch, sometimes it would be dinner. On the Italian Independence Day, he invited me over. JoAnn was not there then. He introduced me to a whole bunch of people. He was very good to me, and I guess that was partly because of the Forrestal connection. But, I guess all that I wanted to really say about him is how impressive a person he was.

I'm going to read, if I could, a little bit about this, what I wrote to JoAnn about him. It will kind of complement, I hope, what I said,. I'll stop when I get to duplication. "d'Orlandi is an interesting person, very Italian in his eyes and sharp cheekbones, very studied in his deliberate mannerisms and pauses, as he expands the position. Above all, he has a well-developed mind, who loves analytical argument. He invited me for dinner again next week, so he obviously believes I am a good entrée to the American group. He

is right, at least, about one thing. I'm very receptive and sympathetic to what he has to say." So that's the end of the quote, and that's the end of our discussion of d'Orlandi.

Breisetsh: Did Michael Forrestal urge you to see him as a reflection of Michael's own ambivalence about the American policies in Vietnam?

Wehrle: No, I don't think so. I think he wanted me to see him as an astute observer, who was over there, who he knew. Yeah, that's right. I don't think there was anything more than that about it in terms of d'Orlandi. I've often wondered what happened to him. Of course, I'm sure he's dead by now, because he was older than I was.

Breisetsh: Parenthetically, how much, particularly speaking to him, were you aware of and dealing with, not just you and your job, but you Americans over there, were dealing with European attitudes, particularly French attitudes towards our involvement in these years '64, '65, '66, into '67.

Wehrle: That leads me to say two things. First, is going to be not your question, but it leads me to remember that fact, and I think it was important in our time over there. When you talk about European, we're really talking about French, because that was the big influence. As I mentioned to you when we were talking privately the other day, it was very common when I arrived in Vietnam, to put down the French. That was just... You know, how people put down a group or whatever it is, and everybody agrees.

Breisetsh: Let's put down the British in India; I experienced that.

Wehrle: Okay, well everybody agrees, right? Well, that's the way it was. Someone would come up and say "Well, the French did that. Boy did they screw up on this. Boy did they screw up on that."

Breisetsh: "Damn the British" was the phrase, and I'm told it didn't work.

Wehrle: What that does is it builds you up; that's what it does. You put them down so it puts you up. I remember so often, they were talking about how the French were so dumb to get caught at Dien Bien Phu or why did they go along the *Street Without Joy*, that famous book that was written about defeat. And then everybody agreed. That bothered me right away because it was too easy. It was just too easy to say "Well, the French got it all wrong, and we're going to get it all right." It encouraged me to do a lot of reading. Bernard Fall's book, *Street Without Joy*, was one of the first things I read. It's a horrendous story of how the Viet Minh outsmarted the French and whacked up that group, just clobbered them up. I read many of them. I read the *Sociologie D'une Guerre*, the *Sociology of War*, by Paul Mus, M-u-s, which is a very famous book about that, which is very critical of the French, but nevertheless puts it in context.

I would ask JoAnn in Bangkok to write to Kramer's Bookstore in Washington, and they would send the books out to her. Then, when I went over to see her, which was ever

four to six weeks, I would get these books. I didn't have much time for reading, but any time I had, I would read those to try to get a background. I realized then that it was not so simple like that. It was much, much more complicated and that we were not necessarily going to get it right unless we really understood why the French failed, not just because they were French. That was argued, well, the French failed because they're French.

Another memory comes back to me right now, which is again, not your question. That is the French ability to talk in circles at thirty thousand feet. What I mean by that is the French have a quality, and you may know that yourself—and this is widely known, I'm not saying anything that I think isn't known. They have an ability to philosophize at a very, very high level of abstraction, which essentially ends up saying nothing. It's called *Cartesian*. They often use the term, "It's Cartesian," from Descartes' way of arguing.

Breiset: Deductive logic.

Wehrle: Deductive logic. I remember sitting in Vietnamese offices, who had been, I would say brainwashed with this kind of thought as being esoteric and very impressive, because you could show off doing this. Sitting there for an hour, maybe less than that, maybe half an hour, and listening to this Vietnamese go into one of these circulatory things, going round and round, and they are going no place. I'd listen; it was all in French, of course. I said where is he going, and when they ended, I didn't have any idea. He was very proud of himself. But I thought that kind of French schooling of the Vietnamese Mandarin class was a deleterious process. It really hurt because they simply were not willing to deal in a much more operational way. This, this, do it, you know. We were very much on this cause. Do that; do that, and philosophy is not our deck of cards. It just isn't. We suffer because we are superficial in many cases, but they suffered because they were too esoteric.

So, in terms of your question about the European influence, I'd say no, there was not a lot, except the two influences that I've mentioned, and they are European. I never thought about it before your question, but they certainly are European influences.

