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Interview with John Tucker

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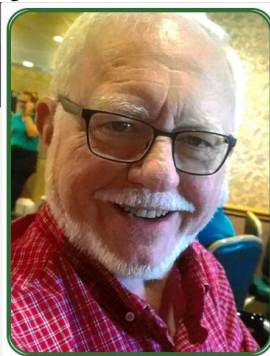
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John Tucker



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11, 12, 13 February, 2008 – Phone interview
Interviewer/Editor – Paul Hillmer
Transcriber – Diane Schuessler

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John Tucker was born in Akron, Ohio in 1945. An eagle scout, he was given the opportunity to travel the world, which fueled his international perspective. He graduated from Case Western Reserve University in 1967 and then joined the Peace Corps. He was assigned to Thailand where he spent three years working on a malaria eradication program. While there he was recruited by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). He spent the early part of his career working for USAID in Laos and Thailand as a refugee Relief and Resettlement Officer. He was one of 15 USAID employees in Laos placed under house arrest for nine days by student demonstrators. He was one of a handful of individuals who started on the ground floor in October of 1975 helping to organize and codify the resettlement of refugees from Thailand. Tucker and Jerry Daniels were assigned the title “ethnic affairs officer.” Daniels was responsible for Hmong refugees and Tucker for Lao refugees. According to his obituary, Tucker estimated that he “interviewed close to 100,000 people for placement or relocation from refugee camps up until approximately 1980, and advocated for increased quotas to get more people safely out of what was at that time a war zone.” While Tucker served in the Philippines, Guam, the Sinai Region, Pakistan and Afghanistan, this interview focused exclusively on his time in Laos and Thailand.*

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**<https://www.anthonymb.com/obituary/John-Tucker>*

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Editor’s note: This conversation occurred over the course of three consecutive evenings. Mr. Tucker reviewed the manuscript after it was transcribed. The “small talk” at the beginning and end of each phone conversation, as well as any information about how to contact other potential interview subjects, has been redacted from this interview.

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(0:17) Good evening. John Tucker.

29
30

Hello, sir. This is Paul Hillmer calling.

31

32
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[The two chat, speak about Hillmer’s project, the parameters of their discussion, and how long they would be able to speak, etc.]

34

35

I met a Lao girl—well, I met her parents at a Lao party Saturday night here in Akron. And their daughter—they only have one child, the daughter, and she's doing quite well. She spent a summer up at the language program in Madison, Wisconsin, which a friend of mine, who I haven't seen in years, Carol Compton, helped start, I think. You may know her or ...

36

37

38

39 **No, I haven't heard of her.**

40 ... of heard of her. She's married to Linn Compton—L-i-n-n. He's a PhD, but I can't remember
41 what field he's in. I met them when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand in '67 or '68. They
42 were on their first Fulbright at the Khon Kaen University in Northeast Thailand. And anyway, I
43 know that she had something to do with getting that started at—a language program for six or seven
44 different languages at Madison. I don't think she's still there. In fact, they may have even separated
45 by now, but—according to what I heard. But she did a PhD in Lao Molam, which is, as you
46 probably know, is a music—it's a way of conveying a story via music. I suppose the Hmong have
47 something equivalent. I don't know what they call it, though. But anyway, she—the girl is—went
48 there to learn Thai and Lao, I think. She—but that's unusual that a child who's been here that long
49 would have that much of an interest in rediscovering their language. But let me—do you want me
50 to tell you a little bit about my background? I don't think I put it in an e-mail. I was actually
51 hired—well, after I did three years Peace Corps in Khon Kaen and Loei provinces in the malaria
52 eradication program, I applied for the AID program in Vietnam. That's the only country they were
53 hiring for in—it would have been '71 by then. And it was the CORDS program—Civilian Office of
54 Rural Development something or other. I don't remember what CORDS stands for now. But six
55 months into a 12-month training program in Rosslyn, Virginia there in Arlington, I was asked if I'd
56 rather go to Laos instead of Vietnam because they needed a Lao speaker immediately. We're talking
57 New Year's, '71, I guess it was. There—if my memory doesn't fail me, I think there was a major
58 incursion in Southern Laos by the Pathet Lao along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the refugees were
59 pouring out of Saravan and Attapeu province westward toward Pakse and they needed another
60 refugee officer in Southern Laos. So I was asked if I would rather go to Laos instead of Vietnam.
61 And of course, I jumped at the chance and five days later found myself in Laos. And I still haven't
62 been to Vietnam. I would imagine I'll get there one day. But I learned enough Vietnamese that I
63 could still do pretty good interviews in Vietnamese in '77 when I was left behind as the sole refugee
64 officer at the Embassy in Bangkok after Washington decided to—the problem was going to go away
65 and nobody really wanted to hear about Indochinese anymore. Of course, those of us who followed
66 the program knew that indeed wasn't the case and refugees kept pouring out, certainly Hmong as
67 well as the boat cases really start hot and heavy from Vietnam then. And I was rotating between
68 two Vietnamese boat refuge camps. One called Lamsing in Chanthaburi Province or Chon Buri
69 Province, depending on how you pronounce it, and the other one was in the South in Songkhla.
70 And I did that by myself, basically, for nine months. When I say by myself is the only USG official.
71 I had help from International Rescue Committee personnel who, by that time, Washington had
72 decided to divide up the case loads by country and by voluntary agency. IRC got Thailand and I
73 can't remember which ones got the other places, like Hong Kong and Singapore, Malaysia, whatever.
74 So I had help with—from IRC until August when the refugee section, which had collapsed in
75 December of '76, but then re-blossomed by September '77 and there was authorization for—to
76 accept—to interview and accept other ethnic groups other than Vietnamese into the U.S. So I went
77 back to being the Lao ethnic affairs officer. It's a shame Jerry Daniels isn't alive because he would
78 be your primary source on all things Hmong, I'm sure, in addition to Mac Thompson. Of course,
79 he's still very much alive.

