

**Philip D. Sprouse Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 6/24/1969**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Philip D. Sprouse  
**Interviewer:** Dennis O'Brien  
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**Biographical Note**

Philip D. Sprouse (1906-1977) served as a Foreign Service Inspector for the US State Department (1959-1962) before becoming the Ambassador to Cambodia (1962-1964). This interview focuses on Sprouse's previous experience in the Foreign Service, relations between the United States and Cambodia under the leadership of Norodom Sihanouk, and tensions between the nations of the Indochinese peninsula, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

PHILIP D. SPROUSE

June 24, 1969  
Orinda, California

By Dennis O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: I guess the obvious place to begin is just with the question, when did you first meet John Fitzgerald Kennedy?

SPROUSE: The first time I ever saw the President he was a member of Congress -- I think not a Senator at that point -- when he came to Paris (I was in the Embassy at Paris.) He gave a talk at the American Club in Paris, which is a luncheon club, and of course, he made an excellent impression, as you would expect. And this was the first time, but I would assume that I didn't even meet him; at least I saw him and heard him talk.

The first time I really met him was when I had been nominated and confirmed as the Ambassador to Cambodia. I went to the White House accompanied by Mr. Harriman [W. Averell Harriman]. This was, I suppose, since I went out to Cambodia in the summer of '62, this must have been the early summer, perhaps June or July '62. And it was not, to my mind, an altogether satisfactory meeting with the President, for one reason which sort of nettled me later. It nettled me at the time, but it nettled me even more later in retrospect; it nettles me even now when I think of it. Harriman was along, which I thought was unnecessary as obviously I had to be overshadowed by anything Mr. Harriman might say or do. This didn't give you an opportunity

really to establish a sense of rapport with the President himself. Also during the talk with the President, which was desultory, something was brought up about the Foreign Service, and Harriman chimed in. Now this isn't pertinent to Cambodia, but are you interested in this?

O'BRIEN: Right. Yes. Very much so.

SPROUSE: Harriman chimed in about a young officer on our staff at the Embassy in Rome. This was in connection with the Foreign Service and the willingness of the Foreign Service to speak out and express its views forthrightly and expect those views to be heard and so forth. Harriman brought up this young man who had supported strongly what is called the *apertura a sinistra* in Italy, the policy, you know, of the approach to the left, a coalition between the left-wing Socialists and the Christian Democrats, the government party for a decade. He was talking about this man because he felt his views had really not been given credence, had not been listened to and so forth.

I had been an Inspector for the three years preceding this assignment, and I had headed the team of inspectors that had inspected the Embassy at Rome. I had a background, first, of being a China specialist myself. I had gone through the period where the China service was sat on and bitterly criticized for basically what the Foreign Service has always done traditionally in my mind, that is in the areas that I've served in, where you've been in touch with the grass roots of the foreign country. We used to speak the language of the country, which we did in China. We knew what was going on, and we didn't swallow hook, line and sinker the line, the official line, that was put out by the government to which we were accredited. This is logical. In any country you don't do it. I remember at one point, when I was Inspector inspecting in Paris, being instructed by the Department to go down to Nicosia to consult with Chester Bowles on something. Chester Bowles gave me a lecture on the role of the Foreign Service officer almost as if I had no experience in the Foreign Service whatsoever, saying we ought to be out, you know, following the peasant plowing his furrow and so forth and to be in touch with the basic grass roots of the country.

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And, of course, all you could answer to a thing like this was, "This has traditionally been the role of the Foreign Service," or, "This is the thing that we suffered for in China."

Against this background, Harriman brought up this young man in Rome. And I said, "Well, I strongly support the idea of any officer's expressing his views. He's lacking in courage and he dissipates his usefulness if he's not willing to speak out. "But," I said, "I happen to know this young man because I inspected this Embassy last year. And I spent twenty hours by actual count with this young man. Ordinarily, when you inspect a post abroad, you might spend at the most, say, two hours with one officer. But I spent twenty hours with this officer because this officer had a grievance. He felt that his views on policy, this opening to the left, were not being listened to, or at least, if they were being listened to, they were not being accepted.

“And,” I said, “I looked into his record; I read everything that he had written, both telegrams and dispatches; I checked this out with the senior officers at the embassy -- Zellerbach [James D. Zellerbach] had been the Ambassador during this period. I discovered that this young man’s views had been forwarded to Washington, so Washington knew these views; that this young man’s views on policy had been considered at the country team level, which is, after all, the basic mechanism with which you approach all policy questions in missions abroad. The Ambassador knew them; the Deputy Chief of Mission knew them; the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] man knew them; the military knew them; all senior officers in the Embassy knew them.” And there were good reasons from the Embassy’s viewpoint that they were not acceptable to them as a basis for American initiative in putting pressure on the Italian government to follow this particular line. And just as always the question also is: Are we in position really to force the Italian government to do this, and would the Italian government have done it if we had attempted to pressure them into doing it? This is another problem, of course. “But,” I said, “everybody knew this young man’s views. They were debated; they were threshed out; the Department knew them. But this young man carried it beyond that point which to me, to my mind, is not the role of a Foreign Service officer.” I said, “His right to express his views forthrightly and put them on paper is one thing, and the fact they were considered and forwarded to Washington, of course, is good, but with all that he wasn’t

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satisfied.”

He took off on leave at one point, supposedly locally in Europe, and he paid his own way back to the States, going to Washington in order to further again his views and without the knowledge of the Embassy. The Embassy found it out later. And this was slightly -- I wouldn’t say it was underhanded, but it was not altogether ethical because he was trying to do this, in a sense, behind the Ambassador’s back.

Then when Mr. Harriman came to Europe at one point, again trying to conceal this from the Embassy, he arranged through another source, to see Harriman to get these views across to Mr. Harriman, hoping to sell these views to Mr. Harriman in order to get the proper line adopted. In other words, everything this man did was to go out of line go over his superiors’ heads, and always with a certain amount of deception, which to me was not the proper role of a Foreign Service officer.

Now I said I was critical of him in that sense, but I could see that Harriman was just brushing this whole thing aside. And I had a feeling at the end of this exchange that both the President and Mr. Harriman thought the young man was being discriminated against rather than the fact that he himself had gotten all the consideration in the world, far more than we officers got in China when Patrick Hurley was the Ambassador out there. Hurley wouldn’t even permit any reports to be written which were critical of the government to which we were accredited.

O’BRIEN: And his name, what...

SPROUSE: I forget his name. I forget his name now. But I wrote an efficiency report on this young man, and I gave him full marks for his performance because it was superb reporting and he had initiative, everything he did was done well, except his lack of balance and judgment. And I've always felt strongly in the Foreign Service that if any man subordinate to me says "yes" to me all the time, you pretty soon begin to suspect him, and he is not worth his salt. I much prefer to have a man who's working for me not to say "yes" easily. But when, and this is the attitude I always took, that when the decision is made, the policy is laid down, if you don't like it, the only alternative you have to accepting and carrying it out is to submit your resignation.

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O'BRIEN: [Interruption] Oh, we're getting a recording. Good, no problems there. I'd hate to go through a good, stimulating discussion of an hour or so and then discover that we're not getting any recording. Did you have any contacts with senatorial or campaign staff in or before the 1960 campaign of Senator Kennedy's?

SPROUSE: The 1960 campaign?

O'BRIEN: Right. Any of this, senatorial people at all?

SPROUSE: No, no, no, not at all. During the period from the beginning of '59 through '61 I was inspecting abroad for three years, coming back to Washington only just before Christmas and on through January and February before we went out to the field again.

O'BRIEN: In your time in the Foreign Service have you maintained any contacts with any informal or formal groups that perhaps specialize on certain areas of the world? I'm thinking mainly of China. In Washington there are groups of people in the State Department, and also the foundations, the academic community, that have an interest in, let's say, China and the Far East. Have you maintained any contacts with these groups over the years at all?

SPROUSE: Not with groups as such. When I was in China -- of course, I was a China specialist. During that period we met, all of us did, the academic types in this country who were specialists in the Far East with emphasis, of course, on China rather than Japan. There were so few of them in those days I don't think that there were any that we missed. We knew them all, and particularly during the war, when so many of them were either in OSS [Office of Strategic Services] or in some capacity with the State Department. Some of them served in the Embassy, both in Chungking during the war and in Nanking after the war. These were contacts that we've maintained over a period of years because it's always been very helpful to have the benefit of the views of academic specialists who have a degree of knowledge and wisdom about developments



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in an area where they know the historical pattern, the cultural traditions, social and economic aspects, et cetera. As reflected in the career of Ambassador Reischauer [Edwin O. Reischauer] in Japan, such a background is absolutely invaluable.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any contact with people like George McGhee?

SPROUSE: I've met George McGhee, but none, none at all.

O'BRIEN: He's not a personal friend at all?

SPROUSE: No, no, no.

O'BRIEN: How about people like Chester Bowles?

SPROUSE: I've just met Mr. Bowles in Washington and at Nicosia on his famous trip.

O'BRIEN: How about George Ball?

SPROUSE: I just met Mr. Ball after I became the Ambassador to Cambodia. I met Mr. Ball, I think, both before I went out and after I came back. I've always been a great admirer of Mr. Ball because I spent a number of years in Paris and Brussels, nine years to be exact. During that period, particularly in Brussels, the European treaties were benign negotiated, the Rome treaties, you know, the Common Market and Euratom [European Atomic Energy Community]. He was very much the "European" as the representative of Monnet [Jean Monnet] at one point, you know, in Washington. And as a staunch "European" myself, I could only have admiration for George Ball, great respect for him.

O'BRIEN: They had, well, in the interim period between the election and the inauguration, the Administration had some task forces. Did you have any contact with these at all? They studied some problems, of course, concerning the United States and world affairs. Did you have any contact with these task forces at all?

