

Luther C. Heinz Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 07/27/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Luther C. Heinz
Interviewer: William W. Moss
Date of Interview: July 27, 1970
Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia
Length: 29 pages

Biographical Note

Heinz was an Admiral in the United States Navy; Regional Director for the Far East of the Office of International Security Affairs in the Department of Defense, 1960–1963; commander, cruiser-destroyer flotilla 12, 1964; and staff, CINCPAC, 1965. In this interview Heinz discusses his primary contacts in other government agencies; the Vietnam task force; the different political trips and survey missions to Vietnam; the Maxwell D. Taylor-Walt W. Rostow mission to Vietnam and subsequent report; the Ngo Dinh Diem regime; the rise in interest in the concept of counterinsurgency; problems with working in Vietnam; changing the terrain in Vietnam with the use of defoliants; the Strategic Hamlet program; how to measure success in warfare; the International Control Commission; General Paul D. Harkins; the various agency reports coming out of Vietnam and interagency meetings; the Buddhist crisis in the summer of 1963; the appointment of Henry Cabot Lodge as Ambassador; and the military coup in Saigon and the rumors leading up to it, among other issues.

Access
Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed October 12, 1976, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Luther C. Heinz, recorded interview by William W. Moss, July 27, 1970, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

of Luther C. Heinz

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, Luther C. Heinz, of Coronado, California, do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and transcript of the interview conducted at Norfolk, Virginia on July 20, 1970 and July 27, 1970 for the John F. Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. The interview is to be opened immediately to general research.
2. Researchers who have access to the transcript of the interview may listen to the tape; however, this is to be for background use only. Researchers may not cite, paraphrase or quote from the tape.
3. I retain literary property rights to the interview for ten years or until my death, whichever is the later, at which time the rights shall be assigned to the U.S. Government.
4. Researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations without my express consent in each case.
5. Copies may be provided to researchers and to other institutions, on request, for deposit in their collections.
6. This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.



Luther C. Heinz

Sept 29, 1976

Month, Day, Year



Archivist of the United States

October 12, 1976

Month, Day, Year

Second Oral History Interview

with

Vice Admiral Luther C. Heinz

July 27, 1970
Norfolk, Virginia

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Oral History Program
of the Kennedy Library

MOSS: Admiral Heinz, today I'd like to begin by asking you, who were some of the people who were, as in the common government parlance, your opposite numbers? For instance, on the National Security Council staff, who might be the man? [Michael V.] Mike Forrestal usually is credited with being the man from the Far East. Was he your primary contact?

HEINZ: Well, Mike Forrestal was one point of contact. As I recall, he was in State for a while before he went to the National Security Council staff.

MOSS: No, he was up in New York and came late to the staff.

HEINZ: I recall that I did work with him at times.

MOSS: [Robert W.] Bob Komer?

HEINZ: Bob Komer was one, [Sterling J.] Cottrell from State was also one of the people as was John Steeves.

MOSS: Yes. Yes.

HEINZ: General [Paul J.] Fontana in the Marine Corps was the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] officer with whom I worked the most.

MOSS: How about . . .

HEINZ: Roger Hilsman was in this group from I and R [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] in State.

MOSS: Right. What about the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] end, do you recall?

HEINZ: I don't recall who was most concerned in CIA. There was . . .

MOSS: Let's see who [Desmond] Des Fitzgerald?

HEINZ: You're right. Des Fitzgerald was.

MOSS: Yes.

HEINZ: He was the one most directly concerned.

MOSS: Anything in general on the way that these men grasped their jobs in the situations and so on-- just sort of general characterizations.

HEINZ: Each one was very competent, and vitally concerned with getting on with making progress in helping Vietnam. I would say that I trusted each one, and respected their points of view where we differed. Mike Forrestal was certainly a very quick-acting man, and appeared to have very sound judgment. In my estimation, I think they all had sound judgment and all made substantive contributions.

MOSS: All right. Fine. Let me ask you another question, a follow-up of last time. I remember your talking about the case of the trainers going to Laos and your saying that you didn't think that it was necessary for such high level consideration to be given to the use of them. This, of course, prompts the question of where tactics leave off and strategy policy begins. And there was a great deal of talk, at least at one time, that policy-makers were getting into tactics and tactical people were getting into policy-making. How do you view that whole hassle, with specific reference to the Southeast Asia situation?

HEINZ: In the beginning, it was a situation that our government tried to control very carefully, and in many cases very minutely. Since it was a political-military conflict, there never was or could there

have been a clear distinction between some of the military decisions and where they impinged on political factors. As I recall, the question about whether or not to use bombs from T-6's arose because of Ambassador [Winthrop G.] Win Brown's concern over the political repercussions that might occur, principally among the opposition forces in Laos. This was a case of a political decision getting into tactical play. But it was controlled very carefully from the beginning. I would say that we all recognized the political implications in the Southeast Asia conflict, and the fact that it was not possible to settle this problem by military means alone. I don't know of anyone that thought that you could achieve a purely military solution. There was a great deal of give and take on this. The fact that the government does attempt to control things so carefully came about with the advance of rapid, secure, and voluminous communications, which enabled it to undertake such control.

MOSS: All right. You can undertake such control from Washington, say, or Honolulu, but there are times when your communications don't act the way you expect them to. I think of the Gulf of Tonkin situation, for instance, in which the news arrived some hours after the event. Was there much concern with the communications question and the question of distance from the scene of the action?

HEINZ: Well, there was always a concern with communications and getting the word quickly as to what happened.

MOSS: I have one more question on this line and then we'll get into the Vietnam area, and that is: Was any systematic attempt made to find criteria or benchmarks or guidelines that people could use in distinguishing purely tactical from political or strategic questions?

