**William C. Trimble Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 08/12/69**
Administrative Information

**Creator:** William C. Trimble
**Interviewer:** Dennis J. O'Brien
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**Place of Interview:** Brooklandville, Maryland
**Length:** 60 pages

**Biographical Note**
Ambassador to Cambodia (1959-1962). In this interview, Trimble discusses United States – Cambodian relations and the Laotian crisis during the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

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of William C. Trimble, Sr.

to the

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William C. Trimble (SEAL)
William C. Trimble, Sr.

Nov. 5, 1973
Date

James B. Rhoads (SEAL)
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Appendix to the Agreement Relating to Gift
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The following pages, as numbered on the final transcript, correspond to the pages of the closed portions of the draft:

| Final Copy | Draft |
|---|---|
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# NAME INDEX

## INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM C. TRIMBLE

Oral History Interview

with

WILLIAM C. TRIMBLE

August 12, 1969
Brooklandville, Maryland

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: Well, as we were talking here just a moment ago, I'm sure that you, after looking at your diary and some of these things, have some things that you'd like to bring in; and I have a sort of question format which we can go through. Ambassador Trimble, how did you come to be Ambassador to Cambodia? How did your appointment come about in 1958?

TRIMBLE: Well, I had been a Foreign Service officer since 1931 and had served at many posts abroad. I was Minister of Embassy in Brazil from 1954 to 1956, when I was transferred as Minister to the Embassy in Bonn--first serving under Dr. [James B.] Conant and then under David Bruce. As I was a senior officer--and by this time had attained the rank of Career Minister which is the second highest in the Foreign Service--I was eligible for an appointment as Ambassador. I had anticipated that I'd get a post in Latin America where I'd served many years, but there wasn't anything open there, so initially the Department wished me--this was in '57--to go as Ambassador to Laos. But David Bruce, who had recently arrived as Ambassador to Germany, didn't want me to leave. I didn't know anything about this proposal until sometime afterwards.

Then, in the fall of '58, the post in Cambodia was coming open, and it was offered to me; I accepted it, although I had no previous Far Eastern experience. However, I did know French and had lived in underdeveloped countries quite a lot. [Background noise of bird screeching.] That parrot!!

O'BRIEN: That's okay.

TRIMBLE: And so I was assigned to Cambodia; that was under President /Dwight D./ Eisenhower, of course. I came back from Bonn in February 1959 and went to Washington for my briefings and consultations before starting out for Phnom Penh.

At this point I'd like to interpolate a little bit of Cambodian history. As you know, Cambodia (or Khmer, as the empire was called) was a very, very large entity. It comprised, in the 6th, 7th, 8th, up to the 13th centuries, much of what is Vietnam today, present day Cambodia, and parts of Laos, Thailand, and Burma. The Khmers developed a really outstanding civilization, centering on what is Angkor. The civilization was largely based on agriculture, but they had a written language, of course, and were tremendous temple builders and engineers. The city of what is now Angkor had roughly a million people, which was very large for that period. But much of the empire was built on prisoner of war labor and slave labor, and the upper class (if you want to call it the aristocracy) became weaker and decadent with the soft life, somewhat like, in a small sense, the Roman Empire. The more aggressive Thai, or the Siamese, and the Annamites, or Vietnamese, started pushing in, pressing in, and finally Angkor was taken and sacked by the Thai early in the 14th century. The Cambodians abandoned Angkor, and it literally disappeared for several centuries. No one knew about it, and the jungle took over.

This encroachment by the Thai and the Vietnamese kept on and on and on, and if it had not been for the establishment of the French protectorate in the 1860's, I think Cambodia as a geographic and political entity would have disappeared. I mention this because there's a tremendous feeling of distrust and even hatred on the part of the Cambodians for the Thai on the one hand and the Annamites on the other, and this feeling has affected the whole history of the three countries since then and also our own relations with Cambodia. Why our own relations with Cambodia? Because Prince Sihanouk and his government regarded both Thailand and South Vietnam as satellites of the United States, the former since it was allied with us in SEATO /Southeast Asia Treaty Organization/ and the latter since we were giving it substantial military and economic assistance. The fact that Cambodia was also receiving both kinds of aid from us was, in Sihanouk's view, extraneous to the issue, for Cambodia was "different" and pursuing a neutral policy in foreign affairs. As satellites, therefore, we were in a position to dictate to Thailand and South Vietnam. Thus, if either took any action of an unfriendly nature towards Cambodia, or what the Cambodians regarded as unfriendly, the United States was held to blame for not having prevented it or taken prompt corrective measures. The logic of all this is somewhat difficult to follow, but that is the way Sihanouk and his government thought. Now you have a little necessary

background for my story.

O'BRIEN: In getting ready to assume the post in Cambodia, how were you briefed, in a sense, in Washington? How were you prepared for the post? Can you remember much about the briefing process?

TRIMBLE: I was briefed by the Far Eastern section of the State Department, the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. My predecessor, Carl Strom, came back and also gave me some briefing. I was briefed by the CIA /Central Intelligence Agency/, the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Treasury, and also the /Bureau of/ European Affairs insofar as the French influence and interests were concerned. I also saw a number of Members of the Congress who had been or were interested in the Far East. I feel that I had a very good briefing; although, as I said, still a neophyte as regards the Far East. The Secretary, Mr. /John Foster/ Dulles was ill, so I didn't see him, but I did see Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, /Robert D./ Bob Murphy, and other people in the upper echelons.

So, I felt reasonably well prepared from my briefings. In addition, I read all the books on Cambodia I could find in English and French, and went over the files of the past several years. One of the more recent books, and a very good one, about Cambodia, had been written by a Foreign Service officer, in which, incidentally, he criticized /Prince Norodom/ Sihanouk. The fact that he had done so constituted one of my problems on arriving in Phnom Penh.

But to reiterate, there was primarily this bitter feeling toward the Thai and the Vietnamese; particularly, I think, the latter. As you know, the Japanese occupied Cambodia during the war period. There had been a resistance movement in Cambodia and Vietnam prior to the Japanese defeat in which the Viet Minh--we call them Viet Cong today, but the Cambodians continued to refer to them as Viet Minh--played an important role. Following the defeat of the Japanese and the return of the French, Viet Minh policy was to create economic chaos in Cambodia as well as Vietnam, so as to enable them to take over and prevent the French from re-gaining control. The French had forces in Cambodia, opposing the Viet Minh, were not doing well, so Sihanouk, who was then King, sought and after much arguing obtained agreement from the French to lead his own army rather than have the Cambodians serve under French command. The Cambodian national forces fought well and were successful in forcing the Viet Minh out of their country. It was, however, pretty prostrate economically, and at that time we came in, initially with Marshall Plan aid, and helped the Cambodians to get their economy going again. That and the leadership of Sihanouk himself who (I'll go into later) was a rather controversial character put the country on the road to recovery. We poured in substantial amounts of aid on a crash basis, for it was essential.

Now, one of the leaders of the Cambodian resistance against the Viet Minh and also, previously, against the Japanese had been a man named Dap Chhuon (D-A-P C-H-H-U-O-N), a tough army type who had helped Sihanouk in the struggle for independence. /Interruption/

They, in '57, '58, Sihanouk--I don't recall the date exactly--Sihanouk went to Red China /People's Republic of China/ where he was well received. There had been several border incidents with the Vietnamese in which, of course, the Vietnamese were at fault in Sihanouk's view. Sihanouk turned to the Chinese for help and received some assurances from them. We never knew the details. As a result, he kicked out the Chinese Nationalist mission in Cambodia and established diplomatic relations with the Red Chinese.

Dap Chhuon, who was strongly anti-communist, was worried about this move towards the left by Sihanouk. He went to see Sihanouk's mother /Queen Sisowath Kossamak/, who had become Queen because Sihanouk had previously resigned as King to be Prime Minister in favor of his father, and protested Sihanouk's action, for the Queen was anti-communist, as indeed was Sihanouk himself for that matter.

But Dap Chhuon was very, very leery of Sihanouk and the communist influence. He had been appointed Governor of Siem Reap Province, where Angkor is located, and was also military commander for the area. As such he really had his own private army, although technically still part of the Cambodian army. In sum, Dap Chhuon was a sort of satrap. Since the Queen apparently was unwilling to use her influence, he turned to the South Vietnamese.

In the fall of 1958, one of his brothers, a man named Slap Peau (S-L-A-P P-E-A-U, I think) and a Member of the Cambodian Legislature went to the United States on a leader grant [redacted]

Am I talking too loud?

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

O'BRIEN: No, that's fine.

TRIMBLE: [redacted] This happened in the fall of '58 and before I got to Phnom Penh. In January '59, Sihanouk learned of the plotting of Dap Chhuon with the Vietnamese via the Vietnamese Legation in Phnom Penh and moved suddenly against Dap Chhuon with his own army. The man in charge of the operation was Sihanouk's Minister of Defense, General Lon Nol. Dap Chhoun was caught unprepared, fled, was killed. His brother, Slap Peau, was captured, as well as three Vietnamese radio

communicators. This was, I recall, in late January or February 1959.

[redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
(CONFIDENTIAL)

[redacted]

[redacted] [ Sihanouk ] was accusing the Americans of plotting against him. Sihanouk called a meeting of the Chiefs of Mission in Phnom Penh--this was while my predecessor was still there--in late February I think it was, 1959, and informed them that there had been foreign intervention in the Dap Chhuon affair. He accused the Vietnamese openly, the South Vietnamese, and also asserted that another foreign power had been involved. I don't think that in his speech he mentioned the United States, but he did to our Ambassador [redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
(CONFIDENTIAL)

As I said, Sihanouk raised this matter with my predecessor, Carl Strom, who denied any knowledge of it, and that was true. [redacted] Sihanouk obviously thought he was lying, but Strom did it in all sincerity, [redacted]

[redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
(CONFIDENTIAL)

[redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
~~(CONFIDENTIAL)~~

[redacted]

TRIMBLE: I arrived there early in April 1959. I'd asked for a letter from President Eisenhower to Sihanouk, [redacted] expressing his support of Sihanouk and friendship and so forth; [redacted] Sihanouk was away at the time I arrived--each year he used to go to take a rest cure in southern France--so I was unable to deliver the President's letter at the very start of my mission as I had hoped.

Well, I found the situation deplorable when I arrived in Phnom Penh: bitter attacks on the United States in the press, accusing us of all sorts of things; resentment against individual Americans; slashing tires, breaking of windows, American vehicles stoned and so on. It was pretty bad and the morale of the Embassy staff was just about as low as it could be, largely because of the Dap Chhuon affair. [redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
~~(CONFIDENTIAL)~~

[redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
~~(CONFIDENTIAL)~~

[redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

[redacted]

Well, as I have said, the cards were stacked against me and the Dap Chhuon affair has affected the relations between Cambodia and the United States ever since. I've gone into this in some detail because it has always stuck in Sihanouk's craw.

But even so, I seem to have gotten off to a good start with him when he came back, let's see that must have been in May. I went out to the airport to see him. I'd sent him messages in France, and flowers to the clinic where he was staying, and he appears to have had favorable reports about me from the acting Prime Minister, Son Sann, and others. Also he was interested in seeing a new American Ambassador. He was very nice to me, but then he always was.

At that time, the relations between the American Embassy under my predecessor in Phnom Penh and the American Embassy in Saigon were both rather parochial. By this I mean that each tended to support the host country's viewpoints in disputes with the other, and, consequently, there was a certain amount of intra-family squabbling as it were. It was so silly, ridiculous. Well, the Ambassador in Saigon, Elbridge Dubrow, was an old friend of mine from European days. We had worked together on Soviet and other matters.

Is this clear enough? Am I speaking. . . .

O'BRIEN: This is very good.

TRIMBLE: And I said, "Look, Durby, if we're going to fight"--this was when I was en route to Phnom Penh--"if we're going to fight, we can do it ourselves. You're my friend and I'm your friend and if we disagree, that's all right. But I'm not going to have these two missions taking cracks at each other: we're all working for the same cause." And this was fine because he put his foot down and I put my foot down, and all this backbiting between the two missions stopped. You run into parochialism of that type not infrequently.

So that stopped. And then Durby and I worked together to try to re-establish or make better relations between Phnom Penh and Saigon--that was, of course, between Prince Sihanouk and President Diem who disliked and distrusted one another which, as I have mentioned, did the Cambodians and the South Vietnamese. As I remember, our joint efforts were fairly successful. We engineered a trip, a visit, a full official visit, by Sihanouk to Saigon. And he was extremely well received by Diem. Although they still didn't get along well, at least they met each other and were able to patch up some differences. As a result things were going quite well for us. Durby and I had been working behind the scenes to keep the momentum up on both sides, and we were very pleased.

This was in the early summer of 1959, several months after I had gotten to Phnom Penh. Thus relations were getting better. They were going to have a joint agreement to study the border, to outline the border which was ill-defined in certain areas--and it still is. The Chinese and the Russians--I suspect the Chinese more than the Russians --got wind of the improvement that was taking place between Vietnam and Cambodia and in our relations with Cambodia, for our posture was also improving and for obvious reasons were concerned. So a bomb was delivered to the palace; it was a plastic bomb in a package addressed to the King [Norodom Suramarit] as a "present." It was delivered to one of the protocol officers in the palace who took it into the throne room. By coincidence, fortunately, just as it was about to be opened the King, and Sihanouk, and the Queen went into the other room for some reason or another. The bomb went off, blew up several servants, and did quite a lot of damage, but the three of them escaped unharmed. With the bomb was a visiting card with the name of an American engineer who had been connected with construction of the Khmer-American Highway [Khmer-American Friendship Highway], obviously planted. Naturally, the Americans were accused of this thing. It was a pretty crude attempt because the card spelled the man's name wrong. We offered to send out people to help investigate but the Cambodians

who really didn't have much of a security service cleaned up the whole place immediately after the explosion--the room that was bombed--and you couldn't find much in the way of clues. So this was a real setback for us in our efforts to improve Cambodian-Vietnamese relations, for the bombing attempt was blamed on the Vietnamese and the Americans. Well, that's the way things seemed to go for us. We would work hard and from time to time we'd go up, and then, BANG, something else would happen.

Another one which happened was the famous "[Bombay] Blitz letter." Do you know about that?

O'BRIEN: No, I'm not familiar with it.

TRIMBLE: This was a long story, so, if I may diverge at this point to describe Sihanouk and please tell me if I'm talking too much.

O'BRIEN: No, go ahead. That's fine.