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SPROUSE: No. You see, during this period my specialization in a sense had gone down the river because all the China specialists of the pre-war vintage were no longer assigned to posts in Asia or had anything to do with the field of Chinese affairs. They were exiled to other places. Tony Freeman [Fulton Freeman] was in Rome; I was in Paris; Penfield [James K. Penfield] was in London; and so none of the pre-war China specialists worked on China anymore. So consequently you, in a sense, drifted out of your own area and you lost your expertise, which is inevitable after staying away from

a field for a number of years. You lost your real expertise in the process, which couldn't come back when you've been absent for so long. So consequently, I'm sure that no task force would have thought about consulting me, although recently -- I think this is under the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] Administration, about two years ago -- I was named a member of the advisory panel on Chinese affairs in Washington. This was when Bill Bundy [William P. Bundy] was the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. But this is the only thing that I've done in the China field since I left it in 1950 to go to Paris.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any contact, particularly in your administration as an Inspector in the Foreign Service, with people like Meyer Rashish or Robert Schaetzel?

SPROUSE: Not as Inspector, although I knew Robert Schaetzel when I was in Brussels, at the Embassy at Brussels. We were following very closely the negotiations of the treaties at Brussels, known later as the Rome treaties. Schaetzel was, of course, one of the leading men in the regional affairs, working on the European movement.

O'BRIEN: In regard to your tenure there as an Inspector in the Foreign Service, did you notice any changes in the late '50s or the changes in the Administration in the moral of the Foreign Service? I suppose that the best place to start would be the morale of the Foreign Service in the late '50s. Could you give us some kind of an evaluation?

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SPROUSE: Well, I think the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] period did untold damage to the Foreign Service. I don't know whether it's fully recovered now or not, but, of course, it did such serious damage. I was in Paris during that period, and we had the Cohn [Roy M. Cohn] and Schine [G. David Schine] act when they came to Paris demanding that books be withdrawn from the library and so forth, holding press conferences at which at times I felt that even the American press, which is all nearly fearless, was being sort of overawed, overwhelmed by the possibilities of what might happen to them. It was only the foreign press who really needed these two properly. I didn't feel that anyone was pulling his punches in terms of reporting in Paris at that point, but there was nothing to require you to pull your punches in the situation in Western Europe. Whether the punches were being pulled in other areas of the world I don't know, but I'd be surprised if they weren't being pulled because I think this did such untold damage to the Foreign Service morale and, in the long run, to the effectiveness of its willingness to speak out.

Another thing I think was questionable at that point while I was an Inspector -- this was in the late '50s, and I saw this at first hand -- was the effects of the Wriston [Henry M. Wriston] program. The Wriston program was inevitable, and it was desirable that there should be an amalgamation of the Department and the Foreign Service, every country in the world has it, I mean, where they're interchangeable. But there were a lot of people in the Department who didn't want to go abroad. I think they should have been given the privilege of deciding whether or not they would be willing to be brought into it.

But in the process they brought into the Foreign Service, I felt, people who shouldn't have been brought into the career Foreign Service. These were chiefly in the minor administrative positions. The minuet you did that you, in a sense, dissolved the Foreign Service Staff Corps, which had an important and an essential role to play in the Foreign Service. And you brought people, some of them with only high school educations, into competition with, say, bright young lads out of Harvard. Well, it was inevitable that the bright young lad from a first rate university was going ahead in the Service and the other man was going out, at which point you'd lose the services of a Staff Corps man who'd been integrated into the Foreign Service, where he shouldn't have been because he couldn't stand the

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competition, and you lost him in a field where he had an essential role to play as an administrator.

I brought this up when I came back at one point as an Inspector, saying that to me, this is the great weakness of the Wriston program. And I was sat on royally. I won't say by whom I was sat on, but I was sat on royally. So I said, "Well, is it so sacrosanct that when this is damaging to the Foreign Service nothing can be done?" And I was sat on royally by one of the greats. I returned to the fire because I was still at that point willing to speak my mind, and I thought this was damaging, and, in effect, I was told that nothing could be done for some time. And what pleased me mightily was the chance when the Kennedy Administration came in. This came, I think, within a year after I raised it because I raised this after a year in the field as an Inspector, and I went out the first year in 1959. So I must have raised this at the beginning of 1960. When the Kennedy Administration came in, they did do something about restoring the Staff Corps, which proved, really, that this was lack of courage on the part of the people at the top and partially political, rather than something based on what was desirable for the Foreign Service itself.

O'BRIEN: How did Foreign Service people react to the Kennedy appointments, well, the ambassadorial appointments, of both career and non-career people?

SPROUSE: I think the caliber was excellent. There was one amusing aspect of it; I'll speak very frankly now. Before you'd had the political appointments. I defend the political appointment idea because the political appointment procedure enables you to have people like David Bruce and Douglas Dillon, and if it's used to appoint very distinguished people, people with a deep and long-range interest in foreign affairs, this is the most desirable thing in the world because you get the best talent in this country. When it is used to pawn off a political hack, to pay off a political debt, then I have no sympathy for it, and of course there were some of those in the Kennedy Administration, inevitably, but for the most part you had people who had an intense interest in world affairs. Unlike the previous administrations where the desirable posts were the rather nice, pleasant spots in Western

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Europe, such as the Hague or Brussels or Copenhagen and, of course, logically the great Embassies at London, Paris, and Rome, you had New Frontier people, very competent non-career people, who were willing to go anywhere in the world. So instead of reserving the less desirable posts for the career Foreign Service Officer, the Foreign Service Officer had to compete for the out-of-the-way posts in Africa with bright, young, able people, distinguished people, like Attwood [William Attwood], you remember, who went to posts in Africa and other places similar to that. This is all to the good. I mean, I'm still in favor as long as they are people who have a sincere and genuine interest in and some knowledge of what foreign affairs and international relations are about.

O'BRIEN: I've heard rumors that there were certain lists that were drawn up by the incoming administration, both one that was sort of black list and the other one was a sort of talent list for appointments as ambassadors. Did you...

SPROUSE: During the Kennedy Administration?

O'BRIEN: Yes. Did you ever run across any of these?

SPROUSE: I never heard of them. No, no. I think of one thing during that period which is amusing. Having risen through the ranks, so to speak, of the Foreign Service, and at this point -- let's see, it was 1960; it was 1960 or '61; '60, I guess -- having risen through the ranks and, of course, having to wait your turn before you could even be considered for nomination as an ambassador, I suddenly discovered, at the point that it was possible that I might be named ambassador, that the Kennedy Administration thought that people my age were too old to be ambassador. And so, consequently, you saw you hadn't priced yourself out of the market; you'd aged yourself out of the market. [Laughter] I almost, as I get the picture, got in sort of under the wire, so to speak. Have you heard that same story?

O'BRIEN: Oh, yes.

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SPROUSE: They wanted youth, vigor.

O'BRIEN: They wanted youth; they wanted vigor. But no, not necessarily.

SPROUSE: No, because Harriman wasn't youth. Yes, I mean, they were exceptions, obviously.

O'BRIEN: It was, you know -- I think they were looking for people who could do the job and apparently age didn't make a great deal of difference except that when it

was in a situation of the equal appointees, as I understand it. For some reason or another I had the thought that you met with President Kennedy at an earlier time with a country team seminar out of the Foreign Service Institute?

SPROUSE: No, I didn't.

O'BRIEN: Oh.

SPROUSE: I went to that counterinsurgency course at the Foreign Service Institute, after I'd been appointed, though. And at this point all chiefs of mission, all heads of AID [Agency for International Development] missions, and all chiefs of military advisory groups and public affairs officers were being required to go to this course, go through this course, before they went to the field to take their posts which was a good thing.

O'BRIEN: Was that a result of some of the problems that came up in late 1950 in regard to embassy communications?

SPROUSE: No. I think this really grew out of an effort to develop techniques for dealing with situations. I mean, something like the situation you had in Vietnam, the situation which was developing in northeast Thailand of infiltration and subversion: What do we do to meet it? This course grew out of it, first, one at Fort Bragg and then later setting up one in Washington, with the State Department and the military combined on this one. The part that impressed me, though, chiefly was the civilian part of it done by MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] group, Max

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Millikan and that group, including Lucien Pye. Absolutely fascinating, absolutely first-rate. The military part of it was less impressive to me, the latter part of it, but the first part, I think, was absolutely first-rate.

O'BRIEN: Now you're linking the counterinsurgency with the country team.

SPROUSE: Well, this is part of the picture, because the country team concept had really grown up in the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration. The country team wasn't new, although with each succeeding Administration, and particularly under President Kennedy, there was a feeling that you should strengthen the hand of the ambassador; it should definitely be known that the ambassador was the authority at hand and the head of the show. And in the final analysis, I think this in a sense could have been done under the Eisenhower Administration (it was done to a certain extent). It depends basically on the temperament and the ability of the ambassador, the willingness to assert his control. And it was easier to do it under the Kennedy Administration because you had more backing in Washington for this sort of thing; whereas, in previous administrations -- and this

is particularly true, perhaps, when you had two Dulleses [John Foster and Allen] sitting in two offices in Washington, it was a question whether you would always get backing for your own position. This made it a little bit awkward.

O'BRIEN: Let's pass on to your appointment as Ambassador to Cambodia. First of all, what were the factors in the relief of Ambassador Trimble [William C. Trimble]?

SPROUSE: Well, I don't know that there were any factors except the inevitable factor of his having been there for somewhere between two and three years. There wasn't any dissatisfaction with Trimble's performance; I know that. Presumably between two and three years in the tropics is enough for a man, and he himself might have even expressed a desire to be relieved. I don't know. But there was nothing in any sense critical of Trimble and in the fact that he was being supplanted.