HEINZ: No, I don't recall that type of question being raised, that is, saying: "This is a tactical decision and therefore Washington shouldn't get into it," or, "This is a problem that must be settled in Washington." The problems that came up could be of almost any nature and could be injected into the arena by any of the agencies.

MOSS: Okay. Fine. Now let's move on into the Vietnam area. I'd like to ask you first of all if you knew of a proposal for General [Edward G.] Lansdale to go as ambassador.

HEINZ: I heard that rumored at one time, but didn't know anything about it. I know that it never came to pass. I know that he went to Vietnam in a special capacity at one time or another. But I couldn't give you any comment on that specific proposal.

MOSS: What was his reputation generally in the Pentagon, and would the Pentagon have accepted him as an ambassador over there? I say "the Pentagon," realizing that there are many people and many ideas in the Pentagon, using it generally to cover the term "military."

HEINZ: There may have been some people who would have objected. That's purely speculation on my part. It was never really considered by the Pentagon that I know of. It may have been, but I'm not aware of it.

MOSS: Yes. What about the appointment of [Frederick E., Jr.] Nolting as ambassador? Do you remember the Pentagon reaction to this?

HEINZ: As far as I know, there was no reaction. There may have been. . . . I'm sure there was consultation, probably at the secretarial level, but as I recall, he was generally welcomed as ambassador.

MOSS: Okay. One of the first things that occurs is the setting up of the so-called Vietnam task force. [Interruption] Now, as I understand it, this was set up initially as sort of a preparation for Vice President [Lyndon B.] Johnson's trip, or was it broader than that in its scope, and did you have much to do with this?

HEINZ: I was a member of the Vietnam task force. It took various forms; it was informal at first and then became more formalized.

MOSS: Just when does it begin, really?

HEINZ: I would guess that it began about 1962 in its more formal . . .

MOSS: In its more formal stage . . .

HEINZ: . . . stage.

MOSS: Because I know that as early as March '61 there was some getting together at least.

HEINZ: But there were always meetings among the various agencies, without having a formal task force organization. But as the Vietnam situation took on more and more importance, then the task force was formed, and it then went through the throes that many of these task forces do. I think gradually it came to lose its significance as such, although there was continued coordinated effort along the Vietnam problem. As the problem became bigger, this task force was really superseded by more and more people in Washington becoming involved in the Vietnam problem.

MOSS: At what point in time would you say it began to lose its significance as an entity?

HEINZ: I would recall perhaps sometime in '63.

MOSS: Yes.

HEINZ: Perhaps later.

MOSS: It's been said that the Vietnam task force had as its organizational focus really DoD [Department of Defense] as opposed to State and the other agencies and that State, in effect, abdicated responsibility on the thing by letting the focus be concentrated so much in DoD. Do you have any comment on that, any observation?

HEINZ: Yes, I would put it this way. Secretary [Robert S.] McNamara, when he began to see the magnitude of the problem, took the position that he had under his control a multi-billion dollar budget and several million people and that therefore he had, more than any other agency, assets that could be applied in the national interest. I can recall that at one time we were trying to find regional advisers, or provincial advisers, for civic action in Vietnam. These would be in a civilian capacity. State just didn't have the people or couldn't get the people to send out there, whereas Defense could designate people and send them out. Defense had the human assets to use, and by reason of having large numbers of men on the payroll already, had the ability to undertake tasks requiring people. This may be the reason for the feeling underlying your question. In other words, where human resources were required, Defense had the

greatest preponderance of resources. Even AID [Agency for International Development] didn't have the people, or could not recruit people very quickly, if a large number of men were required to undertake a task.

MOSS: So what sort of things were being done by the Vietnam task force? Could you give an example or two on the way the thing operated? How would you come together to consider a question? Who were the participants? I know that it must have changed over time.

HEINZ: It changed over time. The problems were such things as: the forms that military assistance could take, the number of people that we could put in, the use of herbicides, the focus of effort, the strategic hamlet program, and the coordination of economic and military assistance; all these are types of problems that were undertaken by the task force.

MOSS: Yes.

HEINZ: I can't give you a specific instance. It was a continuing process.

MOSS: Did you get involved at all in setting up the trip of Vice President Johnson to Vietnam?

HEINZ: No, I didn't.

MOSS: What about the subsequent [Maxwell D.] Taylor-[Walt. W.] Rostow mission? You were on that.

HEINZ: I was on the Taylor-Rostow mission.

MOSS: October '61.

HEINZ: Yes.

MOSS: Could you describe how that was set up and just sort of narrate how it went?

HEINZ: Well, as I recall, a White House decision was made one week to send General Taylor and Walt Rostow out to make an on-site survey, as it were, of the situation. The following week, we were off to Vietnam. In the few intervening days, General Taylor and Mr. Rostow decided where they wanted representatives from. These people were all men who were already involved in the Vietnam question. We were

all designated, and away we went. During that time also, General Taylor outlined areas of questioning for each person--areas of interest that we were to look into, so that when we arrived in Vietnam, we each had a very definite plan of action as to what we would do and whom we would see. We spent most of our time, out in Saigon, talking to various people. I spent most of my time with the military assistance advisory group, and outlined where increased military assistance might be needed and could be used, and the forms that it might take. I was assisted by the army representative Brigadier General [William H.] Craig, who had an assignment similar to mine. As I recall, Ed Lansdale was on that mission, that group. I have a picture of the group at home, but I don't recall all the members at the present time.

When it was over, we went back to Baguio [Phillipines], spent two days writing up our report, and then, immediately returned to Washington. I can recall getting in after the all night flight, when we went home to clean up. About that time, somebody called me and said, "The President wants to see all the members." So we all went down to the White House to meet the President and to receive his thanks for the mission.