TRIMBLE: Because Sihanouk, Prince Norodom Sihanouk is Cambodia. Sihanouk is a small man, rather rotund, with a high piping voice, rather feminine in his reactions although in no way effeminate for he is certainly masculine--he's fathered, sired a number of children, and has had a number of mistresses. But he is devious, mecurial, tempermental, and has great personal charm. He was always courteous to me. He spoke French very, very well, which is unusual for a Cambodian because not only did he speak it correctly but his accent was good--Cambodian French is pretty difficult to understand at times; it's very guttural. He is intelligent, highly intelligent, approaching genius I would say, relatively speaking. And sometimes I would say , relatively speaking, and sometimes, it was so near genius that under stress of emotions he would tend to slip over and become irrational. And at another time he'd go off on a tangent--Sihanouk would do that once in a while. And then he'd get very depressed. He was very suspicious, susceptible to flattery, ruthless, cruel, if you wish, not well educated in the sense of book learning. He'd only gone to a lycee in Saigon; I don't think he even graduated from that. He's not a man who reads a great deal, but he has great political acumen and a great feeling for his country. There's no question about his sincerity, and his patriotism, as far as that's concerned.

He goes around--does go around now, I'm sure--the country making speeches all over and he's a spellbinder, a bit corny at times. He speaks for hours--tells his people jokes, sometimes dirty jokes, sometimes legends--but he had the people with him; there's no question about that.

And, because Cambodia is so close to Red China and has "enemies" on either side, he would play the Chinese against the West. When I was

there, he had no delusions about the United States in the sense that we had any designs on his country, but he would play the theme up in his press to make the Chinese happy. His basic objective was to maintain his own country as it was in its own national integrity and to build it up economically. So he played a game, shifting from side to side and taking aid from both, one time friendly to the West, and then when he thought this had gone too far shifting over to the other side although his press was generally anti-American by and large.

It made my work very interesting but also frustrating. He was, and is, probably one of the most interesting characters I've ever dealt with, and also one of the most difficult. I liked him. I used to get furious at what he would do at times and I'm sure he must have gotten furious at me at times. But I admire his guts, his ability, and his patriotism. And I say this as one who probably knew him better than any other American. May I add a footnote to all this? Sihanouk is highly sensitive to criticism. And one of the troubles we used to have was the items about him in various American magazines, and particularly TIME with its rather snide attacks, writing about Sihanouk, as "the saxophone-tootling prince." Well, he does play the saxophone! As a youngster he used to play it, and when a very young man, and he still does now. Yet, he works like hell; he works about sixteen hours a day, and for relaxation he plays the saxophone, or even at times composes music. Andre Kostelanetz was a great friend of his; they used to work together. But TIME would come up with some crack about "the saxophone-tootling prince or would refer to him as "Snookie" which would make him furious, literally livid. That's how the American press was not too helpful.

The New York Times, on the other hand, was different. Men like Tillman Durdin who really knows his Far East, who could understand Sihanouk, and he [Sihanouk] liked Durdin and he liked one or two other Times men, but some of the other foreign correspondents were not so good. When an American newspaperman would come through and ask for background briefing, you had to be very careful because then he'd file from Phnom Penh; then of course, it got to Sihanouk. Anything you said which expressed the slightest criticism of Cambodia would be reported back. So I used to have to play awfully dumb with the American press unless it was someone like Tillman Durdin who was outstanding, he knew the situation. Well, this is getting off a bit, but I thought it was useful to know about this man, Sihanouk.

O'BRIEN: I'd like to come back a little later to the press and some of your ideas and evaluations on the press in Southeast Asia.

[redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)

~~(CONFIDENTIAL)~~

[redacted]

[redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

[redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

[redacted]

[redacted] the Red Chinese--I say "Red" Chinese, the communist Chinese, whatever you call them--[redacted] had separate schools [redacted] and still do in Cambodia. They were never naturalized; they formed a minority of about four hundred thousand people, I suppose. The overseas Chinese in Cambodia, like many overseas Chinese, went there to better their way of living, if you want. They were the moneylenders on the rice crops or rubber. They ran the retail stores; they ran the busses; they ran the little steam boats up and down the river. They controlled much of the economy of the country. And they were largely apolitical; they were out to make money.

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

But when the relations were established with Red China--a mission, a large mission was sent there--the Chinese immediately tried to get control of the schools, the curriculum, the teaching of these youngsters, and they were having considerable success. [redacted]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)
(CONFIDENTIAL)

[redacted]

O'BRIEN: Sihanouk made the charge of the so-called plot of Sam Sary.

TRIBBLE: Yes. Now that was another one that also happened before I got there. Sam Sary had been a staunch supporter of Sihanouk and was a younger man. He was not communist; I don't think he was pro-anything; he was pro-Sam Sary. He was sent by Sihanouk as Ambassador to London--I think it was around 1957-58. He took several concubines along, one of whom he beat like hell. She went to the British police about it. There was a scandal: the Cambodian Ambassador engaged in . . . beatings! Well, Sihanouk was furious about this, you see, and recalled Sam Sary. The latter thought he was going to be given hell because he had caused Cambodia to lose face! So when recalled he went into voluntary exile and started what they call a Free Khmer Movement which was financed by the Thai and the South Vietnamese. There's no question about that, this so-called Free Khmer Movement. It still exists, I suppose.

Of course, we were as always blamed because Thailand was our ally and South Vietnam was our ally. In Sihanouk's eyes thus he maintained that we could have controlled it if we really wanted to, and the fact that we didn't stop the Sam Sary thing showed that we were not really friendly towards Sihanouk.

Well, actually we had very little to do with the Free Khmers. I tried to get, and I'm sure both /U. Alexis/ Alex Johnson and Durbrow tried to get, the Thai Government and the South Vietnamese Government to stop assistance to Sam Sary--and we did have some success in that but not as much as I'd hoped for. That was another irritant in the relations with Sihanouk.

O'BRIEN: Well, at least the charge has been made, and I think the place it's documented is in this thing by Roger Smith, the book he did on Cambodia and foreign policy. And he suggests that--and I'm interested in your reaction to this--that between 1961 and '63, that particularly the radio broadcasts and much of the anti-Sihanouk activity of this group was pretty much diminished in 1961 and then it came up again in 1963.

TRIMBLE: That was after I left.

O'BRIEN: And did you. . . .

TRIMBLE: Yes. There was a Free Khmer radio station. It was a movable station, probably on a truck. It would broadcast from Vietnam, and sometimes from Thailand I think, obviously using American equipment. But we had not furnished equipment; the South Vietnamese had furnished it; I'm sure of that. We tried to stop it and we got [redacted] people out to the area to take triangulations--if you know the system--to pinpoint where this station was. We did that and the Cambodians appreciated what we were doing; we did show them and we told them how they could do it themselves. At the same time, through our Embassy in Bangkok and our Embassy in Saigon, we urged their support to end. So this Free Khmer station was pretty much off the air and we got out of that one quite well. What happened after '63, I don't know, I'd left in '62.

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O'BRIEN: We were talking here a while ago about some of the historical background with the border problem between the Thai and the Annamites. In regard to Thailand, Sihanouk made some real efforts in 1959, didn't he, to attempt to arrive at some kind of an understanding with Thailand in regard to that border?

TRIMBLE: Well, yes. There was the Preah Vihear Temple case which was sent to the International Court of Justice and in which Dean Acheson was the principal lawyer for the Cambodians. That was '61 and '62. The International Court of Justice awarded the temple to Cambodia.

I think in the fall of '58 there was some sort of plot, the so-called Bangkok Plot, against Sihanouk, very crudely done, probably Sam Sary had a hand. It may have been that Dap Chhuon was in it, too; I don't know. It was in Bangkok. We knew about it; [redacted] The British knew about it; the French knew about it--as I said, it was a pretty amateur operation--and so did the Chinese, and so did the Russians. But we didn't tell Sihanouk; the French did.

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O'BRIEN: Ah!

TRIMBLE: And the Chinese did and the Russians did. So that "proved" again, that we didn't come clean with him. It was a silly thing but he held that against us. Little things like this where we should have acted and we didn't hurt us and this was one of them.

Later there was some effort to define the Thai frontier but it never got too far with Sihanouk. One time I tried very hard to get Prince Wan [Waithayaken] who was an elderly Thai statesman and a member of the royal family of Thailand to come over on a visit--Prince Wan (W-A-N), had been in the U.N., was a respected statesman. And I was hoping for a subsequent visit by the King of Thailand to Cambodia. We were getting along fairly well with that proposal, then something else would break. You're tossing balls in the air all the time, at least I found it in trying to keep the peace with both sides, and then someone would shoot the balls down.

Going back, if I may, to this famous bombing affair, the palace bombing, there's a rather amusing anecdote as a kind of aftermath that took place in '61 or early '62, I don't remember now; no, I think it was '61. In Cambodia it is customary for the rulers to give presents. They give you small presents, silver items, silk scarves, fruit, and so forth; it's always done--and I thought the time had come that we gave something to the Queen Mother, my wife did. So I asked the Department for funds for this purpose to get her a Steuben bowl or something like that, a glass bowl. "Uh-uh, no funds for this." Everybody else was giving: the British and French and the Russians and the Chinese, the Chinese giving rugs. We gave nothing, you see, outside of aid. But this is the personal touch which helps. [redacted] And I got a beautiful Steuben bowl, a big thing like this. It had etchings on the side of it. I looked at it before we gave it to her and noticed that the etchings were little bees with small letters, etched in underneath, reading b-o-m-b-u-s. Well, bombus is the Greek or Latin for bee, so the bowl could be inscribed to read "Bomb U.S." [Laughter] I don't know if the Queen or Sihanouk ever caught on after we gave it to her. She never looked at it very closely. Imagine choosing, of all things, a Steuben glass thing with "Bomb U.S." on it! Bombus.

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O'BRIEN: Well, on the other side, in regard to Vietnam. . . . Oh, before getting into that, did you have a feeling that the people in the Far East division of the State Department had an appreciation of this long-term cultural rivalry that Cambodia has with both Thailand and Vietnam? And that came into their thinking?

TRIMBLE: Some did. I think, particularly the desk officer, the man who was working on it; he knew it pretty well. Certainly the Cambodian desk officer; there were several who knew it. But, remember, this was a carry over from the [Walter S.] Robertson period--we had him as Assistant Secretary of State [for Far Eastern Affairs], a very fine person; I admired him tremendously. He retired shortly after I got there, but his carry over was anti-communist, anti-Red Chinese. Anyone who was friendly with the Red Chinese we were suspicious of.

O'BRIEN: He took a much more political hard line.

TRIMBLE: Very much more so. And Sihanouk was suspect because he played "footsie-footsie" with the Red Chinese, although always in his own national interest as he saw it. So that made him suspicious of Sihanouk. Thus you felt that the Thai were favored, the Vietnamese were favored, Cambodia was not exactly in the enemy's camp; but things were largely viewed in terms of black and white; there was less appreciation of the gray.

O'BRIEN: Well, how about Jeff Parsons? How does he fit into all of this?

TRIMBLE: Well, do you want to go into the Laotian thing? This was later; I'll have to go into that, too. Jeff came to Cambodia shortly after I arrived and had a long talk with the acting Prime Minister, a man named Son Sann, S-O-N S-A-N-N. He was also Foreign Minister at that time. They discussed the differences between our two countries and they got along very well. Jeff, I really feel, had a great sympathy for the Cambodians. I remember he came out there again in 1961 and at the end of his visit he drafted a message which I had to tone down about how wonderful, extremely good the relations were and praised my part in bringing this about. It was very nice to hear, but I felt it would sound like I was blowing my own horn; he wrote the message, I didn't. He went on that we had overlooked the importance of Cambodia and what they really had done in economic development and political development, and that we always saw the seamy side in purely political terms, but failed to realize what Sihanouk had done. He sent that message in and I think it was well received in the Department. Anyhow, Jeff was good on Cambodia. I disagreed with his policy on Laos, but that, of course, is another matter.

We can go into that when we come up to the President Kennedy period where the change took place. I have my own diary here on that period which is quite interesting.

O'BRIEN: Good, good. I'd like to do that. Well, as long as we're touching on some of the things here in the late fifties before the Kennedy Administration, let's get into some of the problems of Vietnam. Now, there's a problem here in terms of commerce, isn't there, in the use of Saigon as a port?

TRIMBLE: Use of the Mekong, yes. That's why we built the Friendship Highway for Cambodia, that great monument to American engineering skills which started falling apart in a year and a half after completion. It was just awful! I opened the road with [Frederick A.] Fred Seaton in the summer of 1959. Fortunately, for

me, the road had been constructed before I got there. It seems that the American contractor found quarries at either end of the road. It's about a hundred and forty odd kilometers in length over a somewhat mountainous area and through jungle, but he couldn't find any quarries in the middle. So instead of using rock as a base, and particularly over the mountain areas, he used a type of very soft stone called laterite. I don't know if you know laterite; it's heavier than clay, but not much. And it's fine when it's dry, but when you get torrential rains, monsoon periods, well, the whole laterite base just swept right off on the side. All that was left in some sections was cracked, conked out asphalt on the top. Oh, that was a bad show! I got our government to sent groups out there--the Bureau of Public Roads and others--to try to rebuild the road because it was a pretty messy affair.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever try to get the Vietnamese to open up the port facilities in Saigon and the use of the Mekong?

TRIMBLE: Yes, the Cambodians used to use the Mekong. But they would resent the fact that some of the merchandise would be inspected by the Vietnamese. I remember, Sihanouk got himself a new Ford, what do you call, you know the sporty. . . .

O'BRIEN: Thunderbird?

TRIMBLE: Thunderbird, yes. It was a very, very sporty Thunderbird. He loved big cars, or sporty cars. Well, it arrived, and apparently had been on a dock in Saigon where it had been bumped into and the fenders had been bashed in a bit and other parts of the body scratched. Of course, he blamed it on the Vietnamese. Well, I am sure there was nothing personal, this was just shipping damage, but this is the way he took it.

But there were always navigation or border problems. Another one which had happened before I got there was again in '58, the so-called Stung Treng affair. Some Viet Cong who had been taken prisoner by the South Vietnamese escaped, and the South Vietnamese forces were going after them in hot pursuit and they crossed the border between Vietnam and Cambodia. To cover their entry the Vietnamese carefully took the border marker and relocated it further to the East. Well, this was interpreted by Sihanouk as obviously a move by the South Vietnamese to encroach more on Khmer territory and he called upon us to do something about it. When we didn't do anything he got angry and the Cambodian press attacked the Americans bitterly, claiming that our "satellites"--the South Vietnamese--were doing this to Cambodia with our encouragement, or at least with our tacit consent. They were very bitter attacks--this was again in the fall of '58--and Sihanouk maligned the United States in speeches and so forth. So, in righteous indignation

Washington called back the head of MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group], the head of the AID [Agency for International Development] mission, and the Ambassador to indicate our displeasure. However, nothing more was done to impress this on the Cambodians, so any effect the gesture may have had was lost when all three returned to Phnom Penh a couple of weeks later.