Breiset: We need to close this off, but one comment you made earlier today might be a fitting conclusion to this particular segment. It's the word that you've just used, somewhat negatively, and that is your own. My summary here is your philosophy and dealt with it in ways that you were very happy in Vietnam. At the same time, you also had profound discouragement. Philosophically, can you put those two contrary experiences of yours as you dealt with your responsibilities in Vietnam. Can you put it in kind of a philosophical framework?

Wehrle: I don't know if I can or not, but I can say that at the operational level, when you're dealing in operational levels, where you say you've reached an agreement on X, and it's now going to have to be implemented. You give it to staff to get it done, and then three

months later you look at it and say that's done, that's good. You get with the Vietnamese, say we were going to do that, and we've done it, that's very rewarding, very rewarding, because you had this thing you were going to deal with, you've dealt with it, it's done, you did it together. It's not us; it's **we** did it, and aren't we proud of what **we've** done? Yes, we are proud of what we've done. At the same time, underneath it all, if you are reflective and thoughtful, you're asking an entirely different set of questions, namely does all this add up to anything? Is it going anyplace? And there, over the time I got more and more discouraged because I didn't see it, and I've referred to why earlier.

First, in my letters, it shows that I did it in cycles. I'd come along and I'd be thinking well, we're getting a hold on this; it's going to work; this is going to do it, and we're going to make it. Then something would happen which would break through that and force my appreciation of that problem to change, and I have to re-reflect. Then I would become discouraged again because I would say, "Well, that's not working." Then it would go in cycles. But then, toward the end, it was pretty much always belief that we're not going to make it this way. Now you have to operate on the operational level as if everything is fine, I think, I was able to do that, although from some things you've told me, I'm not sure. At the deeper level, you're carrying this *tristesse*, the French word for sadness. It was something in you that you just can't get rid of anymore because you know American boys are going home dead, and you know the number. That's at you all the time; does this make sense? Now, you're not in charge; you're not responsible for all that, but you are somewhat of a player in that whole thing.

Breisetsh: You're part of the team.

Wehrle: You're part of the team, and what responsibility do you take for that? So philosophically, I had to hold those two things in. JoAnn could probably remember and talk about that? She knows that I had those things. And a lot of the headaches, I think, were simply related to the tension. Not necessarily between those, but just the tension of the pressure that was put on you to produce. Philosophically, I liked philosophy. I like philosophy; that's one of my loves, so I was kind of attuned to that. Not the Cartesian philosophy. I didn't like that. But the deeper, going deeper down for what the structures are that you're working on and where you're going and whether it's all going to work.

Breisetsh: It struck me, going through the summary of your letters, and this is my last foray, you were very drawn to Chekhov.

Wehrle: Yeah; it's true.

Breisetsh: You were reading Chekhov, it seemed to me, as one of your palliatives. What in Chekhov helped you deal with this, what some people would call a Kafkaesque world you were in?

Wehrle: (laughs) I'm laughing because you know, the basic answer to that question is I don't know. I can say that when I was in college my freshman English teacher in college assigned us to different writers to do our term paper, and I was assigned to do Chekhov. There it was spelled T-c-h, the old spelling of it. I had to go back to the reviews of the drama back in 1899, 1904, when those plays, *Three Sisters* and all those, were just coming into Broadway. That was fascinating for me. I didn't know anything about that stuff. I like new adventures. Well, that was really a new adventure. Later on, I found his short stories, but that's not answering your question. I had the short stories with me, and *The Lady and the Lapdog*, to me today, is still just one of the great stories of all time. But, I think what got me was it was a complete escape. I really think that's what it was, a complete escape.

Breiseth: Well, you did use the adjective Chekhovian to describe some of the experiences and some of the people that you were dealing with.

Wehrle: Yeah, I had some of those. Chekhov was a master in character description. He was a doctor, and he had a lot of experience with that people. So, I think I just took delight in those, and JoAnn liked those as much as I did. So, it gave us something to talk about back and forth in our many letters. We would talk about algebra. She hadn't had algebra, and so we played games back and forth with algebra. And I talked about where Jupiter was going in the sky.

Breiseth: I wondered why that seemed to be recurring in your letters, about dealing with Jupiter.

Wehrle: The great god, Jupiter. But those were ways that we could talk to each other and have fun and be lighthearted.

Breiseth: Well, this has been a very rewarding session. I think, when we take this up tomorrow, it may not be the opening, but a big theme. Besides dealing with your congressional friends, is to deal with your interaction with, and the impact on you, of the American military operations and what is happening with the battles and when there are great defeats and victories.

Wehrle: That will give me something to think about.

Breiseth: Give you something to think about because ultimately, as you've inferred several times, these two realms come together. They come together in a person like Westmoreland and Henry Cabot Lodge; while you're not dealing with the military problems per se, you certainly are on the construction side of things, and the increasing presence of American military has an impact on the Vietnamese economy that ultimately is very much part of your bailiwick.

Wehrle: And also on the countryside.

Breiseth: Those will be some of the big themes we take up tomorrow. So, thank you Roy, for another very rewarding session.

Wehrle: Thank you.

(end of interview session #4)