MOSS: It was simply a formal meeting for him to thank you, and there was no briefing or anything else?

HEINZ: Yes. As I recall, there was a very brief outline of what happened by General Taylor and Mr. Rostow.

MOSS: Do you recall what your impressions were of Saigon and the Vietnam situation at that time, what sort of things you came away with?

HEINZ: It was rather a busy place. We did not have a large number of advisers in Vietnam at that time. We were living generally within the initial agreement that we would not do more than replace the French who'd left. As I recall, we had some seven or eight hundred people in Vietnam. One of the big problems was whether or not to increase our advisers so as to go down to the battalion level. I think the mission recommended that we should. The question came up as to whether or not our advisers could accompany or should accompany Vietnamese units into the field. We made a recommendation that they should. Also the question came up of possibly providing engineer units--small units--to assist

the Vietnamese in construction. However, as I recall, the total strength that we came up with was only an increase of about two thousand. But at that time, Vietnam was just recovering from a rather large flood in the Mekong Delta area, and the Vietnamese had been requesting assistance from us to repair flood damage. Eventually, as I recall, General Taylor recommended sending in, I think, up to about six or eight thousand additional people into Vietnam.

MOSS: Do you remember having any reservations about the Taylor-Rostow report yourself, as it finally went to the President?

HEINZ: I don't recall reservations at the time because the emphasis then was strictly one of assisting the Vietnamese. It did not involve us getting involved in active conflict. It did involve additional installations for the Vietnamese. It laid emphasis upon the political nature, the fact that U.S. efforts had to be across the board and not just in the military line. It laid out additional economic problems and possible courses of action. Perhaps one question that I had always had was how we could get the resources, the human resources, to provide aid in the civilian field, because we felt this had to be done in order for them to attain a viable political organization in Vietnam.

MOSS: Do you recall any reservations about the nature and character of the [Ngo Dinh] Diem regime at that point?

HEINZ: No, I don't. At that point, we all felt that Diem was doing a good job and moving ahead.

MOSS: Yes.

HEINZ: That/^{he} had not yet established a really strong, popular base of support is perhaps the only reservation we had.

MOSS: Yes. About this time, Chester Bowles and [Prince Norodom] Sihanouk both. . . . I guess Sihanouk came out with it and then Bowles pushed the idea of an enlarged neutral zone based on the general Laos situation, and to include Thailand and Cambodia and South Vietnam, perhaps not Thailand but at least Cambodia and South Vietnam. And, I remember last week you said you didn't remember anything of this sort.

HEINZ: No, I don't remember this proposal.

MOSS: Let me go on then, to the whole question of political-military counter insurgency and so on. About this time, there's a rise in interest in the whole concept of counterinsurgency. You get Maxwell Taylor coming on strong with it with it, with the guerrilla warfare business. I remember going to a meeting of the American Political Science Association and we were in the book display area; we were practically knee-high in books on guerrilla warfare at that time. It was a very popular and faddy kind of thing. How much did this really take hold as sort of a panacea? How much were people dazzled by it, into thinking that it would produce more than in fact it did?

HEINZ: I don't think that it was looked upon as a panacea. I think it was the general opinion that the best way to combat the existing aggression was through counterinsurgency action. Now, this is where Sir (Robert K.G.) Thompson, the British man who was in Saigon acting as an adviser, to the Vietnamese government, came in very strong on the actions that needed to be taken in the counter-insurgency line. He generally took the position that we, that is the U.S., tended to rely too much on purely military means, rather than on the broader political-military means. Certainly we were looking at this situation as if counter-insurgency was a broad spectrum of getting the people themselves, and not just their military forces, involved in countering the growing insurgency.

MOSS: All right. What sort of problems were you running into in the context of Vietnam on this kind of thing?

HEINZ:: The problems that you run into were such things as the villagers being politically apathetic, being more concerned with survival than they were with a national endeavor. There was a lack of strong central government and of strong central direction over the whole country. Many of the Vietnamese officials were certainly not as competent as we would have liked. There was corruption, as has been the way of life in that area for a long period of time this didn't help. Communications were not good. There was the problem of the Communist forces using terror as a major weapon, while we were not about to use terror as a counterweapon. This imposed more restrictions in what we

could do. Whereas they could go in and assassinate villagers and thus make the whole village comply with what they wanted to do, the Vietnamese government certainly couldn't take a line like that.

MOSS: So what was coming forth as a counteroffensive?

HEINZ: We had such measures as the Strategic Hamlet Program: grouping the villagers together in a defended hamlet, so as to be able to provide them security; working up, organizing, training local security forces; sending advisers out into the countryside to help the people improve their lot--improve the agricultural methods. We had, as I recall, a program of education. And then we tried to get the Vietnamese armed forces away from their old, rigid, more or less classical lines of organization into lighter, more mobile forces. They had originally been organized as, I think, six World War II type standard divisions, which certainly didn't suit this type of warfare.

MOSS: What problems were you having in implementing this kind of thing?

HEINZ: Well, problems of finding enough competent administrators, in and out of the armed forces in Vietnam; problems of money, although that was later on not a great problem; problems of training; problems of equipment. And then, the problem of, say, intelligence, of knowing exactly what was going on. This was always a difficult one--to make sure you had a good understanding of what the Vietnamese were up to and how they were trying to solve their problems.

MOSS: What sort of things kept you from having such a good understanding?

HEINZ: I'd say the Vietnamese character--the differences between the two types of people.

MOSS: You started out . . .

HEINZ: Well, we were certainly working very closely with them. It was always necessary to establish a basis of understanding. There was some tendency by the people in power to want to use that power for their personal means. I find it difficult to pin some of these things down; they're more impressions that I recall, rather than hard, substantive facts.