Despite setbacks, Durbrow and I persisted in our efforts to better relations between South Vietnam and Cambodia. Thus, a year or so after I got there, we arranged another meeting between the South Vietnamese and the Cambodians. The Vietnamese wanted to talk about some offshore islands to which they laid claim but which the Cambodians held, and still do. The map was never well defined by the French. I think the islands had originally been regarded as Cambodian, but under the French the administration of these islands was put in Saigon. Well, this was another irritant. Still, some progress was made in other matters of disagreement. There were also charges by the South Vietnamese that Cambodia was being used as a safe haven for the Viet Cong--this goes back into '61, '62. At that time the charges were not true. I'd inspected the area concerned very carefully; flew over its entire length very low. I had my MAAG teams go into the area also and neither they nor others found anything. Obviously, the Viet Cong would cross over once in awhile because the border is largely jungle and go back, but there were no rest camps or anything like that. Also, the Cambodians could not effectively control the border. It would have taken several divisions at least to do it, and the Cambodians didn't have anything like that force. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese claimed that Cambodia was being used as a safe haven, and the American MAAG mission in Saigon agreed that this was so and claimed it had aerial photographs to support the contention. So I rushed down to Saigon to inspect the photographs the MAAG had taken. One photograph depicted what was claimed to be a camp. It had been a camp once, or rather an old fort or stockade with little square towers at the corners that had been built by the French in the Viet Minh period. However, it had long since been abandoned, and still was. There are some like it scattered throughout the area. Then I was shown photographs of what were thought to be anti-aircraft gun emplacements. At that time there weren't anti-aircraft guns in all of Cambodia. What these were are common in Southeast Asia during the rainy period; a big round circle is scooped in the earth--a sort of shallow pit--in which water is retained; then when the dry period comes the water is drained off in small irrigation ditches. You can spot such reservoirs all over the area. Well, it was claimed to look from the air like an anti-aircraft emplacement. I exploded that one, but there was still some remaining suspicion.

O'BRIEN: This was 1961?

TRIMBLE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Robert Trumbull, I think, had an article, didn't he, about then . . .

TRIMBLE: He was good; he was a good man.

O'BRIEN: . . . on the use of the border?

TRIMBLE: He came through and went all over the border. He found out that the charges weren't true, which I already knew. I talked to him and I had sent my people in; so he confirmed what I had already reported. But having a New York Times man do it meant a great deal more because you've got to have publicity on such matters.

O'BRIEN: Your MAAG chief was General [Edward C. D.] Scherrer, wasn't it?

TRIMBLE: I had three. Most of the time it was Major General [Charles H.] Chase. General Scherrer was the last one. He was very good; they're both of them excellent men. Scherrer, who's still active--he's a Lieutenant General now, I believe--got along extremely well with Sihanouk; he was attractive, had an attractive wife, and he [Sihanouk] liked them both, especially after "Pony" Scherrer came out with a statement refuting the allegations of border misuse. He made a public statement--in the State Department you couldn't have done that, but he did--which was welcomed by Sihanouk.

O'BRIEN: During those years--well, I'm not quite sure of the exact date--relations were established with North Vietnam.

TRIMBLE: They weren't established when I was there.

O'BRIEN: Oh, they weren't? But weren't some contacts made?

TRIMBLE: Oh, there were some contacts from time to time and the North Vietnamese did try to establish a trade mission, which would bring us back to '62, but it wasn't very much. Actually, Sihanouk despised all Annamites, all Vietnamese, and particularly the North Vietnamese, because they were also communists and they had hurt his country during the immediate post-World War II era.

O"BRIEN: In regard to this, were you applying any kind of pressure? Was the United States applying any kind of pressure to Sihanouk, or attempting in any way to influence him into SEATO in these years?

TRIMBLE: No. Although Sihanouk claimed that. SEATO was established, of course, some years before, and it had the so-called "SEATO umbrella" proviso which covered Cambodia. He used to

say that he resented this, although actually he probably felt differently, but publicly he asserted that the proviso was inconsistent with Cambodia's neutrality. There was some pressure brought to bear on Sihanouk by President [Ramon] Magsaysay--Magsaysay of the Philippines--when he went to Manila on a visit, I think in '57 or '56, '56 I think it was. And he resented that.

But, no, we didn't make any effort to bring Cambodia into SEATO; although, actually, when first being talked about, the Cambodians said they wanted to be a member. But they changed. They'll never admit that now, but they wanted to join when the treaty was first proposed. That I know; I've gone over the records on this point.

O'BRIEN: Well, he had a number of meetings with world leaders in the period you were there, '59 I believe particularly, and '60. Did you get any insight into these: the ones with [Gamal Abdel] Nasser, and he went to Moscow, as I understand?

TRIMBLE: Yes. And Chou En-lai came to Phnom Penh, and [Achmed] Sukarno came, and Princess [Helen Elizabeth Olga Christobel] Alexandra came, and some fairly important French came, and, let's see, the Czechs sent a delegation. Oh, there were visits back and forth by the dozen. Sihanouk would flatter them all and put on the usual show with the Royal Cambodian Ballet; I saw it so many times that I almost knew the script by heart. But he's very good at that sort of thing and entertains well.

This is amusing, but it's true. He was so interested in seeing that everything was done correctly at a formal entertainment that he was once found polishing the silver before a state dinner for some distinguished visitor, because he didn't feel he could trust his servants to keep the silver shining. Also, when Fred Seaton was there--we went down to Sihanoukville for the opening of the Friendship Highway, in July 1959--and were put up in Sihanouk's little guesthouse there, and he sent his Minister of Public Works all the way from Phnom Penh to see if the toilet in the guesthouse flushed properly. Actually, those toilets--he used to have them tested out in the palace before any official entertainment--they always flushed the first time, never did afterwards, but he never knew that. He only saw to it that they were flushed once. [Laughter] Well, this is a little sidelight on Sihanouk's perfectionism.

O'BRIEN: Interesting, yeah. He had a meeting with Eisenhower?

TRIMBLE: Yes. He came over here and met President Eisenhower in--'57? '58?--'58 I think it was, again before my time. Sihanouk liked President Eisenhower. He regarded him as sort of a father image, but this admiration and liking for President Eisenhower, while still existing, tended to diminish because he thought that President Eisenhower was surrounded by people who were anti-Cambodia: TIME magazine;

by Wall Street; he was influenced by Mr. Dulles, and others whom he felt did not really like Cambodia or Sihanouk. So his attitude toward President Eisenhower gradually changed. Of course this was ridiculous, but that's the way he felt. And he saw evidence for this criticism appearing in the American press which he thought was a controlled press as the Cambodian press was controlled. He never could grasp the idea of a free press; he never could understand that.

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O'BRIEN: Well, after these plots were uncovered [redacted] in Cambodia, was there any increase in aid, or was there anything in this as a sort of compensation for that? (CONFIDENTIAL)

TRIMBLE: No. Actually, I was trying to cut down our aid.

O'BRIEN: Why?

TRIMBLE: Because I thought we had too many projects. I wrote a letter about it; I haven't got it here. Oh, here it is. I'll find it for you. I don't remember the whole thing; it was a long. . . . [Note: Section missing as tape ran out and was not stopped]

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

TRIMBLE: Oh, let me see if I can find this thing. We had a number of projects in Cambodia. All contributed, in a sense, to the economic development, but some of them were really of marginal value. For example, we sent a number of American foresters out there to make a survey of the forest resources of Cambodia, a real survey: it took several years. They didn't want it. The study cost thousands of dollars. The report was pigeonholed by the Cambodians. That was the type of activity I sought to stop. Another one was the fish resources study. This would have been useful in a more developed country, but they didn't want a thing like that.

So I wanted more a rifle rather than a shotgun approach, to have fewer projects but of maximum economic importance, and more in line with our political objectives, with a psychological impact, if you see what I mean.

O'BRIEN: Sure.

TRIMBLE: Also, I felt that we were assigning far too many Americans. I think that the AID mission there at the time was well over a hundred, which was pretty big for a country that size. And, althought by and large pretty good people, good in their own field, they couldn't communicate. I think only two of them spoke any Cambodian. And only about 25 percent--no, I think it's 35 percent--spoke French. Well, how are you going to get along with the local people, because they don't speak English?

We were pouring in a great deal of money on some projects which, as I have said, were of marginal value. However, there was no corruption or graft or that type of thing on our part--I never found any, but some of the projects were really of marginal value. Some were excellent; some were not, and I wanted to cut out the latter, not only in the interest of our own budget but also because I didn't think they were helping very much.

Most of the counterpart funds we got from the Cambodians were used to support the Cambodian Army, we used to do that.

Now, to get to the Blitz affair which took place in January 1960, just when things were going well between Cambodia and the United States. The Russians planted a letter, allegedly from Sam Sary to my former Deputy Chief of Mission / Edmund H. / Ed Kellogg in a Bombay magazine called Blitz purporting that he had received one from Ed to the effect that I supported him in his efforts to unseat Sihanouk. Every time we'd get somewhere, something like this would happen. Unfortunately, the Consulate General in Bombay sent the issue to the Department by air pouch rather than by cable, so we didn't have anything on it before the Cambodians received copies of Blitz. I'll just read from my diary on the incident.

O'BRIEN: Sure.

TRIMBLE: "January 31, the Duty Officer brought me a telegram from the Department to the effect that a Bombay crypto-commie weekly, Blitz, had published under banner headlines on January 16th a 'photostat' of a letter allegedy written by Sam Sary to Ed Kellogg on September 3, 1959, referring to 'our common aims' and 'your cordial letter' which 'aroused new hopes' and that Sary 'entirely shares the opinion of the Ambassador, H.E. Trimble, which you have made known to me and counts on his aid and support.' The Department's message indicated that Kellogg had never received such a letter and, in fact, had never had any correspondence with Sary except to invite him to dinner early in his tour here when Sary was a member of the Cambodian Government. The telegram pointed out that Blitz was a well-known commie mouthpiece, and that it has regularly attacked the U.S. with forgeries and unproven allegations. Moreover, the Soviet officer who defected from Rangoon last summer had mentioned in a speech that the Soviets were accustomed to planting fabrications and articles in Blitz designed to stir up trouble between the Free World and neutral nations of Southeast Asia. I was instructed to bring the incident to Sihanouk's attention as an example of the continuing interest in the communists to foment trouble."

The Duty Officer had brought me the message in the evening of January 31. Since Sihanouk was on a tour of the provinces, the following morning "I asked for an urgent appointment with Sonn San. Unfortunately, he is not available today as he is doing his 'voluntary' manual labor service. I went to see the Indian Ambassador and showed him a paraphrase

of the Department's message. He said he was familiar with Blitz, which was a 'scurrilous yellow sheet,' and deplored this latest attempt to stir up trouble. The Cambodian Ambassador to Dehli was seeing him later in the day and he would inform him of Blitz's reputation."

I called on Sonn San in his home late in the afternoon of February 2 and showed him a paraphrase of the Department's message, stressing that Kellogg had never received such a letter from Sary nor had he written him and called Sonn San's attention to the Soviet defector's testimony before the Senate subcommittee and statement regarding the Soviet use of Blitz. Sonn San said he was familiar with the Blitz letter which had been circulating in Phnom Penh for several days and would be re-printed here in a day or so. He would try to stop its publication but could give me no assurances that he would be successful. He said it was "essential" that I see Sihanouk soonest and urged that I go immediately to Siem Reap where he was staying. "I said it was too late to fly there today but would do so first thing tomorrow morning." I asked him to arrange an appointment, but he replied that it was best that I arrive "unannounced." "He was obviously scared and nervous and intimated that there was a lot more in the matter than he was at liberty to tell me, but it was 'very serious.'" I felt that"I had convinced Sonn San that the letter was either a forgery or a plant by Sam Sary, angry with the U. S. and intending to cause trouble between us and the Cambodian Government,"for Sonn San described the attempt as "Machiavellian and diabolical."

The next morning at dawn I flew to Siem Reap where I called on Sihanouk in his villa. I reiterated the statements I had made to Sonn San and stressed the "serious view" the USG /United States Government/ would take should the Cambodian Government place credence in this patent forgery or plant by the commies. It seems that prior to my "audience" Sihanouk had written an editorial criticizing the U. S. for this "horrible thing." He indicated that it was too late to change the press, but in view of the assurances I had given him, he would write a public denial.

This Sihanouk did, and to the best of my knowledge it's the only time he's ever done so. That helped, but we also sent over a handwriting expert to prove that the letter was a fabrication. This was just another of those incidents that used to plague us whenever things were going well.

O'BRIEN: Let's pass on to the Kennedy period. When was the first time that you met President Kennedy?

TRIMBLE: I didn't meet President Kennedy until I came home on leave in 1961. I never met him while I was abroad at other posts; I met other Members of the Senate, but he never came to Germany when I was there, nor Brazil, nor even The Hague where I'd been before.

And here I have some things in my diary, in which I made some references to the President, that I'd like to mention. Hold that for a minute. [Interruption]

O'BRIEN: This is after at least the first stage of the Laotian crisis had sort of dampened down, isn't it?

TRIMBLE: Yes. Oh, this is amazing, going back to the bombing episode. This is a translation of an article appearing in Izvestia, November 16, 1960. They'd cited three "very bad American Ambassadors." One was [Robert C.] Hill, who was in Mexico at the time; another was [John M.] Cabot; and then they got on me, which was amusing.

"In connection with the scandal in Brazil, it is appropriate to recall that after the war Cabot finished the National War College at Greenland Point (sic) which was set up at the suggestion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the joint training of the high-ranking personnel of the Army and State Department. Studying together with him at the College was William Trimble, U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia. A few months ago, Prince Norodom Sihanouk published in the magazine National East (sic) an angry statement in connection with the actions of official United States personnel in Cambodia aimed at undermining the independence and integrity, unity, peace and prospects of the Kingdom. It was discovered that Sam Sary, a traitor who fled to South Vietnam after an aborted plot against Sihanouk's Government, had been in closed contact with the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh headed by William Trimble. 'The explosion in the Royal Palace on August 31,1959,' the Cambodian newspaper Meatophum"--it was a communist sheet--"commented, 'was the joint work of the Imperialist and Sam Sary clique.'"

The Izvestia article went on about the criminal activities of Trimble. I have always kept it, in case any McCarthy period comes up again. [Laughter] It would be useful.

Now, to go back to President Kennedy. Let me see, I've got these things here. [Interruption]

O'BRIEN: Oh, this is the Inaugural.