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I suppose the reason that I was chosen was, one, I had been in Paris. I was the first officer sent to Paris during the post-war period to work almost solely on Asian affairs. We'd had an officer in the Embassy at London beginning sometime during the war, a specialist in Asian affairs assigned to the Embassy to be in touch with the Foreign Office. And I was assigned to Paris for a similar role, and, of course, the real problem in Paris during that period from 1950-54 was Vietnam. Cambodia and Laos were secondary because the issue was going to be decided by the outcome in Vietnam, not in Cambodia or Laos, either. The Korean War was going on during this same period and a certain amount of the work you had to do was consulting the French in dealing with Korean problems through the French government. My work was largely following the situation in Vietnam, but then, of course, you had an ambassador in Paris and later, of course, an ambassador in Vietnam. So it was more of a reporting and a contact role rather than an active role negotiating anything with the French, although we were constantly in touch not only with the Foreign Office but also with the Ministry of Associated States, which had formerly been the Colonial Ministry on Vietnam.

O'BRIEN: When did you first sense that you were being considered for an ambassadorial post to your appointment as Ambassador to Cambodia?

SPROUSE: In January of 1962. I had been an Inspector for three years, and at the end of that period I was in Paris heading a team of inspectors who were inspecting Paris. We had been there several months because we inspected not only the Embassy but also our delegation to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. Our next inspection was due to be the inspection of the Embassy at London. At that point the Secretary and the top level in the State Department had decided that they wanted to look into the question of the reduction of our operations abroad, of the American official establishment abroad.

So I received a telegram when I was in Paris asking me to go down to Nicosia to consult with Chester Bowles on this very problem, before I could undertake the project. That's when I got this little lecture from Mr. Bowles on the role of the

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Foreign Service Officer, how he should follow the peasant plowing his furrow. And I must say at that point I just couldn't avoid interjecting this because I thought of David Bruce's magnificent performance, perhaps the greatest ambassador we've ever had in the history of the country, and I had a feeling that David Bruce would not be out following a peasant plowing his furrow, but that David Bruce would rather sense where the levers of powers were in this country that he's accredited to, and there's where David Bruce would be making his influence felt, and not out following a peasant plowing his furrow. So I said to Mr. Bowles, "Well, of course, that's all very good, and I think it's a very good thing, but," I said, "there are an awful lot of officers in the Embassy that could be doing this sort of thing rather than the ambassador because the government could be falling in the capital while he is talking with the peasant out in his field. I could see that Mr. Bowles didn't particularly like that comment, but that was an aspect of the question.

So I came back to Paris after this trip with the understanding that I would select a small group of officers to assist on this project. And I insisted that I wanted a small group, and I wanted people whom I knew personally, who would not keep their fingers on their numbers and who'd be willing to speak out forthrightly and with courage, because I thought in the process we could achieve what Secretary Rusk wanted, the reduction of our requirements abroad, that is both reporting and the reduction of personnel. And this, if you started reducing State Department personnel abroad, would lead inevitably to the reduction of the personnel of other agencies abroad, which is all to the good.

Paris, for instance, was a monster operation, and I did a special study before I left Paris which I submitted to Washington asking for a large reduction of our operations in Paris, including the return of some operations to Washington where they should never have left, and the elimination of what was, in effect, a supermarket shopping center on the historic Place de la Concorde, which I had bitterly criticized when I'd been an officer, Counselor at the Embassy, in Paris back in the '50s. And I always thought that if I ever got in a position to do anything about it, I would try to eliminate these things, including the elimination of a gift shop which was selling Jacques Fath ties and French perfumes, which had no place in the American

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Embassy; a cafeteria which as open to tourists and everyone. This was a violation of French customs regulations because, in a sense, you were using duty-free goods which you were selling to people who didn't have duty-free entry privileges. I thought this was a marvelous opportunity, and so I submitted this report. I thought of this later when I saw that Ambassador Tuthill [John W. Tuthill] in Rio had managed to cut that huge operation, or had had a lot of support for cutting it.

And I had made this very strong plea, this was in line with what the Secretary wanted, that we reduce Paris operations. For instance, you had a finance operation over there, a payroll operation, which started out with three people in one year and by the time I arrived there not many years later it was up to ninety some odd and was headed to a hundred and fifty. We had a payroll operation serving all of Western Europe and North Africa. I recalled that the last three U.S. ambassadors in Paris had said that the overwhelming American presence was not conducive to our prestige and position in France, and they strongly recommended that the staff should be reduced. Yet Washington was increasing it all the time.

Well, I might add that because of this project I was taken off the inspection of the Embassy in London, which made me somewhat unhappy because I had thought this would be a nice way to end three years as an Inspector. This was over my protest, because I pointed out that I couldn't get the handful of people I wanted, certainly not overnight, it would take about two or three months to get them, let me finish the inspection in London and then by the beginning of the following year we would be ready to start on this operation. Although I didn't like the idea originally, I had decided this was a good thing for God, Yale, country and the Foreign Service, too. It would give me an opportunity to do things that I had always wanted to do, at least to recommend, and had never been able to do.

When I got back to Washington, it took me about a week to get into Roger Jones, who was the Deputy Undersecretary for Administration. In the meantime I had been tipped off by someone who knew that my whole project had been dropped. This infuriated me because I thought, "Here, I was in spite of my protest, taken off the inspection of the Embassy at London, where I was to head the team of inspectors and brought back just willy-nilly over, practically over, my dead body, if you can be

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brought back over your own dead body, to do this thing." When I finally got to Roger Jones, he said the project had been dropped completely. He said there'd been a reduction in our budget appropriations, so consequently we would have to reduce personnel willy-nilly. Well, to me this was not really intelligent or far-sighted because what we were going to do was not something adapted really to the size of your budget this year or last year; it was really to manage a long-range reduction of our operations abroad, which was desirable and is still desirable.

So I sat there for two months; in two months I think I did a half a day's work. Well, I had been in the Foreign Service about thirty years at this point and was a career minister, and I didn't somehow think, from a personnel standpoint, this was a very logical way to utilize the services of a senior officer. Regardless of whether I was good or bad or indifferent, at least I'd had a fair amount of experience as a senior officer. So, not knowing what I was going to do next, I sat there for two months. This was an enforced holiday that I didn't seek, didn't want and didn't need; so I submitted my request for retirement.

Christmas came, and still nothing. And when I got up to the Secretary, Mr. Rusk (I wasn't of an age that I could automatically retire as the rules and regulations require you to have the permission of the Secretary of State), he said, "I can't permit this. I don't know what can be done, but I'll look around and see. There's a possibility that you might be named



Chief of Mission somewhere, but I don't know what would be available, and of course, this has to have the approval of the White House." So out of this grew my appointment eventually as Ambassador to Cambodia. I don't know whether this is pertinent to your own project. This is the Foreign Service at work, so to speak.

O'BRIEN: Well, that's what we're interested in. That's one of the many things we're interested in in regard to these interviews. Going back to Secretary Rusk. Did you know Secretary Rusk when he was Assistant Secretary for Far East Affairs?

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SPROUSE: Yes. I had been the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs in the late '40s when he, with a great deal of courage and devotion to duty, volunteered to serve as Assistant Secretary for Far East Affairs, and this was during a period when it was not a healthy job. Walt Butterworth [W. Walton Butterworth], who'd been the former Assistant Secretary, was moving to Stockholm as ambassador, and Dean Rusk at that point was the equivalent, I think, of the Deputy Undersecretary for Political Affairs. So he took, in a sense, a demotion, a job which was a very unhealthy job and a very undesirable job. Few people would have wanted it. I always had great admiration for Dean Rusk for this sort of thing. Of course, he wasn't a career man, so he wasn't sacrificing a long-range career, but still it was not an easy task. That's where I first knew him; I served under him for about six or eight months during that period.

O'BRIEN: A thought just came to me that, well, perhaps we could get into the whole business of Otto Otepka. Did you have any contacts with Otepka or....

SPROUSE: I never had of Otepka until I became an Inspector, and when I was an Inspector -- I don't know whether this is pertinent or not....

O'BRIEN: Go ahead.

SPROUSE: I got a letter from General Wedemeyer [Albert C. Wedemeyer], on whose mission to Korea and China I had served in 1947. Wedemeyer had written me a letter in connection with a libel suit being brought against him in connection with his book called *Wedemeyer Reports*. In that book he had, in effect, accused a Chinese, who was a sort of personal confidant and private secretary to our then Ambassador John Leighton Stuart, of snitching some notes from his bedside table during the Wedemeyer mission to China when Wedemeyer was spending several nights at the residence of the ambassador in Nanking. These were notes that Wedemeyer had prepared for use in making a speech before the Generalissimo and his Cabinet. And so Wedemeyer wrote this letter, which was forwarded to me through the pouch from Washington, asking me if I could reconstruct any

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of this because he was in danger of a libel suit or was being sued and wondered if I could reconstruct any of the events, circumstances leading to this, which would substantiate his story. In the process he made some additional remarks in his letter to me which also might have been libelous.

I wasn't too sure of my facts. I knew that I didn't remember any of this, as a matter of fact, but I wanted to wait until I could consult the China White Paper, which had a number of documents dealing with this period. So I waited until I got to the Embassy at Rome, and I looked it up there, and then I wrote Wedemeyer a long letter answering this. But I thought the Department ought to see both his letter and my reply, because, in a sense, Wedemeyer was accusing the Embassy at Nanking of leaking like a sieve both to the Communists and to the national government. And I knew there was no basis for it whatsoever, except that one would have expected this Chinese secretary to act as a Chinese national; he wasn't American; he didn't have access to classified material at the Embassy; he did have access to the Ambassador. And the Ambassador was a great gentleman and a great scholar but may have had a certain naivete in dealing with classified material, and he might have told this man things that he wouldn't have learned from the Embassy. But, I mean, this is inevitable in this situation anyway, and this was known both to the Department and to General Marshall [George C. Marshall].