MOSS: How much consideration were all of these things given back in Washington? How much was it discussed?

HEINZ: It was discussed day after day, always.

MOSS: With no satisfactory resolution?

HEINZ: We kept trying different line of attack to resolve this, and as we mounted our assistance, then the North Vietnamese just mounted their aggression.

MOSS: Yes. What sort of pressures were you bringing on the South Vietnamese to try and make them comply with what we thought was good for them? Perhaps that's a loaded question.

HEINZ: Well, it may be a loaded question, but I don't have a good answer for it since most of this was done by the people in Vietnam . . .

MOSS: Uh-huh. Rather than calculated from Washington?

HEINZ: Well, it was calculated, but certainly the instructions went out to the ambassador who was at the forefront of the effort. Certainly they went along with many of the things that we wanted done. We didn't always agree, for example, with some of their own repressive measures. I say this in light of the fact that they are more cruel to their own people than we had been in the habit of doing to our people. This is a difference in the two types of people.

MOSS: You mentioned the use of herbicides or defoliants a little while ago. What was the thinking on this? Who was arguing for it, and how successful did it really turn out to be?

HEINZ: I believe both the military and the economic people argued for it because they found that the Vietnamese forces were getting ambushed because of the type of terrain, and this was tried as a means of opening up the avenues of communications so that you would not be so easily ambushed by guerilla forces. It was tried out experimentally. We found that it worked, that it did defoliate the vegetation, and this was by far the quickest and cheapest way to achieve a bit more security of these important communication routes.

MOSS: So it was along lines of land communication.

HEINZ: It was along the lines of land communication, yes. And the idea was to defoliate along both sides of a road, say, so that the guerillas could not hide within ten feet or so of the road and ambush government units or even Vietnamese civilians using a road.

MOSS: I was under the impression that it was used in some cases to go after enemy concentration areas too.

HEINZ: It was also used later on to try and kill Communist agricultural plots. We found that the Communists would establish base areas in the countryside and do their own farming to save logistic support from North Vietnam. Once these were located, it was possible to spray these and kill their crops. This had perhaps some measure of success; I couldn't measure how much.

MOSS: Yes. How was it regarded generally, in the Washington area, as far as success was concerned?

HEINZ: It was regarded as generally a successful measure. Certainly we kept on doing it. It was just one of the many things we were doing there to help them win the struggle.

MOSS: Were there any serious objections to the use of defoliants?

HEINZ: None that I can recall. Whenever we had, say, the spray stray, when perhaps we got it on a farmer's crop, provision was made to pay him for what he may have lost. So, I don't recall any objections to it.

MOSS: There was nothing in the way of a general objection principle or anything of this sort?

HEINZ: No.

MOSS: Okay.

HEINZ: Because none of this was ever directed nor did it harm humans; it was only directed to the foliage. And most of it was done in rather deep jungle, and there's too much of that in Vietnam anyway.

MOSS: Okay. Let me move on to the Strategic Hamlet Program which you've also mentioned, and I take it that really this was based on the Thompson experience in Malaya, was it not?

HEINZ: Yes, it was.

MOSS: And, how was it implemented, through the Vietnamese government or . . .

HEINZ: It was done through the Vietnamese government. The general plan was to construct a hamlet with a protective perimeter--barbed wire, guard towers--and have the villagers live in there at night and go out and till their nearby fields in the daytime. With each hamlet you had a local defense force. The program was designed to provide security, rather than have people living in a scattered fashion across the countryside where they could not be protected by a local defense unit.

MOSS: All right. Now, as this thing gets rolling, there are great claims made for it. As I understand it, it largely came under the control of Diem's brother [Ngo Dinh] Nhu and that perhaps exaggerated claims were made for it: that there were more hamlets claimed as being secure than really existed; that people were moved against their will into them, almost concentration camp-like atmosphere. At least this was some of the press charges, say, from the [David] Halberstam type people and so on.

HEINZ: Probably in some cases people were moved into them against their will. Certainly, a great number of them were completed, and many people moved in voluntarily. In the long run, it was probably not as successful as we hoped because the aggression was stepped up so much, and because it was so hard to protect each hamlet with the Communists having the initiative all the time. This is one big problem in this type of conflict. The Communists had the initiative, they planned their attacks, and we had to defend everything. It was hard to find them and attack them. Of course it was all, this was all taking place in, to use the phrase, our own backyard. Therefore, we had to protect everything. They could select the place and time of their offensive actions.

MOSS: How about the question of whether or not the exaggerated claims were being made on this

excessively, on the hamlet program, particularly with regard to Nhu?

HEINZ: I think perhaps brother Nhu made more claims than were justifiable. Brother Nhu is the one who brought about, at least brought to a head, the coup that ousted Diem. As we saw it, brother Nhu seemed to be going over to the Communist side and playing footsie with the Communists.

MOSS: This is one question I was going to get to: How much hard evidence was there that he was actually in communication with Hanoi or with the NLF [National Liberation Front]?

HEINZ: I think there was hard evidence that he was in communication with them. This, I think, you would have to verify from the intelligence agency [Central Intelligence Agency].

MOSS: Yes. Yes. He was openly boasting of this kind, or hinting at this kind of thing, wasn't he?

HEINZ: Yes.

MOSS: Yes.

HEINZ: Of course, Madam [Ngo Dinh] Nhu wasn't doing any good either with her actions.

MOSS: Yes. We'll get to the coup in a minute or two, after I cover one or two other things. I was going to ask you about the question. How do you measure success in this kind of warfare? That is . . .

HEINZ: I don't have a good answer to that.

MOSS: You don't?