TRIMBLE: Yes. On January 7, 1961, just before the Inaugural, I received instructions from the Department on the line I should take with Sihanouk when delivering a message for him from Mr. Kennedy. My appointment was for the 9th, and he was very pleased to hear from the President-elect. It meant a great deal to him, especially since he had never met Mr. Kennedy. However, Sihanouk had a certain sort of sympathy for him as a man pretty close to his own age, as opposed to the father image of President Eisenhower.

O'BRIEN: What was in the message?

TRIMBLE: I don't remember the details.

O'BRIEN: Oh, you don't remember?

TRIMBLE: I don't. I never had a copy of the text. As I recall, it was to the effect that "as I am about to commence my term of office, I want you to know how very much I hope that we and our two countries shall get along together," and so on.

O'BRIEN: In these letters that Kennedy wrote to Sihanouk, were they cleared with you before they were sent at any time? They just came?

TRIMBLE: They came, sealed.

O'BRIEN: Is that right?

TRIMBLE: They were always sealed, but generally I was furnished a copy, so I knew what the letter contained. But the originals came on the White House stationary and sealed.

O'BRIEN: Were they of a general nature, in this "We ought to have better relations between out countries" vein?

TRIMBLE: Yes, when there was no specific issue involved, but at other times such as matters concerning Laos the President would ask for Sihanouk's opinion on some point or other and let him know what he was planning to do. Personal messages of this type mean a great deal, and the President was very good at that sort of thing. His letters to Sihanouk were excellent. I had had difficulty in getting ones to him from President Eisenhower, but President Kennedy was different. Letters from the President mean so much to other Heads of State, particularly of small States and with a French background. They love these courtesies, the friendly language and requests for their views.

O'BRIEN: Sure.

TRIMBLE: All of this flattered Sihanouk, and the President must have know how susceptible Sihanouk was to flattery. This type of thing he loved; and President Kennedy did it extremely well.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever get any insight into, in the White House, who was doing the thinking behind those letters?

TRIMBLE: No. No. I didn't know. Some of them may have been written in the State Department, some of them in the White House. I don't know who did it, but whoever was doing it knew his target well, and what kind of things to put in. This is something which means so much, and I used to urge and urge more letters of this nature. When President Kennedy came in, he did so. Not that I had anything to do with it, but the end result was most useful.

Ironically, shortly after President Kennedy's letter had been delivered, a message came from President Eisenhower for Sihanouk. It was meant to have come sooner, but it "finally arrived on January 20. As I wrote at the time, 'It is good and should please the little man.' Unfortunately, he has already left for Kep, so I sent him a letter asking for the appointment there or elsewhere. Later in the day, I had a reply fixing next Tuesday. It would appear that now the new Administration has taken over, he is less interested in hearing from President Eisenhower." This was delayed in coming from Washington; I don't know why. Now, I carry on some more.

O'BRIEN: I wonder if we could get into some of the things regarding the Laotian crisis? Did you notice any change in policy towards Laos when the Kennedy Administration came in?

TRIMBLE: Yes, yes, very much so. Now, if you will remember, Jeff Parsons, who was now Assistant Secretary for the Far East, had served in Laos and had taken a dislike to Souvanna Phouma. There was a can of worms in Laos between the [redacted] Army, and the Department over what our policy should be. It was awfully difficult and Jeff had a hard time in wrestling with the problem in Washington; some wanting to back Phoumi [Nosavan]--and he was a strong anti-communist, but wasn't very bright--some wanting to help Souvanna Phouma. And then there was the Pathet Lao ingredient--under [Prince] Souphanouvong, who was Souvanna Phouma's half-brother. So there was pulling to and from, and it was pretty hard for Jeff.

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Finally, on December 9, 1960, Souvanna Phouma, fled to Cambodia under the auspices of the Russians. I saw him; I went and saw him twice, but I was told--this was under the previous Administration--not to see him any more, that he was in the communist camp. Well, he wasn't. I mean it's since been proven. I felt that we had an opportunity to influence him because he was living in Phnom Penh and I had easy access to him through the Laotian Ambassador. However it was quite apparent to us in the Embassy that Washington didn't want me to do so, for while I don't recall any specific instructions to that effect, my recommendations that I keep in touch with him were ignored. Well, that was the previous Administration's attitude towards Laos, or rather Souvanna Phouma, so I saw him only twice.

O'BRIEN: What do you recall from those conversations with him?

TRIMBLE: I saw Souvanna three days after his arrival in Phnom Penh and a second time, at his request, on December 15. He was quite cool at the first meeting and resentful of the support we were giving to Phoumi. He also insisted that the solution of the Lao problem required the inclusion of both the Phoumi group and the Pathet Lao in a coalition government under his direction, for he maintained that he was still Prime Minister. He also played down the threat of communist influence in such a government. He pursued this latter theme further at our second meeting when, incidentally he appeared friendlier, more relaxed and more confident. It took place immediately following the delivery of a message to him from Phoumi, which had been forwarded through our channels, proposing a meeting in Saigon between Souvanna and representatives of Phoumi. That's here.

As I wasn't meant to see Souvanna further, the British Ambassador did so at the beginning of February 1961 at my request and in accordance with instructions I had received from the Department. "/ Frederic F. / Freddie Garner"--that's the British Ambassador--"told me of his talk with Souvanna Phouma which had taken place on a Saturday and that he seemed very confident, in contrast to the depressed attitude of a month or so ago and told Garner he was planning an early trip to Laos to see the troops and ministers 'loyal to him' and afterwards would visit the capitals in Asia and Europe previously mentioned."

"I pointed out to Garner that if Sihanouk allows Souvanna Phouma to leave here for Laos and then return, it would compromise the position he has thus far taken of strict neutrality in this Laotian matter. It is one thing to receive Souvanna as a political refugee, quite another to permit him to travel in his own country and to come back. To do so would, in a sense, mean that Souvanna had been allowed to establish a government in exile. Now, as usual, Souvanna Phouma blamed the U.S. for the situation in Laos, and also was critical of / Winthrop G. / Win Brown"--that was one of the early references to him.

O'BRIEN: How did your two earlier meetings go with him? Did you ever discuss . . .

TRIMBLE: Not much.

O'BRIEN: . . . U. S. policy?

TRIMBLE: I tried to, but he was very bitter against us claiming we had forced him out. I was the representative in Cambodia of the government which forced him out. He was pretty bitter.

O'BRIEN: Rather bitter towards Parsons, wasn't he?

TRIMBLE: Parsons particularly. Apparently they never hit it off, even when Parsons was there. (i.e. Vientiane).

"On February 8, I received a 'personal for the Ambassador' telegram from Secretary"--Mr. [Dean] Rusk--"to the effect that the President wishes me to continue at my present post." [Pause] Oh, this is February 16th. "I held a staff meeting to review events of the past week. A series of messages has come in about the new plan for Laos." This was the new Laotian plan. "It envisages a broadening of the base of the government, including an effort to get Souvanna Phouma to participate; the neutralization of the country including, if necessary, the withdrawal of our training team and the funnelling of all aid through the U.N. or some other international organism and the establishment of a neutral commission composed of Cambodia, Malaya, and Burma, with Sihanouk as chairman. I sent a message discussing the likely reaction of Sihanouk to the scheme, which, I'm afraid, will be rather negative, for, while flattered, he won't wish to assume the responsibility called for. The new policy represents pretty much an about-face from the one we have been following. Nevertheless, I feel that we are finally on the right track. And even if it isn't accepted by the Soviets, Souvanna, and Sihanouk, the onus will be placed on them instead of us as at present. Also, we are again in line with the British, French, and our other friends and allies, which certainly hasn't been the case up 'til now."

O'BRIEN: Were you making these recommendations?

TRIMBLE: I'd been making these recommendations: Let's work with these others, and don't try to make this a purely American show. But I was in Cambodia, and could see it from a kind of outside vantage point, it you wish. Then Souvanna, as you know, refused to participate in this broadening proposal.

O'BRIEN: Now, this is where [W. Averell] Harriman comes in, isn't it?

HARRIMAN: Harriman comes in later; I'll give you. . . . I've got Harriman marked here. February 21: "A cable was received from the President to Sihanouk to be delivered soonest. It dealt with Neutral Nations Commission"--which is what we called this thing--"and explained why the fourteen-nation conference proposal"--which Sihanouk put forward--"did not, in our view, offer much possibility for success. Because of the increasingly hostile attitude of the Bloc towards us, it would seem likely that the conference will increase, rather than decrease, international tension. The message also expressed the hope that Sihanouk would serve as Chairman of the Neutral Nations Commission. We at once got in touch with Foreign

Ministry and the palace, only to learn that Sihanouk had left Siem Reap at seven to join ex-King Leopold [III] and his wife"--that was another of the foreign visits.

"After considerable difficulty, we got word to the acting Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry"--a second-rate functionary, who never showed much cooperation--"that I should like an urgent appointment with Sihanouk." I also sent a note containing the same request to [Samdech] Penn Nouth who was the Prime Minister. And then I sent the message up to Sihanouk, or had it delivered to him.

"I reported all this to Washington, also sent an immediate message to Jeff Parsons [redacted] suggesting I see Souvanna. I pointed out I'd not done so since December 15 because I assumed the Department would've instructed me if it had wished me to maintain contact"--but they didn't, you see. "However, as he now seems to have made up his mind to go to Xieng Kieng"-- which meant going back to Laos--"to work with the Pathet Lao, I considered I should make a final effort to dissuade him. Admittedly, this would be a 'long shot,' but, in my opinion, worth the attempt. No reply from Jeff."

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O'BRIEN: No reply.

TRIMBLE: Have you taken this down?

O'BRIEN: Oh, of course!

TRIMBLE: "As we have yet to hear from the Royal Cambodian Government on my request that an appointment be arranged with Sihanouk to deliver the President's message"--this was the same day--"I decided to fly to Siem Reap without one"--I had the MAAG plane standing by since this morning. "Just before taking off, I called on Nou Ing"--who was the Laotian Ambassador--"and stressed the importance of Souvanna Phouma not going to Xieng Kiengo. To do so would inevitably compromise his position and make him appear to be a dupe of the commies. The United States was still the strongest power in the world both militarily and economically and Laos was dependent upon us for aid. All the Soviets have done is to provide arms to Kong Lê and Pathet Lao. We have been Laos' best friend for years, as amply proven by the record. I knew that Souvanna Phouma wasn't pro-communist, but influenced by the bloc missions here"--Phnom Penh.

"I had not seen him recently, since I felt that if he wished to see me he would let me know. I was at the latter's disposition any time, and said I was 'optimistic' regarding the

current situation, and the hazard that [Alexander] Abramov, the Russian Ambassador, was operating on out-dated instructions in his efforts to get Souvanna to leave for Xieng Kieng. I mentioned Mr. Rusk's talk with the Soviet Ambassador yesterday, thinking this would be a good ploy, although I haven't heard the outcome. I concluded by urging Nou Ing to see Souvanna Phouma immediately and convey the foregoing to him. I learned subsequently that he failed to do so. Dictated a message on my talk to Nou Ing."

"Bob [Charles R. Moore] and I flew to"--Bob, my deputy--"flew to Siem Reap, met by a car from the Grand Hotel, which we had ordered, and were driven to the hotel instead of to Sihanouk's residence as we had instructed the driver. It seems that he not only was deaf, but also didn't understand a word of French!"

O'BRIEN: Sure.

TRIMBLE: "The assistant manager explained to Bob that Sihanouk was off on a picnic somewhere with Leopold but that Nhiek Tioulong"--he was then Foreign Minister--"was in town. We therefore drove to his house where we were met by his private secretary, in sarong and bare feet, who told us that N.T. [Nhiek Tioulong] was taking a siesta and couldn't be disturbed. Bob and I stressed the urgency of our mission and requested that N.T. [Nhiek Tioulong] be awakened. The secretary, who seemed torn between our importuning and a desire not to incur his boss' wrath by waking him up, changed the subject completely by saying that he 'must take a bath' and wandered off to the interior of the building. It appears that once out of sight, he explained the situation to Mme. N.T. [Nhiek Tioulong] who at once got her husband up."

"The Foreign Minister was cordial, and when I explained the purpose of our visit, said he was seeing Sihanouk at 5:00 (it was then 4:30 p.m.) and asked whether I wished to accompany him. I replied that we must return to Phnom Penh almost immediately in order to arrive before the airport closed down because of darkness. However, as the President's letter spoke for itself, I didn' t think that there was anything I could add. I then let him read it. Consequently, I was sure I could depend on him to deliver it to Sihanouk within the hour. N.T. [Nhiek Tioulong] promised to do so. He did not mention that Sihanouk had already turned down the invitation to take part in the Neutral Nations Commission. We than took our leave, getting back to PP [Phnom Penh] around six. I wrote a telegram on our 'mission' during the flight."

"The Soviet plane was still at the airport when I got back"--this was the one meant to take Souvanna to Xieng Kieng--"but to my

dismay, it was being warmed up. Abramov, the Chinese Charge, and four or five thuggish-looking Russians were sitting in the waiting room. Abramov jumped up as we entered and rushed over to shake my hand. I smiled as though I just pulled off a successful coup, which I hoped threw him off balance and went on my way."

"The terminal was being patrolled by members of the Soviet Embassy. Five or six of them were walk up and down the hall and pavement outside the building. As we drove into town, we passed a car containing Souvanna and the two Pathet Lao leaders. Our efforts to keep him here have obviously failed."

This is interesting; then went on: "There is a definite feeling of letdown on my part"--this was February 22, '61--"and of those who have been working with me on the Laos problem, resulting from Sihanouk's refusal to participate in the Neutral Nations Commission and Souvanna Phouma's departure. I haven't always agreed with our policy in Laos during the past two years, although endeavor to carry out instructions regarding it insofar as they related to Cambodia. We made a mistake, I feel, in antagonizing the French and especially in seeking to replace them in the training of the Lao Army. We poured in far too much aid, as indeed we have done here, without insuring ourselves it was being used properly. We should have tried to work with Souvanna even though we distrusted him instead of backing Phoumi and his bankrupt crew. We should have tried to influence Kone Lê, no matter how misguided and naive he was, rather than to treat him as a pariah. We made a grave error in depending upon the military ability and will to fight of the Laotian Army. We failed to keep our allies in line or to appreciate the importance of the propaganda factor, and thus, in effect, isolating ourselves in world opinion. The Neutral Nations Commission idea, and the neutrality proposal, would have been excellent if they had been brought forward last fall, but as it is, they were advanced far too late. Finally, we have failed to take into account the fact that our power position in Asia has declined in the last six years, both in absolute terms and, what is even more important, psychologically in the eyes of the Asian people.