So I sent my answer to the acting head of the Foreign Service Inspection Corps, a man by the name of Plitt [Edwin A. Plitt], at that point, and I said, "Please show this to our security people before you pass my answer on to Wedemeyer. But since my letter is somewhat overdue, I'd appreciate you doing it as soon as possible." In the meantime, I got another letter from Wedemeyer asking me to return his original letter. I had an idea that his lawyers were asking for this because they thought this also might be libelous. Well, I was willing to do this. So I returned this letter also, asking that his original letter be returned to Wedemeyer.

When I got back to Washington months later I found out that nothing had been done and that Mr. Plitt thought that I might want to reconsider. This rather nettled me because I told Mr. Plitt it wasn't up to him to decide. All I'd asked him to do was to show my letter and Wedemeyer's letter to the security people so they would have a record of it, and send it

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on to Wedemeyer. And this was highly embarrassing to me because my answer to the letter was at least a month overdue.

And so I got in touch with the security people, and I saw a man named Otepka. This was my one contact with Otepka, whom I never heard of before, had not heard of since until he figured in the press. What Otepka did about that I haven't the faintest idea.

O'BRIEN: What does he represent to the State Department?

SPROUSE: Otepka?

O'BRIEN: Right.

SPROUSE: I haven't the faintest idea because all this is, of course, since I retired from service. No, some of it came maybe before I retired; I'm not sure. This is beyond my ken, although I must say that I had no sympathy for the thing; I was rather surprised that he was appointed to another post because people had been fired and their lives and careers ruined for similar things in the Department, you know, and some of them unjustly.

O'BRIEN: You had contact with Secretary Rusk in regard to your appointment. Did you run into any opposition in the Department or in the White House or in the Congress to your appointment as Ambassador to Cambodia?

SPROUSE: No. This was also interesting because none of the China service people, China specialists of the pre-war vintage, had ever been named as an Ambassador. Their names had not gone up for confirmation for anything until the Kennedy Administration came in, and when the Kennedy Administration came in I was the third of the pre-war China specialists who were nominated to be ambassadors, and all of them went through, as far as I know, without the slightest criticism. I know in my case there was no hostility, and when I came to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing I thought there might be some question about, you know, my China background. It wasn't even mentioned, not the slightest. There wasn't one hostile question. There were some very good and

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searching questions, but not having to do with China at all and my background.

O'BRIEN: How about the briefing process before you left for Cambodia? Do you recall much, or perhaps some of the people that you were either briefed by or discussed Cambodia with in the White House, some of the other agencies like CIA, AID?

SPROUSE: No one in the White House. CIA, I remember. I remember distinctly CIA because the sort of thing that you ought to get clear in your mind before you go to a post (I think any chief of mission should) is: Are there any operations going on in this country which could faintly, in any possible way, be really damaging to the U.S. if they were exposed. And I was assured there were no operations engaged in by the CIA in this country which could be faintly interpreted as hostile to or damaging in any sense to the Cambodian government. This is, to me, very important before you go out to a country, particularly one that's as ticklish as this one was.

O'BRIEN: Did you have at that point, did you get an opportunity to meet with people like McGeorge Bundy or Walt Rostow or....

SPROUSE: I don't know that Rostow was even in the government at that point. I don't remember Rostow at all. Of course I knew Rostow's name, his books, but I don't think Rostow was...

O'BRIEN: Well, he was attached to the White House.

SPROUSE: No. I did not meet McGeorge Bundy at all.

O'BRIEN: When was the first time you met Mike Forrestal [Michael V. Forrestal]?

SPROUSE: In Cambodia.

O'BRIEN: In Cambodia?

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SPROUSE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Is that when he came in 1963 after the assassination?

SPROUSE: He came just after the assassination. He came partially on consultation, but also to bring a message from the new President, President Johnson, to Sihanouk [Norodom Sihanouk]. And we called on Sihanouk; we called on other leading officials. He stayed with me the better part of a week, and we had a consultation on all the problems. I remember night after night I'd have a separate senior member of the Embassy staff in for dinner (of course, we were in mourning, so there was no official entertaining). One night I'd have the AID Mission Chief; one night I'd have the military Mission Chief; one night I'd have my deputy; one night I'd have the USIS [United States Information Service] man or the top intelligence man, so that he had a complete review of everything that was going on, letting our hair down and so forth. And then on two separate occasions I had the British Ambassador for lunch one day and the French Ambassador for lunch one day so he could talk with them.

I had a somewhat unsatisfactory set to with Forrestal during one of the evening sessions at my residence at which my top intelligence officer was present. It should be noted that Forrestal, the officer responsible for Pacific and East Asian Affairs in the "little State Department" setup by the President at the White House under Bundy, had no background or previous experience in Asian affairs. On this occasion he advanced a completely erroneous exposition of Prince Sihanouk's views toward the war in Vietnam, a question of some importance during this period. One could understand and accept Forrestal's lack of knowledge on this subject, but it was considerably less easy to accept his heated and strong insistence that he was correct about Sihanouk's attitude and we were wrong. To see a White House official so completely off base and at the same time with such a closed mind and evident unwillingness to give any credence to others in a position to speak with first hand

knowledge on the point at issue made one wonder about the so-called “little State Department” at the White House. If Forrestal’s performance was typical of its operations, one could understand the problem a junior desk officer at the Department would face in standing up to a display of White House weight.

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The day after Forrestal left for the States via Bangkok, Sihanouk made a radio broadcast in which he stated, as he had many times in the past, his views on the war in Vietnam along the lines we had tried unsuccessfully to explain to Forrestal. I reported Sihanouk’s speech in a telegram to Washington and repeated it to the Embassy at Bangkok, asking that it be passed on to Forrestal. I never had any further word from him.

O’BRIEN: Was there any, in the briefings that you received, both in the Department as well as in the CIA and some of the other agencies, was there ever any conflict in information or in the points of view or anything that you remember out of this briefing process from what you actually discovered when you got to Cambodia?

SPROUSE: No. Not at all, not at all. Incidentally, I also had a briefing by Trimble, who’d been the previous Ambassador there, which was very helpful, of course, both from the standpoint of policy and the situation in Cambodia as well as personal things which are always helpful to a man going into a new post.

O’BRIEN: Sure. What’s the major concern on the part of the U.S. Government and the State Department in the time you assumed the position of Ambassador in 1962 in regard to Cambodia?

SPROUSE: What was the major concern in Cambodia?

O’BRIEN: Right.

SPROUSE: The major concern (and this is in contrast to Mr. Dulles’ views about neutrality) was that Cambodia maintain complete neutrality. We were doing our best to help them develop their economy and to maintain stability in the country. And there was a great deal of admiration for Prince Sihanouk, the Chief of State, for the manner in which he had achieved those aims, particularly the aim of bringing stability into this country. It is the only one of the three Indo-Chinese countries, ex-French colonies, which had maintained stability. And there was unity. We were engaged in a rather sizeable economic aid program and in also a relatively small but

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an important military aid program -- important from his standpoint because it was designed to assist him in maintaining his internal security. It in no sense could be interpreted as a

military program designed to aid him in any incursions abroad, which, of course, he had no intention of engaging in anyway because his two chief neighbors were possessed of overwhelming military strength, the Thais on one hand and the South Vietnamese on the other, on either side.

O'BRIEN: How does Laos figure into U.S.-Cambodian relations at this point?

SPROUSE: Much less so, largely because of Cambodia's traditions and history. Cambodia up to about the fifteenth century was the possessor of most of the acreage and the dominant power in that area. And it began to go downhill until finally much of the acreage that used to be Cambodian territory you might say is now part of Vietnam and part of Thailand, since the Thais and the South Vietnamese had overrun various areas. Of course, at one point the capital was at Angkor Wat, you know, and the Thais had overrun that area at one point. And the Japanese had overrun the Indo-Chinese peninsula during the last world war. The Thais had been rewarded by the Japanese with two or three provinces in that area, which the French had forced the Thais to disgorge at the time of the Japanese surrender. So there was a tradition, a historical setting, for deep suspicion on the part of the Cambodians of the Thais and the South Vietnamese.

There was a large group of ethnic Cambodians of several hundred thousand in South Vietnam, resident in South Vietnam, which was a cause for friction also. They retained their ethnic identity but, of course, were South Vietnamese citizens.

O'BRIEN: Perhaps we ought to start with Sihanouk. When was the first time that you met Sihanouk. Was it in 1962 when you went to Cambodia as Ambassador?

SPROUSE: The first time I met Sihanouk was when I went to Cambodia as Ambassador when I had my audience, so to speak, to present my credentials.

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O'BRIEN: At this point, what is his feeling towards the involvement of both the USSR and the United States in Laos and to the struggle of the three princes?

SPROUSE: I'm not sure of his reaction on our involvement in Laos, although I have a feeling that his sympathy in Laos was with Souvanna Phouma, the middle-of-the-road and moderate, rather than Phoumi [Phoumi Nosavan] and the right-wing group or the Pathet Lao, either. I think there was a certain personal relationship he had with Souvanna Phouma. You see, the yardstick that you must apply to Sihanouk and to Sihanouk's actions is that his real and abiding concern is the future of his own country. This man was in no sense pro-Communist; he was very pro-Cambodian; and whatever happened in Cambodia in the final analysis, his actions in Cambodia, his policies, would be governed largely by what he expected to be the outcome in Southeast Asia.