HEINZ: Everybody tried to think of ways of measuring success. We tried measures of counting the number of strategic hamlets, the number of people or the percentage of people under friendly control or under Communist domination, the number of people killed, the number of weapons captured, the number of weapons lost, the number of actions, the places of actions, the change in the areas of attack. All these were measures of what went on,

but they're very hard to measure as a degree of success because the war kept going on. So, there really wasn't a good measure. The fact that you could, perhaps, count the number of outsiders--number of Communist forces--was a measure of the opposition. But really, when you get down to it, the fact that this was directed from Hanoi, by Hanoi, really left your only measure of success to be a measure of their changes of plan and what they were doing, and how we influenced them. And this was, of course, the hardest thing to measure, if it wasn't almost impossible to measure.

MOSS: Yes. Even given this difficulty in measuring success, you had people coming out with optimistic comments on the way things were going--the famous light at the end of the tunnel phrase--and this was the sort of thing and helped in two years and that sort of thing. Why such optimism in the face of a very difficult measurement situation?

HEINZ: Well, at times I think people really felt that we were achieving measures of substantive success, that we could see progress, we could see better organization, better discipline, we could see perhaps expansion of governmental control. As we made progress, people were making statements I'm sure they believed. I don't think that these were made with any intent to deceive. It's a question of really believing that we were making progress and then finding that as we perhaps did progress, the enemy stepped up the action too, and it didn't turn out to be relative progress after all. Certainly, the things we achieved in the early part of the war served as a basis for things that were done later on when the opposition became so much stronger.

MOSS: Yes. All right. Now, on the opposition, the International Control Commission came out with a report that documented infiltration from the north. How was this received in Washington and generally speaking? Was there any attempt to get them to put this out at an earlier time?

HEINZ: We all, of course, we worked on the ICC [International Control Commission] to document aggression. The very nature of the ICC was such that it was rather an impotent body, in that the Communist member was always obstructing things that the free world side tried to do.

So it never really achieved much. As the war heated up in action, we just paid less and less attention to the ICC.

MOSS: Yes. What were some of the ways you tried to use them in the early . . .

HEINZ: We tried to get them to document the presence of North Vietnamese in Laos; in South Vietnam, to document cases of aggression, cases of atrocities, initiation of action, attacks on villages, or attacks on friendly forces; but was always very difficult to pin down. The ICC.

MOSS: Who was liason with the ICC?

HEINZ: I can't recall.

MOSS: Okay. Was there any attempt to use them as a communication route to Hanoi--messages and that sort of thing?

HEINZ: No, I don't believe so.

MOSS: Okay. Let me move back a bit in time, I think, and ask you about the change from the Military Advisory Assistance Group [Military Assistance Advisory Group] to what became MACV. What is it, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam?

HEINZ: Yes.

MOSS: I think so. How did that come about? What was the rationale?

HEINZ: Well, initially our assistance was completely advisory, in that General [Paul D.] Harkins had as his job to deliver military equipment, and then to instruct, train the Vietnamese in its use, and to provide any other training advice that we could. As we moved units--that is U. S. units--into Vietnam, then the job expanded to employing those units in direct furtherance of the war effort, so that eventually, the big part of the job was to direct U.S. efforts in the war. As this took place, the command was changed from a military advisory one to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. And as our forces there grew and grew, so did our staff which was directing them. Of course, we still retained the original purpose, of advising and assisting the Vietnamese armed forces.

MOSS: All right. Now, there's a very interesting situation here as to Harkins's position and MACV's position. There's a sharing of responsibility with the ambassador, Nolting. And how does this agreement come about? Did you get involved in this at all?

HEINZ: Well, Harkins was a member of the country team, as were the other heads of U.S. groups in the country. This organization is common throughout the world where we have Military Assistance Advisory Groups. The ambassador is the head of the Country team and directs coordinated U.S. action.

MOSS: But in fact, was not Harkins somewhat more autonomous than most people in his particular situation, or at least it was more of a combined effort, a partnership, than a subordinate relationship.

HEINZ: It started out as a more subordinate relationship, but it became more of a partnership as U.S. forces were introduced.

MOSS: Yes. Was there any formal understanding on this, or did it . . .

HEINZ: Yes, there was a formal understanding, when the command was set up, as to the lines of control. The ambassador, of course, still remained the head of the U.S. governmental team in Saigon. But there was also a direct line from the Department of Defense to the Military Assistance Command, which enlarged as we took on a U.S. direct role in the war.

MOSS: All right. There's the question of whether to set up a separate command, independent of CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet], directly subordinate to Washington, or whether to go to the CINCPAC group. Do you recall why the decision was made to put MACV under CINCPAC?

HEINZ: I know the question arose. It was discussed, and I believe that it was decided to go the CINCPAC route because of the fact that the whole Pacific theater was involved, that logistic support of the effort would require all CINCPAC resources, that we were involving all of our Pacific bases, and that for the best direction of effort, the CINCPAC route was the best way to go.

MOSS: I've heard some criticism of Admiral [Harry D.] Felt for getting too directly involved in tactical questions--calling off an operation and that kind of thing, or calling, changing the objectives of an operation, once it had been planned. Do you know of anything of that sort?

HEINZ: No, I don't. Certainly there was a line of communication from Vietnam back through Admiral Felt to Washington, and then a direct line from the embassy in Saigon to Washington. I would guess that many things were probably blamed on CINCPAC that came from Washington.

MOSS: I was going to ask, did everything that came from MACV through CINCPAC get to Washington, or was there a certain command relationship that . . .

HEINZ: There was a command relationship there.

MOSS: Yes. But how much could CINCPAC operate independently of Washington, using his own judgment on situations without reference to Washington? He was obviously something more than just a channel for communications.