"The Lao Plan"--that's the Neutral Nations [Commission]--"as presently envisaged, is to all effects and purposes stillborn. The Soviets, who sense victory in Laos, where the position of the Pathet Lao has greatly improved since last November, have practically rejected the International Control Commission proposal of the British and the Indians, thus leaving only Sihanouk's fourteen-nation conference idea. Despite a British admission that, if held, it would likely degenerate into a 'slanging match,' I shouldn't be surprised if they swing toward it along with the Indians and other neutrals. The Bloc has, of course, enthusiastically accepted the proposal from the very start. Thus, we may find ourselves out, isolated again, and

forced against our better judgment to take part in Sihanouk's scheme."

"If the conference is held, it certainly shouldn't take place in Phnom Penh where housing facilities for the delegation and press are grossly inadequate, communications extremely poor, and the weather likely to be unbearable for the next two or three months."
I won't carry on with this one. [Pause]

And then February 28th.

O'BRIEN: This is 1961?

TRIMBLE: "USIS gave a short color film on the Kennedy Inauguration to which members of the diplomatic corps were invited. There was heavy attendance on the part of the Indians. As usual, several Russians showed up and presumably took memtal notes on the military equipment displayed in the parade." [Laughter] Now, let's see. [Pause]

"A telegram was received from the Department"--this is March 6--"authorizing me, finally, to see Souvanna Phouma as soon as possible, and talk to him along the lines of my previous conversation with the Prime Minister. We immediately asked for an appointment and were given one for late afternoon. I took Bob Moore with me. Souvanna was friendly, and less nervous than he'd been thelast time I called. I outlined our desire for a truly neutral Laos. Souvanna said that he was greatly pleased with President Kennedy's attitude which was far different from that of Mr. Dulles. He refused, however, to be drawn out on the point I'd raised. He still considers himself to be the legal Prime Minister. He would be willing to take part in a meeting between himself, representing the Vientiane group"--he claimed that he has the support of 90% of the country--"his brother, as spokesman for the Pathet Lao; and Phoumi on behalf of Savannakhet Committee. At first he insisted on the fourteen-nation conference, but later shifted somewhat, asserting that a guarantee of Laos's neutrality by the neighboring powers, particularly China, might be enough."

"We went around and around for over an hour and left with the feeling that, while unable to change him, we gave him plenty of food for thought. As I cabled Washington, 'He strikes me as an intelligent, articulate, and educated man, self-confident, naive in communist aims and methods, deluded by the Pathet Lao, and dominated by his brother.'" He was at that time, but then grew up. Let me see; I won't have to get all of it.

O'BRIEN: Oh, that's quite all right. This is very good, what you're doing here.

TRIMBLE: Let's see, then I went to Hong Kong for a little bit, and. . . . Oh lord, yes, March 14.

O'BRIEN: This is 1961 again?

TRIMBLE: Yes. "Called at the Consulate"--I went to Hong Knog on a week's leave--"in the afternoon and was shown a copy of instructions for Phnom Penh regarding the note that Nong Kimny, the Cambodian Ambassador, delivered to the Department, charging the Vietnamese with "genocide." I mean, this is entirely false.

And I got back, on the 15th of March. "We were met by Bob Moore at the airport, who reported a second talk with Souvanna at which he delivered an oral message from Secretary Rusk. It appears that some sort of tentative modus vivendi had been worked out between Souvanna and Phoumi, but was subsequently rejected by the former after learning that his half-brother was opposed. He was leaving on the same plane"--this is Souvanna--"for a tour of friendly capitals, so I went up to him to bid him good-bye. Abramov and his bully-boys hovered around and I couldn't have any discussion." Then there's more about. . . .

This is with Sihanouk and AID programs, and so forth, and it's not of interest. Mainly, "Russians shot down an attache plane"--that was March 25--"flying over Laos."

O'BRIEN: Was it a U.S. plane?

TRIMBLE: U.S. plane, yes. [Pause] The Secretary came out for a meeting, I think it was a SEATO meeting, March 26, and I went over for it. "I'd no sooner unpacked then had to leave for the residence for a stag lunch with the Secretary. I was very favorably impressed by him--intelligent, alert, modest--and thus far not possessed with the veneer of hardness which Washington brings out. He questioned me briefly on Cambodia. I gathered he'd not gone into the subject to any extent any extent, for in a subsequent conversation he requested me to give his regards to the King who'd died a year before." [Laughter] Now, this is not meant to be cirticism, for he has been in office just a short time; he's had to deal with so many really important matters that it would be unreasonable to expect him to be briefed on Cambodia.

"Another inquiry from the Secretary as to what Sihanouk would do if we cut off aid. I replied that he would return to the Bloc, from which he had already had a standing offer for all the military aid he desires. By furnishing Military Assistance Program aid we are helping the most dependable element in the country and, while not on our side, they are not pro-communist."

"The talk at lunch naturally centered on Laos. Mr. Rusk stressed that the President's statement made it entirely clear that while we were willing to agree on a truly neutralized status for that country, we would not permit it to go communist and would fight to prevent such a development. Others present at the lunch included Durbrow, Win Brown, Alex Johnson, [Paul H.] Nitze, Hobby"--Who's Hobby?

O'BRIEN: Oh, not Oveta Culp [Hobby]?

TRIMBLE: No, no; I don't remember. "Admiral [Harry D.] Felt and [Sterling J.] Cottrell. There was Thanat Khoman, and talking to him, [Mouvre] Couve de Murville. And then Averell [Harriman] was coming along."

"Meanwhile, I talked with Sihanouk from time to time about Laos and he felt that we were too late in our proposal, that we were much too late."

"Then there was talk"--this is in April--about having a conference, a fourteen-nation conference or some type of conference--reconvening to the Geneva conferences in Cambodia. This is April 8th: "Upon my return to the chancery"--I flew out with Sihanouk for some sort of ceremony--"I found a NIACT [Night Action Cable] from the Department cancelling previous instructions to discuss logistics of the conference with Sihanouk. I hadn't, since there'd been no opportunity to talk with him alone. However, it was irritating to learn the telegram had taken ten hours to get here."

Let's see. "Then on April 12, Sihanouk sent us a note"--a circular note--"saying that because of opposition on the part of certain powers"--that is, the United States and United Kingdom--"Sihanouk wished to propose Geneva, rather than Phnom Penh, for the conference. However, he disagreed completely with the Western and Indian view that a cease-fire should precede the meeting and felt that this should be arranged after the conference had gotten under way."

This is on April 13th. "I sent an urgent message to Washington recommending that the Press Office of the State Department make a statement to the effect that we hoped Sihanouk would open the Laos meeting since he was the father of the idea. The French Ambassador is doing the same. We should move fast if we are to move at all, as otherwise we'll be caught flat-footed by the Russians as we usually are in such matters." Well, we did ask him to be.

Then we had the Cuban affair.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Do you have something in the way of. . . . Well, were you asked to inform. . . .

TRIMBLE: April 19, '61: "The news from Cuba continues to be most sketchy and hence I feel forboding. The President wrote an excellent reply to [Nikita S.] Khrushchev's message of protest. I have had it reproduced and sent to all Western and neutral missions here. I also stressed the points he made, at weekly staff meetings." Then there was some sort of reception that afternoon. "The UAR [United Arab Republic] envoy saw me arrive and disappeared shortly after we entered the room as a protest, as I learned later, against our part in Cuba."

O'BRIEN: Did Sihanouk ever say anything about the Bay of Pigs?

TRIMBLE: No. I've got it in April 20th: "The rebellion in Cuba has collapsed. Apparently, number landed was only around twelve hundred and had practically no air cover, while Castro was able to attack them with MIG's, Soviet tanks, and artillery. Another example of too little and too late. Naturally, La Depeche [du Cambodge]"--which was a leftist newspaper in Cambodia--"is strongly critical of us. It claims the United States is doing just what the Russians did in Hungary. There is a simile of a different kind: there the Russians crushed a move for freedom by the people, and in Cuba, Russian arms were used in the same way. Governor Stevenson [Adlai] delivered a superb reply to Raul [Castro Ruz] tirade at the [United Nations] Security Council, which I brought to the attention of all members of the staff."

Now I'll go on to Averell, if I can find that. "May 1 marked the return of Sihanouk from Laos, where he had been attending the late King's funeral. As is customary, all Chiefs of Mission and members of the Government assembled at the airport to greet him. His plane was an hour late and the sun hot, but at least he didn't give a speech on his arrival as is his want to do. I was awakened that evening by the duty officer with a flood of cables, including one en clair, summarizing"--wait a minute, here it is, yes--"Sihanouk's statement to the press on his departure that morning from Vientiane: that because of the opposition of the Laotian King he was withdrawing his sponsorship of the fourteen-nation conference scheduled to open in Geneva on May 12th, and at which he was meant to give the inaugural address; and his suggestion that the three groups in Laos--the Government, Pathet Lao, and Souvanna Phouma's 'neutralists'--meet in Phnom Penh to decide the composition of a delegation which would represent Laos at the conference. He also said he would not go to Geneva and that Cambodia would not be represented there. Another message indicated that Ambassador-at-Large Harriman would arrive here May 3 and was anxious to have talks with Sihanouk and Souvanna. Finally, there was a tres urgent note from

the Foreign Office requesting the Chiefs of Mission meet with Sihanouk the following morning."

"No sooner had I gotten to bed again than my Public Affairs Officer arrived breathless with excitement. It seems that he had been awakened by the Japanese counselor who had attended a dinner that evening given by Sihanouk in honor of the departing Japanese Ambassador. At it, Sihanouk had told of his talk with the Laotian King that morning and had expressed the view that the Americans were behind the latter's opposition to the conference, presumably because they were planning to send forces to Laos rather than take part in a conference where we were faced with defeat"--this is Sihanouk. "This, of course, is ridiculous, and I was able to disabuse the Foreign Minister and others the following day. However, the leftist press played it up for twenty-four hours before my quiteus could enter into effect."

"The meeting with the Chiefs of Mission was charged with excitement. After expressing his regret at calling us together at such short notice and having resorted to the unorthodox procedure of having us meet with him, the Chiefs of State, instead of with his Foreign Minister"--we've talked about this--"Sihanouk said the matter was so important and time was of such essence that he felt compelled to address us himself. He then launched into a long account of his final conversation with the King (of Laos). The latter had made it quite clear that he resented Cambodia's interference in purely a Laotian affair; he had never done so in Cambodian matters. He was opposed to the conference idea and if outsiders would only let them alone the Laotians could settle their differences among themselves. The Laos situation was caused by the North Vietnamese who wanted more land. They were seeking to annex Laos, would then try to do the same to Cambodia."

"Sihanouk, who was extremely nervous and excited, said the Laotian King seemed to feel that Cambodia was more at fault than the U.S., the Russians, the Chinese, and the North Vietnamese; and to regard Cambodia as the 'public enemy number one.'" The King said all this.

"Sihanouk continued that he had only been trying to help in putting forward the conference proposal and the meeting between the Laotian factions in Phnom Penh. However, since the King didn't want his help and thought that if left alone he could settle things, he, Sihanouk, would abide by the wishes of a fellow sovereign, and therefore would wash his hands of the whole affair. He ended by asking us to transmit his views to our government."

"I was asked to remain behind in order to discuss Harriman's visit. I endeavored to calm the little man down, expressing my puzzlement at the King's attitude, my regret that Sihanouk was withdrawing from

the conference and the hope that he would reconsider. He again stressed that he was only trying to help, but as this wasn't wanted, he felt obliged to stop his efforts. He was sorry at the way things had turned out, but his mind was made up and under no circumstances would he go to Geneva or send a Cambodian delegation there."

"He then said he was planning to see Souvanna Phouma the next day and would keep him in a closet while he saw Harriman and me. After we had had our talk, Souvanna could join us. He also said he'd give a dinner for Harriman in the evening with only three present: himself, Harriman, and me."

"I then returned to the Embassy to draft a telegram to Washington on the momentous events which had just transpired. Parenthetically, it is still unclear as to what happened in the talk between Sihanouk and the King. They haven't gotten along since 1953, when Sihanouk reportedly resented the then Crown Prince of Laos's advice that Cambodia not withdraw from the French Union, and this tiff didn't help matters. Also it is quite possible the King was irritated by Sihanouk's meddling and frankly told him so. The latter has a penchant for this but until now no one has put him in his place, and he didn't like it. Finally, both are vain and egotistical."

"Mr. Harriman arrived from Saigon the morning of the 3rd. I was, of course, on hand at the airport while the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs and the Chief of Protocol represented the Cambodian Government. An Honor guard was lined up out of respect for the President's personal representative. Unfortunately, as I soon found out, Harriman had forgotten his French; also is deaf."--I don't think he ever knew much French.--"Nevertheless, the 'press conference' attended by the AP [Associated Press] correspondent and the UPI [United Press International] stringer went off all right."

"We then drove to the chancery where I briefed Harriman on the developments of the preceding days and the situation here. He carried considerable 'side,' is articulate, and a smooth talker, but not too well informed on the background of the Laotian problem"--which he wasn't [Laughter]. "Let us hope that he is well indroctrinated between now and May 12th as he expects to be the head of our delegation at Geneva. I had him to lunch with [redacted] the head of the political section. To my regret, Bob Moore was away."

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"I picked up Harriman at the residence at 5:00--he'd been resting--and, together with an escort officer from the Foreign Ministry, drove to Sihanouk's villa. To my surprise, Sihanouk's English was quite good"--I always talk to him in French--"thus obviating the need for me to act as interpreter, a job I hate. Harriman assured him of

the President's desire for a truly neutral Laos. He admitted for the President, that mistakes had been made by the previous Administration" --which is true--"but stressed that what is past is past and that our policy has changed. He also expressed regret that Sihanouk had withdrawn from the conference, but didn't allow the latter the time to go into the reasons for reaching that decision, which I had already heard and reported to Harriman. Sihanouk made his usual point that if we had accepted his proposal for a conference when first put forward last January the West would have been in a far better position than it is today. He felt it is now too late and seemed convinced that the commies will take over Laos, a development which he envisages with the greatest concern as it would mean a communist state on Cambodia's borders. Harriman then asked for Sihanouk's views as to what we should do in this area. Sihanouk was flattered, as Harriman intended he should be, and said he would think it over and write the President. He apologized for Souvanna's absence, stating that the latter had sent a letter to his First Minister"--Sihanouk's First Minister--"that he would be delayed in getting here because of bad weather in northern Laos. Sihanouk remarked that the telegram had been sent from Hanoi! At Harriman's suggestion, however, he would arrange an interview between himself, Souvanna and me. We left after fifty minutes and drove back to the Embassy where we made notes on our talk so that the Political Officer could prepare a draft of a report to Washington."