Where we suffered largely was, one, that at some point Sihanouk apparently reached the conclusion that the wave of the future in this area was communism, and that if the

Communists were going to win he had to make his peace with the victors, so to speak, or with elements which could provide protection for the sovereignty and future of his own country. And this is the reason that he so often made overtures openly, publicly to Peking. He wrote an article, which appeared in his own magazine (a weekly magazine, I forget the name of it now, in Cambodia), just about the time I arrived. I think there was a series of articles in which he said, "I'd rather be a puppet of Peking than to disappear from the map under the hands of Hanoi," the Viet Minh, or the Viet Cong, at that point, of course. And he was bitterly suspicious of the Thais, of course, historical background, again.

In '62 there was a case before the World Court involving the ownership of a tenth century temple, Buddhist temple, which was located on an escarpment along a line which was a matter of dispute whether this was in Cambodia or in Thailand. Dean Acheson represented legally the Cambodian government in this case before the World Court, and the case was won by the Cambodians. And, of course, Dean Acheson became a great hero to Sihanouk and the Cambodians at that point, held in high regard, and he was burned in effigy in the streets of Bangkok at the

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same time.

O'BRIEN: Philip Jessup was supposed to have handled the case for Thailand, as I understand, at one time, was he not?

SPROUSE: Didn't in this particular, as Phil Jessup was on the Court, wasn't he? Wasn't he on the Court by this time?

O'BRIEN: I understood, though, that he was going to handle the case for Thailand, and then he was appointed to the World Court. And the Thais always resented the fact that he had been appointed, that they thought that perhaps it made some difference.

SPROUSE: Oh, really? I hadn't heard that story.

O'BRIEN: I think Smith [Roger M. Smith] in that book he did [*Cambodian Foreign Policy*] on Cambodian foreign policy talks something about that.

SPROUSE: I hadn't heard this.

O'BRIEN: During '61-'62 Sihanouk makes some proposals in regard to, first of all, a neutral zone in Laos, and then secondly -- well, I guess this is a continuing thing -- he calls for international conferences on Laos from time to time. Do these ever really receive consideration in the Department...

SPROUSE: You see, Sihanouk was frequently calling for international conferences, and

when the conference was finally called on Laos, in a sense, Sihanouk felt that he'd been vindicated because it was called. And he felt that it should have been called much earlier and that the situation might thus have been much better. I remember Mr. Harriman, who played a leading role, you know, in this conference on Laos, told me when I was talking with him before I left that he had gone down to Rome to see Sihanouk at some point during the conference; Sihanouk, I think, was present during part of the negotiations and had suddenly gone off, and

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Harriman made a special trip to Rome to consult Sihanouk on some angle. This is something that is always valuable, and this is part of the Cambodian picture.

Let me digress a minute, as this doesn't deal directly with any of your questions, but this was one of the best weapons that we had, one of the best instruments or forms of leverage we had in dealing with Sihanouk. Sihanouk had great admiration for President Kennedy, because here was a world leader, a youthful world leader, a young world leader such as Sihanouk considered himself to be. So, the effect of any attention or message that President Kennedy could address to Sihanouk was a very helpful weapon to use. And I recommended very strongly to the Department, I think both officially and informally, that is, in a personal letter, that to the extent possible that we should do everything we could to have the President deal with Sihanouk personally in personal messages on very important matters because this could be more convincing to Sihanouk and more helpful than anything we could do.

Of course, you had a problem because the Thais were so critical of Cambodia and Prince Sihanouk, and, of course, the South Vietnamese were even more so because they felt that he was giving aid in a sense by giving sanctuary to the Viet Cong from time to time. So consequently, since we were closely allied with the Thais in SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] and we were tied up with the South Vietnamese in the struggle against the enemy in Vietnam, and they were, you might say, major allies whereas Sihanouk was a neutral, it was awfully difficult to do this thing and yet at the same time maintain our friendship in the two capitals where we were committed in a way we were not in Cambodia. So we used that weapon, used that leverage, much less than I should have liked, but I could understand why we couldn't.

O'BRIEN: Did President Kennedy carry on a series of personal correspondence with him subsequently, as he did with some of the other...

SPROUSE: No, except in answer to messages that Sihanouk would send to him appealing, for instance, after the conference on Laos for a conference on Cambodia.

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During the entire time I was there Sihanouk made continuing appeals for a conference on Cambodia. And this was a major effort. We never said, "Yes" on the thing



because he wanted one which would be designed to guarantee -- and he used the word "guarantee" -- the sovereignty and independence and territorial integrity of Cambodia. He was calling for a conference which would assemble the same nations which had participated in the Geneva conference on Vietnam earlier, you see.

O'BRIEN: Did you get any insight into Soviet policy in Cambodia and, well, Soviet objectives in their relations with Cambodia in those years?

SPROUSE: No. They had representation there, and they did a number of small things in the aid field. They maintained a presence, and they had a certain influence with Sihanouk because Sihanouk was always careful to cover all areas of the field. He'd be friendly with the Russians; he'd be friendly with the Chinese Communists; he was friendly with us. This is after Bandung [Bandung Conference of April 1955], of course, and the beginning of the Third World. He was careful to accept aid from all of them, and he had aid programs from both the Communists and the free world and the neutral world, which furthered his picture of Cambodia as a neutralist power taking no sides at all. This was logical, and I could understand all of this. You couldn't be critical of this. What you could be critical of, of course, was the situation when his neutrality began to be a "leaning" neutrality; it was not really true neutrality.

And I could never be as critical as other people were of the sanctuary that the Viet Cong were supposed to have found in Cambodia for the following reasons: Sihanouk himself would admit, and admit it publicly, that Viet Cong did cross the border into Cambodia from time to time, particularly when they were being pursued by South Vietnamese troops from the other side in actual battle. And he pointed out, "I have a boundary with South Vietnam of some six or seven hundred miles, and I have a military force of thirty-one thousand men, ground troops, Army, Navy, and Air Force." And, he said, "I obviously can't patrol a seven hundred mile border with this many troops. But when we do know that they have crossed our border, we try to

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deal with them." And they have captured some. Then he added, "If it's so easy to close that border, why don't the South Vietnamese with hundreds of thousands of troops close it from the other side?" [Laughter] Well, this was true.

Another angle on this thing, of course, is that with these incursions into Cambodian territory from South Vietnam from time to time you would have American military advisers -- not combat troops but American military advisers -- crossing with the South Vietnamese. And, of course, this would become a great issue with Sihanouk and we would come under fire. This was always unfortunate. Then on occasion you would have South Vietnamese planes crossing the border -- ill-defined in the sense of not clearly marked by a great river or something you can see from the air -- and these planes would bomb Cambodian villages or Cambodian provincial outposts and the attacks resulted in deaths among Cambodians.

Sihanouk used to label this or described it as South Vietnamese aggression against Cambodia with aggressive designs. And I've told Sihanouk, and I said this very strongly, I

said, "If this were aggression in the real sense of the word, Monseigneur" -- this is the name, the title that he preferred to be called by, Monseigneur --" they would obviously come across the border and camp and they wouldn't leave; they would seize your territory. But," I said, "when a country's engaged in a battle for its life and they're pursuing in the heat of battle guerillas or the enemy who are fleeing, with a border of this sort which isn't marked by a great river, a great boundary, it's inevitable this is going to happen. But," I said, "if the war weren't going on, this wouldn't be happening. This is unfortunate, and I'm sure that they wouldn't be doing it otherwise. We regret it, and we'd do anything we could do to stop it, but this is impossible." He said, "Well, how can I face my people" -- which was true -- "if I don't make an issue of this when they're killing my people and crossing in my territory? I have to. No self-respecting government could do otherwise" -- which was true.

Are you getting cold?

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

[BEGIN SIDE I, TAPE II]

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O'BRIEN: We've touched very, very briefly on some of the things that concern the relations of Thailand with their neighbors, or rather, Cambodia with their neighbors. I think perhaps that might be a good place to continue. You briefly discussed some of the questions concerning Thailand and Cambodia. Why was Cambodia so sensitive about her borders, particularly with Thailand, at this point? I know Vietnam as well, but let's deal with Thailand first?

SPROUSE: Thailand, of course, because the hais had seized Cambodian territory and there had been Thai encroachments on Cambodian territory. The Thais were the more vigorous people, certainly from the beginning of the fifteen century, and encroachments had cost Cambodian territory. And, as I said, when the Japanese awarded the Thais three provinces, which were disgorged under French pressure at the end of the war, this further convinced the Cambodians of Thai designs on the country. And the border, you see, was not fully accepted or fully defined, and this temple case at the World Court further embittered the feeling between the two countries. So consequently, there was a historical basis for Cambodian irritation and suspicion of the Thais. Of course, all this rubbed off on us because, after all, we were closely allied and friendly both with the Thais and South Vietnamese. This was something that rubbed off on us in terms of our relations with Cambodia, but if we had been winning, or if the side we were backing had been winning clearly in South Vietnam, I'm convinced that we would not have had difficulty with Cambodia. Again, you return to the yardstick that Sihanouk always applies: what is designed to insure the continued independence and sovereignty and territorial integrity of his own country?

O'BRIEN: With regard to the reaction after the temple settlement, after the court award, there was a considerable period of friction there. How did Cambodia react to Thailand's reaction? As I understand it, that Sarit [Sarit Thanarat] called for ten more divisions or something to that effect.

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SPROUSE: I don't remember that he called for ten, but I don't really think he needed ten more divisions because he had ample military power in contrast to the military resources available to the Cambodians. But the Thais very reluctantly finally carried out the terms of the World Court decision on the Preah Vihear Temple.