HEINZ: Oh, yes, certainly. Because he had available to him all his component commanders, who were very intimately concerned with this, and he had his rather large staff, the judgment of what perhaps was feasible and was not feasible was injected in there. There was also a level of command option to be taken at the same time. This is normal military command lines.

MOSS: Any frustration on the part of Washington with the way things were being handled, either at the MAC end or at CINCPAC?

HEINZ: There was a frustration, of course, a frustration of how better to grapple with this immense problem, which we had not really coped with before. It wasn't a frustration, say, with certain people, although naturally there was frustration with brother Nhu.

MOSS: Yes. Yes.

HEINZ: Frustration perhaps when another completely incompetent province official came up who negated our efforts. But I don't recall a frustration that

perhaps you may have been implying with your question.

MOSS: Yes. Well, let me take it at a different angle. And, you were talking about the difficulties with intelligence--knowing just what was going on. Now, ostensibly you're all reading mostly the same reports but in a way, each command level is receiving a different set of reports as well. Now, they don't see them all at the same time or in the same sequence. Their analysts on the spot give them different interpretations, different selection and this kind of thing, so you do have a different point of view in Washington, in all probability another one in Saigon. Did this give you much trouble, was it that significant?

HEINZ: I think it was not too significant, in that I read a great deal of the State Department traffic; they read a great deal of ours. And the problem was to meld the political points of view and military points of view into an agreed course of action.

MOSS: Yes. Did you have much problem with conflicting reports--flat conflict of data, of hard intelligence?

HEINZ: Yes, because we were never always quite sure of our data. It was very hard to trust all the data that we got; sometimes we didn't trust completely the Vietnamese reports. You had to look at some of this with a jaundiced eye and discount some of it.

MOSS: Well, what would you do with something you had to discount? Say you have a Vietnamese report on action in which you doubt that there's been quite the enemy kill count that they come up with. You have to base your . . .

HEINZ: Just use the figures with caution.

MOSS: Just use the figures with caution.

HEINZ: That's all you can do, right. And base your actions accordingly. This is the best data you have; you have to use it. Whether you trust it or not is something else.

MOSS: What were some of the sources of the data? Interrogation of prisoners or what? What was the primary thing?

HEINZ: Well, it depended on the kind of date you were looking for. If you talk about the number of actions, you have reports from all the various villages, hamlets, cities in Vietnam. You had to trust the reports of commanders as to enemy killed, their own losses, the weapons lost and weapons captured. You had to trust them; you had to trust the Vietnamese reports, and coordinate them with U.S. advisers' reports, and the progress in strategic hamlets. You sometimes questioned the completeness of reports. But it is always true in a war situation, that you never have a complete picture, and you never can say that "this is accurate." I can go back to World War II, and recall some of the Japanese claims which we knew were completely erroneous.

MOSS: On one more point, you indicated last time a negative response. The application of such things as war games and what have come to be known as scenarios and so on to the Vietnam situation; was it not done, or did you simply not get involved?

HEINZ: It was done, although I didn't participate in more than, as I recall, two of them. We tried to plan out how things might occur. But it's awfully difficult to war-game insurgency.

MOSS: Yes. All right. Let me move on, then, in time to the Forrestal-Hilsman mission, the winter of 1962-63. I believe they left in very late December and came back in January. Do you recall how this was set up and coordinated with DoD and so on?

HEINZ: That I don't remember. And I would say we should skip that part because I can't offer any comment on it.

MOSS: Okay. I just noted something here in my outline that I skipped, and that's the monthly Honolulu meetings. When did these begin? Are they ones where McNamara would go out and Harkins and, I presume, Nolting as well would come back from Vietnam?

HEINZ: They began, as I recall, sometime in 1961. As a basis for a meeting, we would get a report from the commanders in the field, covering the various aspects of the current situation, as well as recommended courses of action in some cases. The meetings gave us a much better feel of

what was going on and enabled us to talk to the people from Vietnam. In some cases, recommended actions were approved as a result of these meetings. Principally, the meetings gave both State and Defense people a very close feel of the problem.

MOSS: All right. Now, who was participating? You say State and Defense; did the CIA get involved?

HEINZ: Oh, yes. There was always a representative in the party that went out from Washington--State, Defense, CIA, AID were always represented.

MOSS: How about somebody from the security council staff?

HEINZ: As I recall, generally one went along.

MOSS: Yes. What sort of things, other than what you've mentioned. . . . How would you characterize these meetings?

HEINZ: Generally it was a presentation by the CINCPAC and in-country people. But since it was McNamara's meeting, therefore it was a question of, what could Defense do? We didn't discuss the political situation at those meetings. The purpose was to improve what the Department of Defense was doing.

MOSS: So it was an administrative and logistic kind of thing in a way, or operational planning.

HEINZ: Operational planning, yes. Operational and planning.

MOSS: All right. Now, how did McNamara run a meeting like this? Can you give me a description of the way the guy operated as a meeting leader in these Honolulu meetings?

HEINZ: We usually had a presentation by the various sections of the CINCPAC staff, and also by people from Saigon. Questions were asked by McNamara, by his people, or by anyone there, as the meeting progressed. We tried to get a feel of how the war was going, a question again of measuring progress, a very difficult thing to come to grips with. Usually the meeting began at seven or seven-thirty in the morning, and broke up about five or six in the evening. It lasted all day, and there were discussions all day long.

MOSS: McNamara has a popular reputation at least of being a pretty tough cookie in this kind of situation.

HEINZ: Yeah.

MOSS: Is this a valid observation?

HEINZ: Yes, he was very decisive, and incisive.

MOSS: What kind of things would annoy him in a meeting, and what kind of things would he be pleased about?