"We returned to the Prince's villa that evening for dinner. Others present included the Foreign Minister, the First Minister, the French Ambassador to Cambodia and Laos, and Andre Kostelanetz, and our respective wives. Kostelanetz had orchestrated and conducted several of Sihanouk's compositions, and hence is a great favorite. We marched into the dining room to 'The Stars and Stripes Forever,' played by Sihanouk's private orchestra and then were diverted by other well-known compositions, including, by chance, several written by the Prince himself!" [Laughter]

Well, this is too long; I won't continue all this.

O'BRIEN: If you can get into some of the substance of the. . . . Go ahead, I think that's very good.

TRIMBLE: "Harriman gave a toast in which he praised Sihanouk as one of the world's leaders in the cause of peace; that, naturally, was a great success. Then they went over to the palace, the Throne Room was thrown open for Harriman's inspection. Then back to the house where we worked over a draft of a telegram for the President. Like several Ambassadors with whom I have been associated, Averell Harriman is more cautious in his reports than I am, in the sense that bluntness might not always be

appreciated by the reader." He is, he's very good at this. Then he left; Averell got up at 6:00 to catch a 7:15 plane.

"As Harriman and I drove to the airport I espied an IL-14 in the apron and realized it was Souvanna's plane. This was confirmed by the Secretary General who was waiting to see Harriman off. Through some slip-up, no one was there from the Soviet Embassy, so Souvanna's entourage were huddled together in the VIP room awaiting transportation to town. Harriman"--this was a wonderful one--Harriman at once went up to him, spreading personality and goodwill. Souvanna seemed greatly pleased. He assured us of his desire for a neutral Laos and said he was convinced this was shared by the Bloc. As evidence of his 'independence' he stated he had told the Chinese and North Vietnamese that if they tried to take over his country, he'd oppose them!"

Harriman was at his best there; he got along well with Sihanouk and he got along well with Souvanna and that was one of the changing points in Souvanna. Then of course the--I won't go on with this--then, of course, there was the conference itself, but this is merely some of the background for it.

One more story I did want to tell you about the President. I came home in 1961 on leave. I saw the President that summer at the White House, briefly, and told him of the situation in Cambodia. Sihanouk was coming over for the opening of the U.N. General Assembly in the fall of '61. The previous year he'd been over--1960--where he felt he'd been insulted because no senior officers from the State Department had met him, that he'd been given an escort car without a Mars light on it, police escort, and so forth. He was very miffed by the whole thing. I reviewed the story in the Department and expressed the hope that he be given a red carpet treatment this time. It was then decided to hold me over--my leave was up--for the General Assembly opening which Sihanouk would attend. So I urged Alex Johnson, who was then Under Secretary for Political Affairs, to arrange for an appointment for the President to receive Sihanouk in New York at his hotel. "Well, that would be very difficult; the President is very busy; he can't receive everybody." You know the saying, "just this one," etc. But I finally persuaded him to get the message through to the President and the President replied yes, he would. Then I arranged for--not arranged, but I was pushing this thing--for the Assistant Secretary for Far East Affairs--the fellow, who is it?

O'BRIEN: [Walter P.] McConaughy.

TRIMBLE: McConaughy, to go up and meet Sihanouk at what was then Idlewild Airport. Sihanouk arrived and we had a press conference. . . . Do you want to leave?

O'BRIEN: No, I was just. . . .

TRIMBLE: We had a press conference all arranged for him and he was very pleased with that. Special cars drove him and his suite into town in New York. Next day the Secretary called on him--that was Mr. Rusk--which pleased him a great deal, everything went fine! And the following day he went to the President's hotel--I was there, we were taken up to his private apartment--and the President couldn't have been better. He talked to Sihanouk.

BEGIN SIDE I, TAPE II

O'BRIEN: Okay, would you like to continue now on that?

TRIMBLE: Yes. The President was extremely well briefed on Cambodia, on Sihanouk's part in Geneva and his talks with Harriman and showed a great interest in the country. Sihanouk had been--the evening before when he had been called upon by the Secretary--had been highly nervous and was looking at me all the time as a face he knew.

O'BRIEN: Right.

TRIMBLE: But with the President, he looked straight at the President. There was something in the President's personality which drew him out and from then on he was just listening, listening to his words. As I said, Mr. Kennedy was extremely cordial. He gave a tour de horison of the whole Southeast Asis area. The President was very frank, and treated Sihanouk with great respect as another Head of Government. There was no feeling of superiority, of which Sihanouk was very appreciative, for he's very sensitive to things like that. Further on in the meeting, Sihanouk gave the President a centuries old Khmer head;--/ pointing / that's a modern copy of one. It's against the law to take ancient art pieces out of the country, but Sihanouk could do so and gave one to the President which he accepted with warm thanks and probably gave it to the Smithsonian afterwards. And then he / the President / said, "Well, I hope you will come over and visit us next year, " which I had hoped the President would do. The State Department was saying, "No, we can't ask the President to have any more official visits, he's too busy." Sihanouk was in seventh heaven, because he had--he counted on his watch--we'll say fifty-three minutes with the President alone, just us, and no other Head of State then attending the UN had had that much time. And he counted out for me how many there were; somebody had had only fourteen minutes, and so on. . . . Well, he couldn't have been happier. Everything went off beautifully. Afterward I said to myself, "Thank God, that's over with," because I just was hoping that this was going to be this way. So I went back

to Phnom Penh completely pleased. When I went to the airport to say good-by to Sihanouk on leaving New York, I thought that he was going to take the plane to Los Angeles, and then immediately continue on. I was so relieved , for everything had gone so well as opposed to last year's visit. He liked the President; he listened to the President; he talked to the President. Well.

But when he got to Los Angeles some Hollywood people gave him a dinner at which a number of leading lights of Holloywood were present. One of them I was told started haranguing him about communism and how Sihanouk was soft on communists, which made him furious. And then some dowager rushed up to Sihanouk, and gushed out, "We don't know who you are, little man, or where you're from, but we love you!" and threw her arms around him. It was just awful. So instead of leaving the United States on cloud seven as he would have been if he'd only flown direct home from New York, he left with a bad taste in his mouth.

Even so, when he got back he was still feeling pretty well. And he got back to Phnom Penh. . . . No, it was on a stopover in Tokyo. He told the press he'd seen the President and had seen Mr. Rusk and Mr. Rusk had suggested some sort of an arrangement to restore relations with the Thai which had been broken some months before; and he thought it was a good idea. Well, when he got back to Phnom Penh still feeling pretty good, it seems that the Thai Prime Minister who had heard Mr. Rusk's proposal that Sihanouk seek to better relations with Thailand and Sihanouk's favorable reaction, declared at his own press conference that this was "sort of warmed-over soup." That made Sihanouk furious as he'd acted on Mr. Rusk's suggestion and had made a friendly gesture in his statement at Tokyo. So then relations with Thailand got worse and with us as well for a while--but never with the President--because Sihanouk thought we were behind the Thai, you see.

From then on, there were letters exchanged from time to time with the President. And when I left--I left in July, yes, it was July 1962--Sihanouk, at his farewell dinner for my wife and me , asked me to convey his warmest regards to the President and spoke of his great admiration for the President, etc. I honestly believe, looking back on it as hindsight now, that if the policy which the President inaugurated, or initiated in 1961 on Laos and his attitude toward Cambodia, and generally, Vietnam, had been followed--or initiated, we'll say--two years before, we would have a great deal different situation in Southeast Asia today.

All right.

O'BRIEN: Okay, well, I'll. . . .

TRIMBLE: But, is what I think now of interest? I don't know if it's of interest or not.

O'BRIEN: I think it is. I think it's not only of interest but of a good deal of importance too.

May I back up a little bit, and talk about some of the things we were discussing here? You were reading out of your diary in regard to Laos. Sihanouk very definately favored Souvanna Phouma, didn't he, in the conflict of the three princes?

TRIMBLE: Yes, I think he did. He did not like Souphanouvong, whom he thought was a communist; and he thought the Pathet Lao was a creature of the North Vietnamese and he disliked the North Vietnamese. So he favored Souvanna Phouma. He thought he was weak, and he didn't like the King, but he thought Souvanna Phouma was the best; yes.

O'BRIEN: Did he at all have any kind of close relations with the others?

TRIMBLE: No.

O'BRIEN: There wasn't any problem at all of Souvanna Phouma getting asylum when he came to Cambodia?

TRIMBLE: None whatsoever, although he did put wraps on him. He said, "You're not to mixed up in politics, now; you're a political refugee, and in a sense, he was. He wasn't too closely guarded or anything; they quartered him in a villa, royal villa, and he had his own people around him. Even so Sihanouk was worried the Chinese might get upset.

O'BRIEN: Well, he was recommending a neutral Laos, and Cambodia as a buffer state . . .

TRIMBLE: Yes, exactly.

O'BRIEN: . . . at an earlier period. Did this ever really get any kind of consideration or hearing in the Department?

TRIMBLE: Yes, I think so. I wasn't in the Department so I couldn't tell, but my impression was they didn't trust Sihanouk.

O'BRIEN: They just didn't trust him, and that was. . . . A little later in 1961, Harriman met with Souvanna Phouma in Rangoon, as I understand, and this is where they decided on the apportionment of the Cabinet.

TRIMBLE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Did you get any insight into this?

TRIMBLE: No, I didn't. Those messages were not repeated to me as I recall. At least I don't have any reference to them. No, the contact was first established, of course, at the airport in Phnom Penh when Harriman was on the way out and they hit it off well. And that continued.

That was '61, and I was on leave. I'd just arrived, actually, in this country. Harriman sent a message asking me to go back to Phnom Penh immediately--recommended I be ordered to go back to Phnom Penh--to be certain we'd get Sihanouk at the meeting. Washington. . . . I didn't want to; I'd just arrived here. And so I said to them, "Is it important?" I didn't think it was important; I thought Sihanouk would come anyhow, which he did. But Harriman knew that I had certain influence with Sihanouk and he wanted to be certain he was coming. Well, he did come, so it was all right.

O'BRIEN: What do you racall from your meetings with President Kennedy during that time, yourself? Didn't you have an appointment with him?

TRIMBLE: I saw him in the summer; it was a very brief one. I did not keep a diary note on it--I didn't know whether I should with the President--as I didn't on his meeting with Sihanouk, although I did write notes on it. Notes on that meeting between Sihanouk and the President were kept in a memorandum which is in the files, but I haven't got a copy of it. I think I prepared it, but I haven't got it.

O'BRIEN: Do you recall anything from the meeting at all?

TRIMBLE: My first meeting with the President?

O'BRIEN: Yes.

TRIMBLE: No, except it was very brief. I had the feeling that he felt I was so much older than he was. And he was very kind, but it almost seemed as though he thought I was the age of Averell Harriman, which I'm not; but, you know, the President was new and young and this was an older man, so showed a sort of deference to the older person as a courtesy.

O'BRIEN: Well, how was Sihanouk responding to these changes in policy towards Laos, when the Kennedy Administration came in?

TRIMBLE: Favorably. He was first upset that his own fourteen-nation proposal that he put forward had been turned down by us.

And he felt that our own neutral nations proposal had come too late. But then, after the messages and letters from the President, and certainly after the meeting with the President, all this disappeared. He really was very, very fond of and greatly impressed by the President.

O'BRIEN: How did he view the enlarging, in those years, the kind of enlarging military commitment and the presence of military aid and advisors in the neighboring countries of Thailand and Laos?

TRIMBLE: He was very, very disturbed about that--the military aid to Thailand and Vietnam--yes, he was very disturbed about it. So we did increase our aid to Cambodia a little bit; it wasn't very much. We did give him at one time some training jets, but we certainly did not provide them with the machine guns so they weren't much good from a military standpoint. He was always suspicious of that. One time, this was in 1962, before I left, the then Foreign Minister--I'm not certain whether it was still Nhiek Tioulong, who was one of the principal members of the government, an anti-communist, I think, and certainly a nationalist--and the head of the army, General Lon Nol. . . . I'm not spelling these names, because they. . . .

O'BIREN: That's fine, yes, we have them.

TRIMBLE: Both approached me as to the possibility of providing arms to form, oh, I think three or four batallions which would patrol the northeastern part of the Cambodian frontier between Laos and Vietnam to prevent the utilization of the area by the Viet Cong. They were going to be very light batallions so the equipment cost to us would have amounted to maybe a couple of hundred thousand dollars or something like that. Both of them wanted this and the proposal had Sihanouk's backing. The Cambodians wanted to increase their army for just this particular purpose. Thus, they agreed that if we gave them those arms, the troops would be used for that purpose and that purpose alone. Whether it was killed at CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief, Pacific] because it might irritate the South Vietnamese, or whether it was killed in Washington, I don't know. I've often thought that with that proposal--which had the complete backing of our MAAG, of course, which was Scherrer at that time--things might have been different. It would have cost very little. That was a thing that never reached the President; it would have been killed by that time.

O'BRIEN: How much of a problem did Cambodia have with these areas? Well, there's certain areas of Vietnam that have minorities of Cambodian origin, the Khmer.

TRIMBLE: Yes, Khmer Krom, they call them.

O'BRIEN: Right, Was this a constant sort of irritation, the Vietnamese treatment of these people?

TRIMBLE: It was, because the Vietnamese, unlike the Cambodians, claim that racial minorities living in the country must be citizens of South Vietnam and they regard them as such. The Cambodian policy is completely different ; the Chinese or Vietnamese living in Cambodia are minorities but they are not citizens of "our" country unless their children happen to marry Cambodians. So they're always regarded and treated as minorities, and have special rights--they call them privileges--exemption from military services and so forth. This was not the attitude of the South Vietnamese Government, which forced the Khmer Krom--there are about eight humdred thousand of them, maybe, in all South Vietnam--into the South Vietnamese Army. Also, the Cambodians claimed that there was persecution of their bonzes--their Buddhist priests--and other discrimination. It may be true; I don't know.

But the Cambodian Government played it up a great deal and I at one time proposed to Sihanouk, in 1961-62, when the issue was getting worse, that there be an exchange of the minority populations. However, he felt that too many problems would be involved. There would have been quite a lot of problems, but even so it might have been done. this was always one of the issues the Cambodians held against the South Vietnamese: the persecution, genocide as they call it. There were always raids back and forth across the border, not by troops, but local people from time immemorial would go across the border and pick up a cow or a water buffalo and take it back. Both sides did it.

O'BRIEN: Thailand and Cambodia broke relations in 1961, October. Did the U.S. in any way try to attempt to prevent that?