Sihanouk waited until (it must have been six or eight or ten months, certainly somewhere between six months and ten months) before he officially took possession of this temple because when he did it was a great occasion. Special buildings were built to house the people who went up, and we in the diplomatic corps were put up in a special little cottage built for us. We got up very early at daybreak the next morning -- before daybreak, if I remember correctly -- and took jeep station wagons over to the little airport where we were taken by helicopters, I think, to the next spot. And we assembled at the foot of the mountain -- it was a mountain of something between two thousand, three thousand feet -- we assembled at the foot of the mountain to await Sihanouk's arrival. There were Cabinet ministers, the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister, and all the leading officials of the country. The night before we had been entertained by having a superb French-type dinner in a pavilion built specifically for the purpose, food obviously flown up from Phnom Penh, and a volleyball game afterwards with Sihanouk's own team, and I think maybe the afternoon before we'd even had a soccer game.

All this was beautifully done, superbly done, and when Sihanouk finally turned up that morning, say around 8 o'clock, we took off on foot to climb that mountain, a trail. And, of course, some of it had been redone, some of the rail which had been in a state of disrepair, was redone for the occasion. We climbed to the top of that mountain, and Sihanouk walked every step of it. And when we got to the top, the peak, Sihanouk turned and said, "Allons, mes enfants, le jour de gloire est arrivé," which was very fitting indeed. And on the other side of the trail, at a point which was clearly Thai territory, there were Thai correspondents and photographers and a big sign on a barbed wire fence -- I think it was barbed wire, certainly a wire fence of some kind. The sign read, "Here marks the limit beyond which it's Thai territory." Later in the day we were taken on tours of the temple itself, the ruins. And at one

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point where this wire fence went out to the edge of the escarpment with a drop into the valley below, there were Thai soldiers on the other side, and you had the Thai and Cambodian soldiers fraternizing over the fence peacefully in the most friendly fashion, which was again very touching.

He took back the temple, but the Thais, I don't think, have ever actually fully renounced their idea of reopening this thing some year. I'm not sure of the exact terms in

which they indicate that they have not completely accepted this because they've accepted the decision of the Court, obviously, because the temple is in Cambodian hands. But I don't think they've foreclosed the idea of reopening this issue at some point. How they would reopen it I don't know. But this again keeps a certain friction and suspicion, you see.

O'BRIEN: Did you get any indication of Sihanouk's feelings in regard to, first of all, the presence of American military units in the northern part of Thailand in 1962?

SPROUSE: Not at all. I don't know that we had American military units as such, except as part of the military advisory group, in the Northeast in 1962. Did we have them that early?

O'BRIEN: We had five thousand Marines in there.

SPROUSE: As early as '62?

O'BRIEN: In the spring of 1962 or May of 1962.

SPROUSE: Well, I didn't recall that we'd had them that early. But I've never heard of any Sihanouk reaction to this...

O'BRIEN: Well, how about...

SPROUSE: ...Sihanouk's reaction was rather to our close tie-up with the Thais, which increased, because of his hostility, to the Thais, his suspicion of us.

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O'BRIEN: Was he concerned about the road-building programs that were going on in northern Thailand along the border?

SPROUSE: I never heard him make any remark about it. Not that he didn't make them, but I don't know of any remark that he made.

O'BRIEN: Do you remember any instances in which you discussed the, well, some of the military aid programs that were going on with Thailand, and certainly Thailand's role in the deal?

SPROUSE: Well, he was critical of our over-arming the Thais, of course. This is perennial, over-arming the Thais, and I'm not sure that he wasn't critical of our over-arming South Vietnam, but particularly of over-arming the Thais. And, of course, he was always making speeches which were broadcast over the radio in which he was making some charge of one kind or another against the Thais.

And part of it, of course, were the activities which we got into, something we touched earlier, activities of a group of Free Cambodians called Khmer Serei, which were headed by a former Cambodian Prime Minister named Son Ngoc Thanh, who'd been Prime Minister at the time of the Japanese surrender. And Son Ngoc Thanh had been obviously a staunch nationalist -- I don't think there's any doubt about that -- but Sihanouk was very critical of him because people tried to indicate that perhaps Son Ngoc Thanh had played a part in Cambodia's gaining its independence from France, and Sihanouk felt that it was he and he alone who had really been the *Père de l'indépendance*, so to speak. So he was suspicious of the activities of these groups.

And this group of Free Cambodians was broadcasting, doing radio broadcasts to Cambodia, directed to Cambodia, appealing for the overthrow of Sihanouk and the end of his corrupt rule. And we were aware of these broadcasts because we monitored them, and we had an idea that they were emanating from South Vietnamese territory. Our Ambassador in South Vietnam took this up on more than one occasion with Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] and Nhu [Ngo Dinh Nhu], and they always denied that they knew anything about these things, these activities, that they existed. So consequently, when the head of state and his chief assistant -- I forget exactly

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what Nhu's official title was at that point -- deny that they exist, I think you have no recourse. Well, we put every pressure we could to stop them because we felt it achieved no purpose and this was arousing Sihanouk's suspicions of both the South Vietnamese and, in a sense, of us because he charged us with complicity in it. We deeply deplored it, and, of course, I could never go to Sihanouk and say that we have put all the pressure in the world we can on Diem and the South Vietnamese government to stop these things. So all we could say, and we said it time after time, was that we deplored them.

President Kennedy at one point had a thorough investigation made, and he sent a personal message to Sihanouk, which I delivered, assuring him that he had had a complete investigation made looking into the charges that Sihanouk brought that these were CIA-inspired, that we were behind these things, and assuring him that there wasn't one bit of evidence to back this assertion. The President said we deplored them because we didn't like them, we felt they were not conducive to good relations between Cambodia and the South Vietnamese, and we would give anything in the world we could to stop them, and asked Sihanouk if he had some evidence which he could turn over to us which would enable us to act. And, of course, he never turned up the evidence. Of course, we knew that he had the same evidence that we did of the monitoring of the broadcasts because he heard them.

O'BRIEN: Where was this group getting their support? Did you ever get any insight into their -- where the actual support was coming...

SPROUSE: Well, our intelligence told -- of course, this is obviously highly classified -- our intelligence told us it was coming right from the South Vietnamese

government, coming from South Vietnam. The latter denied heatedly that they knew anything about it, had anything to do with it, although it was being subsidized by them. It was unfortunate, really, because Son Ngoc Thanh had a good record up to this point, but this wasn't serving any purpose whatsoever. It was poisoning relations, or adding to the poison in the relations, between the South Vietnamese and the Cambodians and, of course, again rubbing off on us to our disadvantage and detriment.

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O'BRIEN: In September of '62...

SPROUSE: Excuse me, let me add one more thing...

O'BRIEN: Oh, go ahead. Sure.

SPROUSE: ...because this is part of the same picture. Then, just after the assassination, Mike Forrestal came to Cambodia with a similar message from President Johnson that he had looked into this and that there was no basis whatsoever in the fact that we were involved in this, that we deplored them and so forth.

O'BRIEN: There was a delivery of T-28 jets to the Cambodians in September of '62. Was this a prior military agreement, or was it spurred by the fact that Thailand had made some rather strong statements as a result of the -- or am I getting out of sequence there -- as a result of the temple situation?

SPROUSE: No. You see, Sihanouk had earlier -- I think in '61, towards the end of '61, if I remember correctly, or the beginning of '62, before I came on the scene -- asked for jet planes. We felt, of course, that from a military standpoint there was absolutely no requirement whatsoever for the Cambodians to have jet planes, which would be expensive to maintain and they'd need to train pilots to operate. His real problem, of course, was internal security. But Sihanouk felt very strongly he should have jets. On the original request, I don't know whether he'd been given a flat refusal or not, but anyway we hadn't delivered them, and these planes came along much later. And these were trainers, actual trainers. Of course, this satisfied some requirements, but later, of course, he got MIGs from the Russians. Someone said at the time, "You get a fast-flying jet pursuit plane up in the air, and once it's gotten up there and gone in some direction, it'll be out of Cambodia before you know what's happened." [Laughter] Obviously there was no target for such a plane and no reason for it, except perhaps prestige purposes, obviously. And, of course, the Russians took great pleasure in giving them to them.

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O'BRIEN: Has the building of -- getting into relations with Vietnam -- has the building of the seaport, let me see.... Sihanoukville, isn't it?

SPROUSE: The French did that.

O'BRIEN: Right. But has the building of that lessened the kind of traditional economic dependence on the Mekong and particularly Saigon?

SPROUSE: He would have had a problem if the South Vietnamese had ever closed the Mekong because of the problem of the transport of oil. You had a long haul by road from Sihanoukville up to Phnom Penh -- I forget what, a hundred and seventy five, two hundred, two hundred and fifty miles; my memory's a little bit hazy on the thing now -- and economically the Mekong is much more important than Sihanoukville. But Sihanoukville, if they venture to build a railway, of course, could answer many of their problems. But you had the problem of the river which could bring up much more, that huge river, than a road which, of course, we ourselves built. This wasn't a very happy situation in some ways because the first road that was built collapsed in various points and it exceeded its original costs, as happens in so many cases. While I was there -- or rather before I arrived -- we agreed to rebuild those portions which had collapsed, and we were engaged in doing this. Of course, this was also very costly, but I think in a sense our prestige was involved, and I think we should have rebuilt it since we'd built a faulty one to begin with; this doesn't give a foreigner much respect for American efficiency, know-how and competence. We were engaged in rebuilding the road, and it was well under way when Diem and Nhu were assassinated in the fall of 1963.

At the same time the appeals by the Khmer Serei being broadcast out of South Vietnam for the overthrow of Sihanouk were gaining in intensity and...

O'BRIEN: Now, they gained in intensity after the assassination?