HEINZ: I think he would be annoyed by somebody who didn't know what he was talking about, or somebody wandering in a presentation. He liked things factual, and he could assimilate things very quickly. And the people who were there always knew what they were talking about.

MOSS: Okay. Let me move on now to the Buddhist crisis in the summer of 1963. This broke, I think, about May '63, you had the first business with the Buddhist flags being flown in a parade. What sort of impact did this have initially on Washington, before the self-immolations?

HEINZ: I think we recognized that there was a crisis coming up within the government which certainly could alienate popular support of the government. This we didn't like; we were trying to increase popular support. This was one of State's main endeavors, to increase popular support of the government. In the Buddhist crisis, we had a group of religious leaders who were trying to tear down that support. So we recognized it as a very serious situation almost from the beginning and tried to steer it so that the Vietnamese could calm it down. Again, I think in this particular crisis, there was a major difference of viewpoint between the Vietnamese and the American, of the understanding of how the other thought. Always, I would say, there was the interface between our democratic heritage and their rather autocratic heritage and way of life over the centuries. This is an important thing to understand, because they don't do things our ways. They've never done them the way we do them. They have a much harsher outlook on life because that has been their way of life. They don't have the independent way of looking at problems that we do. You have to take this into consideration. This goes back to a questions you asked me before about a democratic form of government. A good democracy needs to have participation by

all the people--active participation, that is. And this is sometimes difficult to get.

MOSS: All right. It's been said in defense of Diem, for instance, that here he was, a mandarin, in effect, and that to insist on his having popular support was somehow to make him lose this quality of leadership that was traditional in the area.

HEINZ: I don't agree with that.

MOSS: You don't?

HEINZ: No.

MOSS: Why not?

HEINZ: Because we certainly tried to. . . . Well, we felt that if we could increase popular support of the government, certainly the government could then take more effective measures in its own defense. This was not something that you could attain by direct military force. It had to be fought on the grounds of having the people solidly behind you, of having the people work for the government, believe in and have confidence in the government, have the government provide security and have the people, again, participate in that effort.

MOSS: Yes. Do you think that the Buddhist crisis was the beginning of an alienation of Diem from the people or had this been going on for some time, and this was just a crisis that started things downhill even faster?

HEINZ: I believe that probably it may have triggered off the downhill road of Diem.

MOSS: How were Diem and Nhu regarded at this point?

HEINZ: I think Diem had fairly wide support. Brother Nhu did not have, in my estimation. Nor did Madame Nhu. Madame Nhu tried to get popular support and enlist women in the national cause, but she was so very autocratic and did unpopular things that her achievements were minimal.

MOSS: Yes. Was she the source of the highly moralistic laws that the . . .

HEINZ: She was. Yes.

MOSS: Well, what about the role of the American press in Vietnam on this whole Buddhist crisis thing? It's been criticized very heavily and yet on the other side you have it claimed as the word of the real truth on what was going on or at least an aspect that was being hidden. What is the real story on that--if there is one?

HEINZ: That's almost an impossible question to answer. I'd answer it this way, that the press, by its being, reports things that are problems. In other words, I can remember seeing a report of actions in Vietnam any particular day, and if there were, say, ten actions and seven were favorable to us and three were unfavorable, they would talk about the three that were unfavorable and perhaps in the last line mention that we'd won seven other engagements. It's their tendency to report the bad things, so this is what gets the headlines. If you view it in that light, then they tend to exacerbate people or to arouse people about all the things that are wrong, and it's much harder for them to enlist support of things that are good. Now, in that context, they were reporting the Buddhist crisis.

MOSS: Yes. I've heard it said that the self-immolations of the Buddhist monks--and there was one Buddhist nun, I believe--had a really strong emotional impact on Washington and particularly on President Kennedy. Do you have any . . .

HEINZ: No, I can't . . .

MOSS: . . . observations on that?

HEINZ: I don't have on that.

MOSS: Okay. Let me flip the tape right here and we'll go on to one or two other things before we stop.

BEGIN TAPE I SIDE II

MOSS: . . . about the appointment of Henry Cabot Lodge as ambassador, and specifically as background, to ask if there was any feeling in Washington that both Nolting and perhaps Harkins as well, because of their long presence in Saigon, had become too close to Diem to operate effectively as spokesmen for the American position.

HEINZ: I hadn't thought that way at all. I think Nolting was a good ambassador. Harkins probably was not as good a commander as the war went on as he had been in the military assistance field. I wouldn't say it was because he was too close to the scene, and I don't agree with the thrust of your question at all.

MOSS: Okay. Okay, fine. What about John Richardson of CIA, who was a more shadowy but perhaps the same sort of, in the same sort of situation?

HEINZ: There I don't have any knowledge or any feel to comment on.

MOSS: Okay. Fine. How was the appointment of Lodge received in ISA [Office of International Security Affairs], and the Pentagon generally?

HEINZ: I think we felt that Lodge would make a good ambassador. The way I personally viewed it was that I was used to ambassadors changing at regular intervals, and I looked upon this as a routine change of ambassadors.

MOSS: And the fact that it was Henry Cabot Lodge who'd been the vice presidential candidate under the Republicans and had been the ambassador to the United Nations under [Dwight D.] Eisenhower and so on, did this have any effect?

HEINZ: Personally I looked upon him as I would upon any other of a number of political appointees, as a capable man who was going in as ambassador into a new and very difficult situation. And from what I personally knew of what he had done he's a very competent man.

MOSS: All right. About the time that he's getting out there--or at least he's been selected some time in June and I think nominated, appointed in July--about the beginning of August you get coup rumors really running wild in Saigon. And during most of August you get quite a bit of this and then it calms down. What is going on, and how did you view that from your position?