TRIMBLE: Yes, we did, but unsuccessfully. And we tried to get them together again. That's one of the times when I wanted Prince Wan to come to Phnom Penh on a visit, to try to restore relations. But this was the time of the Preah Vihear case, when the feeling against Thailand was very strong. And the Cambodians claimed that the Thai were supporting the Free Khmer Movement, as they call the Sam Sary group. Also, it should be borne in mind that during the Second World War, as you recall, of course, Thailand remained neutral. The Thai were given by the Japanese, as a reward for this neutrality, the Province of Battambang which belonged to Cambodia. The Thai were forced to give it back after the Second World War but this has always stuck in the Cambodian craw.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever have a feeling that some of these border incursions that took place by air and by ARVA [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] troops, were they ever in any way timed, or in a sense premeditated, or seemed that way, or appeared that way, or did you ever have any evidence that they were?

TRIMBLE: I had no evidence that they were. I think some were partly due to the ill-defined frontier. When there were raids, that was one of the reasons. Secondly, the local commander may have had some grudge against his counterpart. Actually, at the lower echelons, or at least the first lieutenant, second lieutenant echelons in the Cambodian and the Vietnamese sides, relations were pretty good. But there was a great deal of smuggling back and forth, which had an irritating effect. Still, local relations were pretty good. The Cambodians just don't like the Vietnamese. During the French Protectorate, the French used the Vietnamese--the Vietnamese who are Chinese, are basically Sinic in racial origins, rather than Indic which the Cambodians are, and smarter and quicker as are all people of Chinese descent, while the Cambodians were pretty heavy--as functionaries, small functionaries, minor officials--des fonctionaires, as the French say--while the Cambodians were used sort of as the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. They were kept in menial civil service positions and as a matter of fact the only real service, I mean civil service, that the French established for the Cambodians--a career service, if you want to call it--was the Water and Forest Service that the Cambodians had for their own. But as for the rest, the clerks were mostly Vietnamese, even in Phnom Penh. That was resented.

O'BRIEN: Well, let's pass over to the AID program. We briefly touched on this, somewhat. I sensed from what we've said so far that you personally, as well as I'm sure, the mission, has done a great deal of thinking about the means and the manner of economic development in the country. What kind of economic development were you trying to encourage at that point?

TRIMBLE: One, in the field of education. Now, before independence there was no university in Cambodia; the students would go to Paris for higher education. As Sihanouk told me, many of them came back communists or crypto-communists from the experience. They were poor little people from Southeast Asia who found themselves in a strange and new climate and no one looked after them except the communists. They would meet the students in Marseille and they'd give them money--French communists--and so many of the students came back communists, and some with French wives. The Minister of Information's wife was the daughter of a French communist mayor of some little village.

Once back home they became the intellectual elite. We couldn't get to them; we couldn't change their political views. However, we wanted to reach the youth, the future elite. So we established one of the most successful projects in our AID program, a teachers' training school which was excellent. It was run by Quakers and other groups under AID auspices -- USOM / United States Operations Mission / we used to call AID. It was an excellent training school for future teachers, a full four-year course. Then as the Cambodians were seeking to do more to modernize themselves economically and technically, we wanted to establish and were going to establish, and had the land and plans drawn up for, a technical school, engineering institute. That was what they needed. Also, we built a number of elementary schools all over the country. I used to go out with Sihanouk to inaugurate the schools. That work in the field of education was very, very important.

Second was agriculture; to build up Cambodian agriculture, to improve the type of rice grown, to provide more irrigation, to show them how to control flow of water, and to interest them in certain diversifications. For example, we brought some bulls over, a special type of brahma bull which was suitable for warm climates, tropical climates, to improve their stock; most of the cattle out there were swayback. That was another thing we were working on. Those were some of the fields. Let's see, education, sanitation. The area of sanitation, this was primarily malaria control. In it we worked with the U.N., with the World Health Organization.

When I got to Cambodia, we were all over the ball park and engaged in many little projects, for example, a project for electric power and water power in the port of Sihanoukville. Well, we made an exhaustive study of the situation. It was furnished the Government, but no one paid any attention to it; the Cambodians couldn't understand the study. So I wanted to terminate many of the projects, and concentrate on two or three or four fields rather than cover the whole waterfront. I also wanted to cut down the amount of aid, because I thought we were giving too much; and I wanted to reduce the number of Americans. I once estimated that if, proportionately speaking, the number of Americans in Cambodia on government business--mostly AID and MAAG--was applied in the same proportions to India, we would have had several million American civil servants working in India.

O'BRIEN: That high!

TRIMBLE: It would have been; I mean, in relation to the population of Cambodia and India.

O'BRIEN: Was there any misuse of counterpart funds?

TRIMBLE: Yes, there was certain misuse of it. The Cambodians admitted it. They agreed to pay us back; and we had their promise in writing that they would do so. But I had a hell of a time collecting those debts; we collected some, but there were some outstanding by the time I had left. I don't think they've ever been collected. Still, the amount involved was less than 1% of our aid which was very good.

O"BRIEN: Right. Well, while you were there, Sihanouk nationalized--or was it before you were there?--nationalized the export-import trade.

TRIMBLE: That was after I left.

O'BRIEN: After you left? Was there any kind of response on the part of State, and Washington, in regard to the preliminaries of that?

TRIMBLE: No, it happened after I left, and quite frankly, when I got back after my debriefing, no one asked me anything more about Cambodia.

O'BRIEN: Is that right?

TRIMBLE: Well, I'm not bitter because that's the experience of any Chief, most Chiefs of Missions.

O'BRIEN: Yes, I've heard that. I've heard that from a good many.

TRIMBLE: My views were never sought--and we went through some very difficult periods--but my views were never sought and I obviously wasn't going to advance them; the Far Eastern Bureau and others concerned didn't want them.

O'BRIEN: In any of the AID programs there, was there ever any attempt to tie these with a commitment to the West, like SEATO [Southeast Asis Treaty Organization], even a subtle suggestion?

TRIMBLE: No. No, also we couldn't have aid projects we were funding linked with Bloc aid projects.

O'BRIEN: That was the co-mingling thing, wasn't it?

TRIMBLE: Co-mingling. That was one thing we wouldn't permit. There was one case in which this was charged, a radio station. The Chinese had given the Cambodians something for a radio station and we gave them something else in that field of communications.

That caused great excitement at home. It had happened before I got there--because I didn't want us to get in that field. There was some investigation on the part of the Congress, but nothing much came from it.

O'BRIEN: The MAAG program never really came off very well, did it?

TRIMBLE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Oh, it did?

TRIMBLE: Oh, yes. Particularly under Chase and Sherrer. It was a good program, and our people won the respect of many of the officers in the Cambodian Army. We had some very good officers out there, younger officers mostly. Many of them spoke French quite fluently. It was a small program but a good one. Now the French had their training program as such.

O'BRIEN: Yes, this is what I was really referring to.

TRIMBLE: The French had the responsibility for the training function while we would furnish the equipment and supervise the use and maintenance of the equipment, but the actual training was by the French. Well, obviously there was a considerable jealousy between the French and the Americans on that one. I remember the first Armed Forces Day, which was shortly after I arrived in 1959, and I sensed this feeling between the two groups. I was to give a speech at the Armed Forces Day celebration which the MAAG was putting on and to which the military from other countries, the French, and the Cambodians, had been invited. I gave a speech in French and talked about the old alliance between the United States and France, going back on how they helped us in our Revolution, how we had fought together against the Germans in two World Wars, how in my youth I had served as an artilleryman on the French '75, and so forth. I just laid it on. The reaction was very favorable. The MAAG Chief, General Chase, was very good in his dealings with the French. He'd play up to the French General, General Seita, and his officers followed his lead. Afterwards, Tony Sherrer kept in close contact with the French military; so it was really remarkable what good relations we had with the French. We took the line that we were not trying to replace them, but to work with them in the interest of the Free World. Our boys did extremely well and the French--no one ever tried that approach before--and the French liked it.

We had the same good relationship with the French Ambassador; he hadn't particularly liked Americans before so I made it a point to see him frequently to exchange information, and it worked. There was always the feeling that we had replaced them in Vietnam. They didn't want that same thing to happen in Cambodia and it didn't.

O'BRIEN: Well, when this business about the army and the training jets, and then the Russians gave the MIG's to Cambodia, that was just about the time you left?

TRIMBLE: Just about the time I was leaving, yes.

O'BRIEN: Did you get any insight into. . . . What were you recommending?

TRIMBLE: I was recommending that we give jets to the Cambodian Air Force, because if we did not furnish them, the Russians would I pointed this out time after time after time. We finally, reluctantly, gave them I think six jets, training jets, but as I said earlier, without armament, and the type of trainer that could not be armed, apparently. Well, that hardly satisfied the Cambodians. We did train some of their pilots in Texas--Cambodian pilots--but it was too little and too late. This was because of objections, not in Washington I don't think, but in CINCPAC or something of that sort.

O'BRIEN: Did you get any insight into the Japanese role in economic relations here with Cambodia during those years?

TRIMBLE: The Japanese took no political interest whatsoever in Cambodia, which I always resented because I thought that as fellow Asians and as citizens of a Free World country, the Japanese could have played a very important role. They were trying to increase their trade--purely exports--and having some success, but it was later that it really increased, after I left. That was one thing, and then I was always upset by the fact that the Indians--as representatives of a great neutral Asian nation, and linked historically through Indic civilization--did very little. The Indians never exercised any influence, or tried to, which they could have done. I made a special trip to Delhi once and talked to the Foreign Minister about the Indians taking greater interest in Cambodia. I couldn't see [Jawaharlal] Nehru; I met him, but I didn't talk to him on the subject. They just said, "No. We have our own country, with our own problems." They couldn't have cared less, which I regarded as a mistake on the Indians' part. In fact, an Indian Ambassador was sent to Cambodia who couldn't speak French.

O'BRIEN: Well, this was about the point that you were relieved there. Was there any other circumstances than the normal . . . [Interruption] Oh, one other thing. Was Seymour Janow, did he assume the. . . .

TRIMBLE: Seymour Janow came out to Phnom Penh--he was the head of the Far Eastern branch of AID--and I talked to him. I have a reference to him in this book here, somewhere. But I didn't get to know him very well because I left shortly. . . . Well, I knew him. I don't remember the date of his visit. When did he take over? In '61 or '62, I don't remember which.

O'BRIEN: It was late in '61, I believe.

TRIMBLE: Yes, I think that was it. So I didn't have a great deal to do with him. Good man.

O'BRIEN: Well, what were the circumstances in your leaving? Now, was it just a normal transfer of post, or. . . .

TRIMBLE: Ordinarily, Phnom Penh is a two-year post because of health conditions, debilitating climate, etc. I had had about thirty-odd medical evacuations in my staff the first year there and about twenty-eight my second year. I thought, "Well, lightening is striking here and striking there and the doctors say your third year is probably the worst; you're more susceptible." But the President asked me to stay on, which I did for another year, and then I said, "I'd like to leave." I talked to Averell at Baguio about it. So they transferred me to Washington, which I had asked for. I was there thirty-nine months which was longer than almost anybody we had ever assigned there. I just don't think I could face that heat again.

O'BRIEN: It is really debilitating, probably.

TRIMBLE: Actually, you find in a place like that, it's debilitating. You don't have the energy you have when you're first starting out full of vigor. Our people used to have to go up to the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia, which are not very high, or to Hong Kong, just to get a change from those flat, dusty plains, tropical climate and the continuous heat.

O'BRIEN: I guess Sihanouk's visits to France were very much this kind of thing.

TRIMBLE: Oh yes, that was one of the reasons why he did.

O'BRIEN: What did you tell Ambassador [Philip D.] Sprouse when you briefed him?

TRIMBLE: I gave him the whole story of what I had experienced. He came over here [in Maryland] for some Departmental matter one ought to talk about it. As my wife was present and as he was undergoing his briefing in Washington, he seemed more interested, as I recall, in housekeeping activities out there, how the house was run, the servants, etc. I thought he'd be an excellent successor because he speaks very good French; he had Chinese as well. A very attractive personality, but he didn't seem to get along with Sihanouk--I don't know why--particularly well--because Sihanouk would always have other people present when they talked. This was a new policy for he didn't have it when I was there; I used to talk to him alone. But I think possibly one of the reasons was that Philip isn't married. He was rather much of an old bachelor in his ways, and Sihanouk preferred Ambassadors with wives, particularly if he thought they were attractive; it adds a sort of eclat. And Sprouse didn't have one. And then Sprouse was ill, too. Anyhow, they just didn't seem to hit it off. As I said, the President and Sihanouk got along beautifully together, it just seemed to work that way from the very start. But for some reason or other, Sprouse, as far as I can understand, and Sihanouk just didn't hit it off with one another any more than did our first Ambassador there Robert McClintock, just didn't hit it off with Sihanouk because they were both somewhat prima donnas and I guess that the country was too small for both. Philip isn't, nor, I believe, am I. It's funny, Sihanouk either likes somebody or dislikes him. He liked Averell. He didn't like some other people we sent out there, I mean on other special missions.

O'BRIEN: Oh, by the way, when Harriman came, did anyone else come with him?

TRIMBLE: No.

O'BRIEN: He was pretty much alone. And [William H.] Sullivan wasn't with him at this point, was he?

TRIMBLE: No, that was later.

O'BRIEN: Okay. We were talking a little while ago, too, about the Country Team, and the letter from President Kennedy and all. Did this change the workings of the Embassy in any way for you?

TRIMBLE: We were already working the way he wanted, pretty much the way he indicated. We had a very good Country Team. Only once did they want to split on a question. That was when they proposed to send in a divided report and I said I wouldn't permit a split one; we must work out an agreed one. It was for

something to do with how much economic aid and how much military we should furnish. So we worked out a compromise. We had, I think, probably the best Country Team in Southeast Asia because there were extremely good people on it, excellent, MAAG, DCM, AID Director, and the Public Relations Officer.

O'BRIEN: They all kept you pretty well informed about what they were doing?

TRIMBLE: Yes. I couldn't have it otherwise [redacted] No. There's no question about that; they were very cooperative, all of them.

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O'BRIEN: Did you ever make direct contact with the White House, in any of these years, or was most of the contact through the Department?

TRIMBLE: That was always frowned upon.

O'BRIEN: Right. But some Ambassadors, you know, will . . .

TRIMBLE: Some have done it, and I think probably for a very good reason. But for a career officer it's frowned upon and you just don't do it. Some career officers have done so, but they've generally known the President, whoever he may have been, before and have a personal relationship with him which I did not have with President Kennedy. I did not know him until 1961.

O'BRIEN: When you were back here in 1961, did you talk to anyone else in the White House, have any long conversations or anything you remember?

TRIMBLE: Yes. What was the fellow's name who afterward went as Ambassador to Chile?

O'BRIEN: [Charles W.] Cole?

TRIMBLE: No.

O'BRIEN: No, no Cole. You mean after Cole? It would have been after Cole.