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SPROUSE: Gained in intensity. Yes, just at this time, you see. And Sihanouk, already with suspicion of U.S. machinations (what we were about, and our close association with both the South Vietnamese and Thais) apparently didn't feel exactly sure of what this might mean, you know. Ordinarily he goes abroad in the fall, goes to France and takes the "cure." It's like what the French do at Vichy and Evian. And he goes on a very rigid diet during that period and comes back, of course, with renewed vigor because, after all, the tropical heat does sap you and he's always intensely active in everything, physically and mentally, too. He didn't go that fall, but had his doctor come out from the south of France. And the doctor put him on this rigid regime, and he was laboring under tension and under this rigid diet at the time the assassination occurred with these appeals for his overthrow at the same time from the Free Cambodians. It was at this point that Sihanouk decided that he would ask for the withdrawal of our aid missions.

One tame Cambodian came in at that point, supposed to be a representative of these Free Cambodians in South Vietnam, to negotiate perhaps a return of Son Ngoc Thernh for discussions or something. I think he thought originally he was going to get safe conduct for

his return but instead he was arrested. And Sihanouk staged a huge trial in front of the palace. There were tens of thousands of people listening to this trial, during which this man confessed all his sins and said that the Free Cambodians were being armed by the United States.

Well, then we looked into this even more closely than we had before, and in a literal sense of the word you could say that the United States had armed Free Cambodians or ethnic Cambodians in South Vietnam because as Vietnamese citizens they were subject to military recruitment, as were other South Vietnamese, residents of South Vietnam. We had undoubtedly armed them as part of units of the South Vietnamese army. After all, they were fighting the Viet Cong along with the South Vietnamese. So to the extent there was some truth in this, but to say they were being armed as Free Cambodian units under the direction of Cambodians for use against Cambodia, of course, was just absolutely false. There wasn't one iota of truth in it.

O'BRIEN: Have these units retained their...

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SPROUSE: Separate identity?

O'BRIEN: Separate identity, yes, in South Vietnam.

SPROUSE: They might have, although I'm not sure that their officers were ethnic Cambodians. They were obviously grouped together at some point, but they were not in any sense under the command of Son Ngoc Thanh or any of these free Cambodians who were broadcasting; as a matter of fact, they had no connection whatsoever. So Sihanouk staged this huge open-air trial of this chap. Later, I think he was shot or executed. Sihanouk was broadcasting day after day long speeches, two and three hour speeches, accusing us of every crime known to man.

And it was during this period, also, that.... Oh yes, I got a note from the Foreign Office following these speeches by Sihanouk, got a note from the Foreign Office which said that the continuation of American aid would be insulting to Cambodia, even one dollar more of American aid would be an insult to the country. Whereupon we logically, with all these charges that had been going on on the air day after day after day, stopped our aid. Sihanouk at the same time -- no, I don't think at this point he had yet demanded withdrawal of all the aid missions -- but when we stopped the aid, then Sihanouk said we had not right to stop the aid because, after all, we'd made a commitment to give this aid and they had the right to this aid. He reversed his field immediately.

And we started negotiations with the Cambodian cabinet minister chiefly involved in these aid programs, a very able, French-educated specialist -- he was an economist, a professional economist, first-rate man -- with the idea of seeing how much could be saved from this debris. We at the embassy and all of the people involved did not want, really, to stop all the aid programs, although I could be critical of the aid program on the whole because the aid program was all out of proportion. We were engaged in every form of



economic activity, almost, in that country; it was an overwhelming American presence, which is always counterproductive. If you could have cut the aid program by two-thirds, I think we'd been better off, but wherever the Cambodians had asked for, for too long we had been willing to give them. At this point I think our total aid program at the end was, over the period of years, somewhere around three hundred sixty or seventy million dollars, both military and economic, although largely economic.

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So we were negotiating with this cabinet minister in an effort to see what could be kept, you know. And I told the cabinet minister, "Although Prince Sihanouk, of course, has been critical of us for stopping the aid program, when he says it's an insult to the country and a danger to the country and that would be humiliating to receive even one dollar more of American aid, how could we do anything but stop the aid in the face of his statement that he doesn't want it? And," I said, "I see your position, but perhaps we can restore some of this or keep some of it going in things that you're particularly interested in having." I was thinking primarily of that road, that highway, which we knew they wanted. I said, "I can't commit Washington. I can't give you indications of just what Washington would do, but I'd certainly be willing to continue some parts of the program. I feel reasonably certain they would give it very careful and serious consideration and look perhaps with favor on some of it. But," I said, "this is going to have to be a request from you because, after all, I mean we just can't force this aid on you." Of course, this was an awkward situation because people who were involved in the aid program on the Cambodian side knew what contributions it made to the country, the economy of the country, and they didn't want the programs stopped either, that is, the major elements of the aid program.

So we were negotiating right along, and I think we would have saved something from the debris which would have enabled us to keep our foot still in the door. Basically, as I told Sihanouk time after time, our aims and objectives in Cambodia are the same as yours, that is, to help you maintain your independence and develop your economy so that you have continued stability in the country.

So everything was going beautifully, but suddenly one day during this period there was a broadcast by the Cambodian Ministry of Information in Khmer, in Cambodian, not in French or in English. And this was a broadcast obviously designed for the Cambodian people -- this was just after the assassination of President Kennedy -- which said that the Cambodians' chief enemies now had joined in the nethermost regions. One, they had first gotten rid of either Sarit or Diem (I forget which went first)' then the other great enemy (Sarit or Diem or vice-versa)

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had joined him; and now the chief of them all had joined them in the nethermost regions where they continued to hatch their nefarious plots.

Well, of course, this was obviously picked up in Washington immediately, and Washington, without asking my advice (or anybody else's advice, so far as I know)

immediately instructed me to see Sihanouk and instructed Charlie Yost [Chalres W. Yost], who was our Deputy Chief Delegate to the U.N., to see the Cambodian Ambassador to Washington, serving also as the head of their delegation to the U.N. And I always felt that this was a mistake because a delegation at the U.N. really has no standing vis-a-vis an ambassador resident in Washington and they shouldn't have done it. But they told him -- this was Charlie Yost -- to approach Nong Kimny, who was the top Cambodian Ambassador abroad and a very distinguished and able man and very close to Sihanouk. They told me at the same time to see Sihanouk or, if I couldn't get to Sihanouk immediately, to get to Prime Minister Price Kantol [Norodom Kantol], who was less well connected and less important. Yost and I were instructed to tell the Cambodians that this was barbaric and uncivilized.

Well, if you've practiced the art of diplomacy at all, you know that you don't tell a chief of state that whatever happened in his country is barbaric and uncivilized if you expect to stay there very long. I could have been given my passport the next minute, I'm sure. So before I could get anything off to Washington, we got a report from Charlie Yost that he had passed this on to Nong Kimny, and Nong Kimny, of course, was shocked at this, said it couldn't possibly be true. I didn't even try to get to Sihanouk because this was hopeless. Sihanouk wasn't in the city at that point; he was down in one of his villas somewhere on the seacoast or somewhere in the mountains.

So I got to Kantol, the Prime Minister, and I told Kantol (I didn't use the words "uncivilized and barbaric") I just simply said that this broadcast had come to my Government's attention. We had noted fortunately that the Chinese Communist press at Phnom Penh had printed a little bit from the broadcast in the local press, so I could say truthfully that we noted this report in the local press, the Chinese press, instead of revealing our monitoring service in Saigon as the source. I told Kantol that my Government had instructed me to say, and I very carefully said, "If this is true, they

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protest in the strongest terms this really almost incredible blow to the memory of our great President recently assassinated." And Kantol, who obviously didn't know (I could never be fooled on this; I was sure that he knew nothing of this), said, "This couldn't be true. After all, I and the Foreign Minister went to Washington to attend the funeral and did everything we could to honor the late President. And you know what great respect and liking Prince Sihanouk had for President Kennedy." I said, "Will you please look into it and give me an answer." Then there was another thing that I did in accordance with instructions. I did this reluctantly because I thought this was superfluous and was offensive in a different sense. I said that we also deplored such statements about our great and good ally the Prime Minister of Thailand, Sarit. Well, of course, that infuriated the Cambodians because, after all, everything they said about Sarit they believed. [Laughter]

And so, of course, we got an answer back that this broadcast hadn't taken place. Well, at that point what could you say? And so there we were left sitting high and dry. I told Washington the matter had to be dropped as there wasn't anything further we could do. Sihanouk was so infuriated with the "uncivilized and barbaric" accusations that he broke off

the negotiations immediately and asked us to withdraw our aid missions from Cambodia. This was the end, really, of the American presence during this period.

I don't think that this action itself was the decisive factor in what happened in Cambodia. I still feel very strongly that we were hoist on the petard of a deteriorating situation in Vietnam and that Sihanouk had arrived at the conclusion that inevitably that Hanoi was going to win and that he had to make his accommodations for the future based solely on the interests of his own country.

O'BRIEN: Let's take some of those issues that are present between the United States and, well, between actually South Vietnam and Cambodia, and see how the United States, in a sense, was involved. First of all, before that, I was just curious here when we were going through a little earlier. Did you receive any instructions in regard to the Cuban missile crisis in the way of contacting Sihanouk beforehand?

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SPROUSE: No. We kept him informed, if I remember correctly, but one thing happened in connection with that which shows you the difficulty we were having with Sihanouk. Sihanouk at this point, just at this point, had begun to make overtures to and was on the verge of establishing diplomatic relations with Castro Cuba. I was instructed to go to Sihanouk and say that this would really pose a very difficult problem for us, and rightly so: that Congress wouldn't understand, the American public wouldn't understand, that at a time like this Cambodia could possibly do this.