HEINZ: Well, I was living with coup rumors. If you recall, we had a whole series of them in Laos. There were coups and somewhat the same things going on in many

other countries around the world. Coup rumors were something you lived with. Sometimes you felt there may have been something to them and sometimes you didn't. As the events occurred that actually led up to Diem's overthrow, coup rumors were very substantive, mainly, I believe, because of the actions taken by Nhu and his wife. It became apparent that many people in the country were becoming very much dissatisfied with Nhu's actions, with the influence that he and Madame Nhu had on Diem, and that there was a widespread and growing discontent. It was also apparent that the military, who had to get out and do the fighting, just weren't happy with this situation, and it appeared that they could very easily do something about it.

MOSS: Is there any significant change that occurs between August and October? Because you had in August all the ingredients apparently for a coup and then it was either repressed or called off.

HEINZ: I would say that perhaps when the Buddhist crisis was calmed down, we got the country on a calmer basis again. This tended to quiet the coup rumors. But then, we had brother Nhu acting up again, and injecting new situations which brought things to a crisis.

MOSS: Did you get involved at all in staffing the 24 August cable of instructions to Lodge, that I believe came primarily from Hilsman and Forrestal and was shown round to [W. Averell] Harriman and supposedly to General Taylor, although it's not entirely clear; [Major General Victor H.] Krulak was in on it, in which a fairly hard U.S. line, to force Diem to come to terms, was conveyed?

HEINZ: I wasn't directly involved. I probably supported or helped draw up the Defense position. But certainly, Diem seemed to be acceding to brother Nhu and letting him take over and not telling him what to do. It was felt in Washington at the time that Nhu's actions were really countering all of the things that we were trying to do, so that Diem had to get him in line or the country was liable to go down the drain. Again, to answer your question directly, I did not help draft it.

MOSS: Okay. Now, about this time, Krulak and [Joseph A.]

Mendenhall go out to Vietnam and then come back with what is apparently diametrically opposed views of what's going on--Mendenhall with a very pessimistic view and Krulak with a very optimistic one. Do you recall this?

HEINZ: No, I do not.

MOSS: Okay. It's followed by a McNamara-Taylor trip, almost immediately because the President was dissatisfied with the first report, in October shortly before the coup takes place, early October.

HEINZ: I think that all of this was done at a rather high level, and I was not involved in that.

MOSS: Uh-huh. Okay. Okay, now, you say you were in Saigon at the time of the coup; you were taking your relief, I believe, around the Far East on a tour of the spots. Would you describe the whole situation: first, how you got there, and where . . .

HEINZ: Well, actually, I had been in Bangkok, and came over to Saigon with Admiral Felt, just for the purpose of visiting Saigon. And my business was independent of Admiral Felt's visit. He provided the transportation. We visited with General Harkins and his people; we went to the embassy and visited there. We made contact with some Vietnamese--called on them--and then went back to the hotel. We then had other appointments that afternoon. We were supposed to go to the embassy, but they called to say that it was called off. The embassy warned us to stay at the hotel. Sometime that afternoon, we started to hear shooting. So we stayed very much in the hotel, as the bullets began to fly over Saigon. We ended up spending a lot of the night on the roof, watching the action from there. We could see the Vietnamese army fighting as they went to storm the palace; we could see the ships of the navy as they participated in the action. We didn't know what was going on, but we knew there was a lot of shooting. It was apparent, of course, that a coup was taking place. We got some fragmentary reports, and sometime in the early morning, as the shooting subsided, we heard a great cheer go up from the army forces, which were fairly close to us there. Finally, they'd won. We then went down to the embassy to see what was going on and there we got more information as to what had happened--that Diem was off hiding in a church, as I recall, with brother Nhu,

although I'm not sure of that fact. We then went up to the palace and saw the troops going through the rooms there, very obviously in control, and there were some very happy army commanders at the time. All Saigon, of course, was agog as to what was happening.

MOSS: Okay. Now, to what extent was there, do you think, either U.S. tolerance of the developing coup or active participation and encouragement of it?

HEINZ: My own guess is that there was at least U.S. tolerance; whether there was U.S. connivance, I don't know. My own guess is that there very possibly was. But I have nothing factual to go on.

MOSS: Okay. Now, coming back to Washington after the coup, how did people there size it up?

HEINZ: I think they looked at it as both a loss and a gain. We certainly had lost the government that we had been working with and had a new set of leaders in there. This in itself had inherent difficulties. On the other hand, we'd gotten rid of the influences that we felt were degrading the war effort. In that sense, we had gained. We had as the new leaders in Saigon military people whom we felt would tend to look for more of a military solution than we thought was possible, or feasible.

MOSS: Okay, fine. That takes care of my questions. Do you have anything else that you want to add or think should be added?

HEINZ: I think that. . . . My one comment on this would be that there've been too many comments that we looked for a military solution to this problem. From the beginning, the Pentagon did not look for a political-military solution. The question was always that if you were going to rally the people, you had to have security; if you were going to have security, you had to have armed forces to provide protection. Therefore, you had to build up the Vietnamese armed forces to get security in order to get the people to be a part of the government, which then in turn would provide their own security. This was a very difficult roundy-go-roundy. We never felt that this could be handled by military means during the period in question. Always, we were looking for economic, political, and military courses of action that would go hand in hand and complement and

supplement each other. This was the way I viewed it from my position, and it's the way ISA viewed it. Now, sometimes you had to accede to one or the other factors as the dominant one in a particular action. I believe that to me the major problem was that we were always defending our position--that'd be South Vietnam--and that therefore it was a defensive action from the beginning. It's a difficult position to be in.

MOSS: Right. Right, absolutely. Okay, thank you very much indeed, Admiral Heinz. I appreciate this.