TRIMBLE: Yes. He was in the White House under President Kennedy; he left about '63, I think it was, '64. I forgotten his name.

O'BRIEN: Not [Robert Forbes] Woodward?

TRIMBLE: No, although I did talk to him. I did not see McGeorge Bundy; he was too busy. I've got this all down; I'm thinking of the man who dealt with Southeast Asia on the White House staff.

O'BRIEN: We'll think of it.

TRIMBLE: And then there was a Vietnamese Working Group under [Sterling J.] Cottrell, an inter-agency committee; I talked to them about the situation in Cambodia.

O'BRIEN: Did you notice any difference in your working relationships--between Parsons and McConaughy--when McConaughy became Assistant Secretary?

TRIMBLE: No. I've known Parsons for years and years and years; I didn't know McConaughy even though we entered the Service about the same time--I think he entered six months before me and had attended the Foreign Service School together, but I didn't know him well. No, I disagreed with certain of Jeff's [Parson's] policies, not so much on Cambodia but on Vietnam and Laos, particularly Laos. But our relations were good; we exchanged letters, quite frequently, but I didn't have much correspondence with McConaughy.

O'BRIEN: And then Harriman came in . . .

TRIMBLE: Harriman came in as Assistant Secretary just when I was leaving.

O'BRIEN: How about other people in the Far East section, and the people particularly dealing with Southeast Asia? Do you recall much about people like [John M.] Steeves, or Avery Peterson?

TRIMBLE: John Steeves was Consul General in Hong Kong when I arrived there and afterwards he was made Deputy Assistant Secretary. I saw him at the conference in Bangkok, the SEATO conference in '61. He and I exchanged letters back and forth from time to time, largely on personnel matters. Peterson was Consul General in Singapore, and I never got there. Then there was the Southeast Asia Office, which dealt with the area, a fellow named [Daniel V.] Dan Anderson, who was a very good friend of mine--I think he retired recently--was the Director. The Deputy was Bob [Robert G.] Cleveland, a fellow named Bob Cleveland. The Desk Officers for Cambodia were also very competent. One of them was

Arzac, Daniel Arzac, who had worked under me in Phnom Penh; very good, he spoke Cambodian very well. And another one was Laurin Askew. Askew was very able.

O'BRIEN: Well, at the SEATO conference, there, and in your whole tenure here as Ambassador, did you find any kind of fundamental philosophical or political or economic differences which divided the people who were involved in not only the formation, but at the ambassadorial level the implementation of policy?

TRIMBLE: Oh, yes! We had some disagreements. I disagreed with Alex Johnson at times, about Cambodia versus Thailand matters. He didn't want any military aid for my clients and the Thai would criticize him for not stopping, it complaining that we were giving military aid to Cambodia, which was not pro-West, etc. So we disagreed on policy matters like that, and as I said, I often disagreed with Durbrow, but never very seriously. There's always, as I also said earlier, a certain amount of parochialism. But both of them were my friends, which always helps. Particularly Durbrow because I'd known him for many years while I didn't know Alex as well. And I found, actually, after President Kennedy had . . .
[Interruption]

O'BRIEN: Well, actually I'm through with the questions I came with on Cambodia. Is there anything else that we've left out?

TRIMBLE: No, except I will say that after--this happens under any administration, I suppose--when a new administration comes in most of the Chiefs of Mission must automatically submit their resignations following the change. I felt that some of the appointments made in the Southeast Asis area by President Kennedy, after he came in, while they were good people, some weren't particularly well qualified for the office they were given.

O'BRIEN: Specifically, can we get into some?

TRIMBLE: Well, I can't remember his name, we sent one man to Burma, who wasn't. . . .

O'BRIEN: That's [John S.] Everton, I believe, John Everton.

TRIMBLE: Very nice; he did have the background, but he didn't get along with the present Government for he'd been there before and that sometimes hurts, if you've been there under the previous regime. I didn't think the man in New Zealand. . . . While very pleasant, wasn't particularly suited for the job.

O'BRIEN: He was a former military man, wasn't he?

TRIMBLE: I've forgotten now. I met him at the Baguio Conference. [William E.] Stevenson was just as nice as he could be, but I didn't think he was handling the Filipinos as expertly as might have been done by someone with more experience in foreign affairs. Actually, it was a new field for him. I don't think [Frederick E., Jr.] Rich Nolting who is a career officer in a sense--he came in the Service during the war--was well suited for Vietnam, because he had had no Far East experience and he had practically no briefing in the Department. He was shot over within two weeks from NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] to Vietnam under very tricky circumstances. On the other hand, the man they sent to Thailand was. . . .

O'BRIEN: That was Kenneth Young.

TRIMBLE: Kenneth Young knew quite a lot about Southeast Asia; he'd been dealing with the area for some years, but he didn't get along too well with Thanat Khoman. He gave a speech. . . . Oh my, I remember very well. Thanat Khoman gave us a luncheon--we were going home in '61, flying from Bangkok--and Ken Young was there, and his wife, my wife, Thanat Khoman and his wife, but that was all. Maybe one of those . . . .

MRS. TRIMBLE: I think his wife wasn't there.

TRIMBLE: Wasn't she?

MRS. TRIMBLE: She was at a meeting some place.

TRIMBLE: That's right. Anyhow, Ken Young had given a speech entitled, "The New Frontier," which was obviously a very appropriate topic at the time. But Thanat Khoman said, on listening to it, "Mr. Ambassador, your speech was all right, but I didn't think the title was entirely appropriate to this area." [Laughter]

O'BRIEN: How about [Charles F.] Baldwin?

TRIMBLE: I think he did a good job, as far as I know. I knew him before; he'd served in London, and he did a good job in Malaysia.

O'BRIEN: Well, about the only one left. . . .

TRIMBLE: And of course the man in Japan was outstanding.

O'BRIEN: Ambassador [Edwin O.] Reischauer. How about [J. Kenneth] Galbraith? Did you ever have any. . . .

TRIMBLE: Yes. I only met him once.

O'BRIEN: What was your reaction to him?

TRIMBLE: Well, he seemed highly intelligent, aggressive, a man who was obviously interested in India and in his own career. I didn't find him particularly sympathetic, to use that expression; he couldn't have cared less about Cambodia. I met him at a luncheon--Durbrow's--but I saw very little of his work. I was not impressed by his personality, I mean, quite apart from his unquestionable intellectual ability.

O'BRIEN: Well, Ambassador [Howard P.] Jones had developed somewhat the same kind of relationship with Sukarno that you had with Sihanouk. Well, that was, in some ways, was kind of symbolic of the Kennedy Administration, I believe, that they had taken a very sympathetic view towards. . . .

TRIMBLE: Jones got along beautifully with Sukarno. And in a place like that, in a country of that type where there's one man, you have to whether you like it or not; you have to get along with him, he's the force. And Jones did it.

O'BRIEN: Was there ever any contact between Sihanouk and Sukarno?

TRIMBLE: Yes, and they didn't like each other at all. Sukarno came to Phnom Penh for a visit. Wasn't it 1960, Nannie?

MRS. TRIMBLE: What?

TRIMBLE: Sukarno came to a dinner Sihanouk gave while on a state visit.

MRS. TRIMBLE: He came once, but it wasn't a state thing.

TRIMBLE: Anyhow, he kept on wearing that little cap of his all the time which Sihanouk didn't like. And he had his little swagger stick which he would put down on the table. He gave a speech in which he talked about, "little, poor little Cambodia. In my country, we have X many millions, and how many have you got here?" Sihanouk didn't like that at all. And then he went off after dinner to a night club and allegedly got drunk, and that was all reported back, so Sihanouk just didn't like him at all!

MRS. TRIMBLE: Oh, Sukarno, I was thinking of Souvanna; oh, he was wild!

TRIMBLE: And he was uncouth.

MRS. TRIMBLE: He came in '59, because I'd just arrived.

TRIMBLE: He was uncouth, and for Sihanouk, anyone who was uncouth was figuratively, brushed aside.
[Interruption]
The spring of 1961.

O'BRIEN: Now, this was [Chester] Bowles.

TRIMBLE: Right. Chet. Yes. With that outgoing personality, he flattered Sihanouk, but he just didn't do so as successfully as Averell had done. He thought he was putting his personality over on Sihanouk, but Sihanouk wasn't taken in by the flattery. Averell could do so, but Chet could not.

O'BRIEN: Well, in regard to the ambassadorial appointments, backing up a bit, a good many of these people, as I understand it, like Stevenson and many others were Bowles' appointments.

TRIMBLE: Yes, they were, almost completely.

O'BRIEN: There was a certain amount of resentment there, wasn't there, on the fairness?

TRIMBLE: Yes, very strong in the Foreign Service. President Eisenhower believed in the career principle, and actually, when I got to Cambodia, every man was career. Robertson felt strongly about it. A year later, during the latter part of the Eisenhower Administration, some were not. It's your own Service, and you feel that if he has done a good job that one of your own people should have a post rather than someone from the outside. I suppose it's a trade school feeling; I don't know, but I believe that if a man is really good, he's probably much better than anyone from the outside. And you also find others, like David Bruce if you want, and I'm sure there are many, many others from outside the career who are excellent. But, by and large, I'd rather have a career man to work with, or under, or nearby, than someone who is not. Because they have certain experience and knowledge, the background which you acquire in working this field through years, that another cannot possess, or may not possess. It has nothing to do with ability or brains or intelligence. [Interruption]

Do you know Chet at all?

O'BRIEN: I just met him, and . . .

TRIMBLE: I'm very fond of him; he's an awfully nice guy. But he was not suited for that personnel-choosing job; he just didn't know the people well enough.

O'BRIEN: They got a lot of academic and foundation people, didn't they?

TRIMBLE: Yes, and some of them were good and some were not. Some of them were excellent; some just couldn't.. . .

O'BRIEN: Had you ever met Secretary Rusk before he became Secretary?

TRIMBLE: No. He came in when I was charge in Iceland, right after the War. No, wait a minute! When did he come in? Yes, it was just after the War when [George C.] Marshall was Secretary and I was in Iceland. I never knew him before.

O'BRIEN: How about George McGhee? Had you met George McGhee?

TRIMBLE: Yes, I knew George, not very well. I was in London when he was Assistant Secretary. Incidentally, there's one. . . . Oh, there's another story about President Kennedy--is this still running?

O'BRIEN: Yes.

TRIMBLE: Good lord! When I came back to Washington, I asked for an assignment in the Department; I hadn't had one there for years and years and years. So they put me in African Affairs, for which I wasn't suited, knowing nothing about the area, few people did. I was dealing with the West Coast of Africa, including, among other countries, Guinea.

That was the fall of '62, and Sekou Toure, the President of Guinea, came over on a visit--he is a tough cookie; was meant to be pro-communist, which I don't think he is. He's a nationalist. Tough, but he's not like Sihanouk; he's a different type. Anyhow, he went to see the President, and because I was concerned with the visit, I went along. That was the first time I'd seen the President as a matter of fact, since I resigned as Ambassador. And he did the same job on Sekou Toure that he had done on Sihanouk. They got along beautifully, hit is off wonderfully. I don't know how he did it, because they had to speak through an interpreter. But even then, they went off by themselves for a private talk in the garden and I don't think there was any interpreter present. He just. . . . He had an ability to make people feel at ease and to impress them with

his confidence and sincerity. As with Sihanouk, the President and Sekou Toure were more or less the same age, perhaps Sekou was a little younger. It was very interesting; he had that quality which so few have. President [Lyndon B.] Johnson didn't have it when I saw him with Heads of State. He does not possess the charm of President Kennedy. This is in no way criticism of President Johnson because I admire him. But I don't admire him as much as I did President Kennedy.

O'BRIEN: Just one thought came to mind in regard to Guinea. Harvey Aluminum [Inc.] went in there to get a big bauxite thing, and they were also, in terms of California politics, rather large contributors to the Democratic Party. Did you ever feel any kind of influence or pressure in the Department while you were there in African Affairs?

TRIMBLE: Actually, well, a Harvey man in Washington--I've forgotten his name now--used to often bypass the Department rushing over to the White House. Much as I disapproved of the idea of not proceeding through normal channels, State and AID, that was the use of contacts rather than pressure. [Interruption]

O'BRIEN: Then how about when you were in Cambodia? Any at all?

TRIMBLE: No.

O'BRIEN: There really were not very many large economic interests.

TRIMBLE: No. Olin Mathieson [Chemical Corporation] had some.

O'BRIEN: Caltex [Petroleum Corporation].

TRIMBLE: Caltex was out there; Standard Oil [Co. of N. J.]. I think there were only three American businessmen in Phnom Penh when I was there. No there wasn't. The Cambodians wanted to get the Americans to invest and I wish we had done more; I think we could have done more, but we didn't. It was selling oil, well, selling gasoline, and that was about--a little chemical factory was put up by Olin Mathieson--but that's about all.

O'BRIEN: These were done under the Guarantee Loan [Development Loan Fund] weren't they?

TRIMBLE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Do you have any comments or observations on that Guarantee Loan program?

TRIMBLE: I thought it was a very good program. I was very much in favor of it, and I think it helped a great deal. But I didn't see much of it in Cambodia because it wasn't used there.

O'BRIEN: Can you think of anything else that we should add to this?

TRIMBLE: I'm sure I've covered pretty much of the waterfront. Oh, let me see, wait a minute. I told you about the Blitz story, and we were really in the doghouse on that one. And strangely enough--this could only happen in Cambodia--just when the Blitz thing was over and I was jumped on by Sihanouk, and we were having a tough time, all of a sudden a little man, a Cambodian, came to the Embassy one afternoon and he said he wanted to see me. Well, he didn't see me, but he was asked why he wished to. He said he was in a plot to kill Sihanouk and he knew that we didn't like Sihanouk, the American Government didn't like Sihanouk, and he wanted our assistance. I was called and figured he must be an agent provocateur, you know, or something like this. Anyhow, I said, "Hold him downstairs!" So we called up the Foreign Office but no one answers in the afternoon. So we called up Sihanouk's office; again, no answer. We called up the Ministry of the Interior; no one in. We next called up the head of the police; no one in, off taking naps. So we finally got some junior official in the police department. We held this fellow and finally persuaded police officials to come over and arrest him and take him into custody. It turned out to be the man was plotting against Sihanouk. So having been bitterly criticized for this damn Blitz affair, next day's papers came out: "Our great friends the United States. . . ." It was a crude attempt by the local communists to kill Sihanouk who the following day was to deliver a speech, and they had the dynamite all ready and the bombs to throw at him! That could only happen in a place like that. So having been down, we were suddenly up again. We were fair-headed boys for about six weeks. But it was something. Boy! What an experience it was to serve in Cambodia!