So I went to him, and this is where I first made the point to him that he had enjoyed a very favorable press in the United States. He immediately said, "But they're always criticizing me." And I said, "No. The papers that are important, the most influential papers in the United States, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, all the leading papers have almost uniformly praised you for your accomplishments and achievements in this country." And I said, "The only thing is from time to time you do see a critical article or particularly a critical letter written by some person whom no one every heard of. He might write it to a good paper or he might write it to a paper that has no particular influence. I notice your ambassador in Washington always picks these up, and he always replies." Sometimes Sihanouk himself would reply. What I wanted to say was, "You dignify something that should be ignored," but you couldn't quite put it so bluntly. But I said, "These are unimportant; these don't mean anything. This is one man out of millions, tens of millions, almost two hundred million people. What is important is what the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and the *Christian Science Monitor* say, and they always say favorable things about you. But," I said, "if you think the American press has been critical, let me assure you that if you establish" -- this is the only time I ever really let him have it squarely between the teeth -- "diplomatic relations with Cuba at this time where a vital American interest is involved, where you basically have no interest whatsoever, I can assure you that if you think the American press has been critical in the past, you haven't heard anything." At that point, he backed off, and he said, "Well, I'll see what I can do," which meant to me, of course, that he was going to do what was necessary to stop it. And he did

stop it. He later carried it through, sometime later. This was the one difficulty we had with Sihanouk, but he called this off.

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O'BRIEN: In regard to some of the more important differences between Vietnam and Cambodia, what major efforts were made on the part of the United States? Let's put it this way: what were you instructed to do, and what were you advising Washington in regard to particularly the border incursions, the border problems, the bombing of some of the Cambodian villages?

SPROUSE: There was a problem for us because the South Vietnamese were fighting a war for their lives. It was a problem also because, as Sihanouk himself admitted, Viet Cong guerillas did cross the border, although Sihanouk denied that he had permitted them to establish bases and real sanctuaries and said that when they crossed the border in numbers in which he could deal with them, he did so. We know that he did deal with them from time to time. In 1961 or '62 Trumbull [Robert Trumbull], a first-rate *New York Times* correspondent, published an article, dateline Saigon, in which he accused Sihanouk of giving sanctuary and bases to the Viet Cong. And Sihanouk made an offer publicly that he would permit the correspondents of any nationality, any paper, to come to Cambodia and see for themselves. He would provide facilities so they could get out and inspect the border themselves, see whether or not this was true. And Trumbull came up, and he put helicopters, jeeps and so forth at his disposal. Of course, he never found anything. Our MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] Chief went off at that point on an investigation of his own, and he never found anything either.

O'BRIEN: That was General Scherrer [Edward Scherrer]?

SPROUSE: That was General Scherrer, Pony Sherrer. And General Scherrer, at this point, became the leading American in Cambodia for ever afterwards because he made a public statement saying that there was no truth in the charges. And, of course, while this wasn't exactly the sort of thing that a chief of MAAG group should have done, it helped us with Sihanouk, and it gave the lie to these reports, which were baseless. It was based, as we learned later, entirely on South Vietnamese intelligence. And Trumbull himself made a retraction, which was very decent for a correspondent to

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do, saying he'd been misinformed, but these charges continued to get bandied about.

At some point the number of incursions, I'm sure, became larger. And these incursions, as I said earlier, quite frequently involved the presence of U.S. military observers with the South Vietnamese troops across the Cambodian border, sometimes resulting in killing of Cambodians, the ethnic Cambodians, and maybe the killing of their cattle and damage to their villages. And at one point they came up the Mekong. But whenever these

things happened, we didn't pound the table on this from our embassy in Cambodia. We always tried, pointedly and courteously, because we realized the problem our ambassador faced in South Vietnam and Saigon, to point out how helpful it would be (and this is making the point without saying, "You damn well ought to") how helpful it would be if on any such occasion Diem would immediately say that they had no grounds for believing their troops were involved in a thing of this sort, but he would order an immediate investigation and that if the investigation showed that there were grounds for these charges, they would be willing to offer their apologies and pay indemnity.

Now this would have been a simple thing for the South Vietnamese to do, but old stiff-necked, stiff-backed Diem would never do it. And the thing would drag on and on and on. He would never make any retraction, never offer any indemnity, pay nothing. And, of course, we knew the facts because immediately Sihanouk would order an investigation survey from his own side, including always our military attaché. We felt that our military attaché would have to go along because otherwise it made his position untenable there. He would go down -- and, of course, they'd have interpreters -- but they could see the spots, and they would pick up American shell casings and this sort of thing. If there'd been bombing, they'd pick up pieces of bombs with clear indication that these came not from the Cambodians but from the other side. It would establish, in practically every instance that we know of, the fact that these incidents actually had occurred. But not Mr. Diem; he wouldn't accept any responsibility. This is one of the things which, of course, undermined our position repeatedly, and particularly if there were American observers along because you can't hid a Westerner in a group of South Vietnamese; they just stand out.

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O'BRIEN: Did you ever have the feeling or did you ever see any evidence to the effect that perhaps some of these bombings and border incursions were timed or were intentional on the part of the South Vietnamese to perhaps prevent a, well, in some way or another designed to affect United States-Cambodian relations?

SPROUSE: No, I never did except insofar as their intelligence reports went. But, you see, what purpose would it have served the South Vietnamese to get us embroiled with Sihanouk because we always pointed out to the South Vietnamese that what we should do is everything we could do to maintain good -- for them also -- to maintain good relations with Sihanouk because it was vital to avoid giving any possibility of sanctuary or aid to the Viet Cong. But I'm convinced almost entirely, if not entirely, that these always involved the pursuit of Viet Cong guerrillas or a fancied attack on Viet Cong positions. For instance, on occasion you'd have fire across the border, maybe some kind of lobbing of shells or howitzers or something, and they would attack because they thought this was a Viet Cong base in Cambodia, a sanctuary. In later years, I think finally Sihanouk himself began to admit some of these situations. Apparently the incidents began to involve units of such strength that he could no longer really deal with them anymore with his small military force.

O'BRIEN: Did the United States ever get involved in the attempts to reopen some of the

trade patterns? I was thinking particularly of the customs problem they had, Cambodia had, with South Vietnam over the use of Saigon as a port and some of these...

SPROUSE: They never closed the river, you see, but there was always a threat they might close the river. If this had come, you know, this would have been a very ticklish one, because of the treaty arrangements made at the time of the Geneva Conference and at the time of independence. But we did get involved in other problems, and our involvement consisted usually of trying to put some pressure on the South Vietnamese government. And, of course, we couldn't tell Sihanouk these things because the minute you tell Sihanouk

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anything, you had a message to him, you've got to accept that it's going to be broadcast over the radio within twenty-four hours, because as Sihanouk once said, "I have no secrets," which is true. I remember when Mike Forrestal came out there, Mike Forrestal said something to him and, of course, within twenty-four or forty-eight hours it was being broadcast.

You see, there was the question of blocked francs under the bank of issue, Le Banque de l'Indochine, I believe, connected with that area before independence. And the Cambodians were due to get a certain amount and the South Vietnamese a certain amount, but they were in the possession of the South Vietnamese at this point, the South Vietnamese bank. And this was always a ticklish point because we did our best to get the South Vietnamese to release these funds; they wouldn't do it.

Then, of course, there was the question of the border, the delineation of the border, because the Cambodians always insisted the border was such and such. As I have said, there's no sort of great river, great highway which clearly marks it. And the South Vietnamese had certain claims which they felt had not been satisfied, and they were unwilling to accept the present borders as such. Then there were some offshore islands down in the gulf there, which the Cambodians said were theirs and the South Vietnamese were claiming as theirs. So there was one issue after another.

And then at one point I think the South Vietnamese grabbed off a number of Cambodian vessels and got their crews -- or was it vice versa? I'm not completely clear on this. Well, whatever it was, this was again an issue between the two countries. Usually the claims, the grievances, were on the part of the Cambodians, that is, looking at it from the standpoint of Phnom Penh. Maybe if I were in Saigon, I might have looked at it otherwise, but it always seemed to me that they were the complainants, you might say, and they could never get any satisfaction.

I always felt this would have been a small price for Diem -- trying to look at it objectively -- this is a small price for Diem to have paid because, after all, the petty little acreage involved couldn't have been very much, one. The matter of money involved, considering the amount of aid we were giving, was almost nothing again. The islands, of course, involved national prestige, but he would never, Diem would never, renounce anything or give up anything. So consequently, in a sense these

situations contributed to forcing Sihanouk towards the other camp.

O'BRIEN: Were you recommending settlements or at least giving advice on these particular situations to Washington?

SPROUSE: Well, to the extent that we could, of course, because we were recommending the negotiations. Maybe both sides would have had to compromise. It would have been stupid of us to have outlined the form of a settlement, as such. To the extent that we knew anything about it and we could find out anything about it -- and, of course, the Embassy at Paris knew something about this as well as Saigon -- we felt that the Cambodians at least had a claim on all these things and that some compromise could have been worked out so that all would have been happy and you wouldn't have had these continuing sources of friction between the two. Of course, on all these things that we were doing in Saigon, or if we did them in Bangkok, we were never able to tell these things to Sihanouk, and Sihanouk never knew the efforts that we made, really, you might say, partially in his behalf, primarily in behalf of a settlement which would eliminate the points of friction, but in a sense to his advantage. But if you told him, he would get on the radio and broadcast and then the effect of your pressure would be completely lost in the other capital. Why don't we hit it for lunch at this point?

O'BRIEN: O.K. Fine.

SPROUSE: Since it's one o'clock.... oops. I say, it's a little bit warm out in the sun, isn't it?

O'BRIEN: It's getting that way. It feels good, though.

SPROUSE: It's still not hot, I grant you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]