80 **Oh, indeed.**

81 Have you sat down with him at all?

82

83 **(13:15) Yeah, I was in Bangkok in January of last year and then we just had a chance to chat**
84 **briefly. I was there again in November. But yeah, he is almost encyclopedic in what he**
85 **seems to remember from those days.**

86 Oh, yeah. Yes, definitely. He's a heck of a guy. I've worked with him in—well, not directly with
87 him, but we were in the same program in Laos, although he focused on the North. Then when he
88 moved to Vientiane—I guess he was my backstop for ordering rice and commodities. He was the—
89 he had—he was the person who liaised with our—whatever they called it in Bangkok—maybe it
90 was a procurement officer type in Bangkok to procure, to do rice contracts and blankets and all
91 those other commodities that we distributed in the refugee camps in Laos. And then he got
92 involved in the parole program. I guess he was the first one on the scene because he was still in
93 Laos after the rest of us had been evacuated. But anyway, I got to go to southern Laos and stayed
94 there for three years, I think, until December of '74. And then the plan was to downsize all of
95 southern Laos up there. The area coordinator of Savannakhet, where Pakse had had its own AC—
96 area coordinator, in the past, they were going to abolish that position. And I was not the AC of
97 Pakse. He—it was someone else. But I was going to move to Savannakhet and be the deputy AC
98 for all of southern Laos with Sandy Stone, who is now deceased and—out of Savannakhet. But that
99 never came to be. We were all evacuated before that plan could be implemented. But then I stayed
100 with the program. I went to Guam and then when the parole program started in Bangkok, I was
101 sent to Bangkok to help out with that. And Mac was already in place, of course. Jack Huxtable was
102 there, I think. So the three of us pretty much were in the office in Bangkok—at the Bangkok end of
103 it. Then back in Washington—and I'm sure you've heard these names before, like Shep Lowman
104 and Lionel Rosenblatt and Hank Cushing. The three of them were ...

105
106 **(16:03) Hank Cushing. I haven't heard that name.**

107 Well, he's now deceased, too, unfortunately. He was in—he came out of Vietnam there at the fall.
108 He was an English professor at Valparaiso, I think. And somehow ended up—oh, and an ex-
109 Marine—and somehow ended up in the AID program in Vietnam and then with the refugee
110 program from '75 on through, oh, early '80s, mid-'80s. He—I guess his last refugee post was—he
111 was the head of the office in Washington when I came back to work in Washington in 1980. Head
112 of—well, a part of the big program in Washington. He wasn't the number one guy, but he headed
113 up the office over in SA2—State Annex 2, there on the corner of Virginia Avenue and 23rd Street.
114 We were not in main state per se. But he headed that up. Then he went out again to be a refugee
115 coordinator—I want to say Philippines. He did that for a few years and then I guess we lost contact
116 with each other because I went off to do other things and then by '89 I was sent to Peshawar,
117 Pakistan and Hank was already in place there working on the Afghan cross border humanitarian
118 relief program, which we—which I ended up working in later after Washington started downsizing
119 the Pakistan program. Two missions working in the same country. Because the Afghan program
120 people couldn't go inside Afghanistan. The Americans couldn't, at least. So anyway, Hank and I
121 became even closer friends yet, because we were the only two direct hires posted in Peshawar. One
122 of my programs—one of my projects was in the tribal areas. Of course, no one ever heard of it
123 before this recent search for Osama Bin Laden. But anyway, that was—that's a whole other story.
124 So anyway, I was at the embassy in Bangkok—not, well I say I was there, but actually I was back and
125 forth, working with Mac out of the consulate in Udorn, covering the—I was covering the Lao
126 camps and Jerry Daniels covering the Hmong camps. Of course, he traveled much more than I did
127 up to the North because there were Hmong camps way up North in Thailand. There weren't too
128 many Lao up there. Well, there were some, I guess, but Jerry went ahead and covered them. And
129 then when he'd go on leave, I'd cover his Hmong camps. So we were sort of interchangeable in that
130 respect. In fact, he even stayed at my house in Bangkok when I went on home leave in '78 or '79.
131 And I ended up going to his funeral out in Missoula, which was quite an interesting experience.

132

133 **(19:24) There was a piece—I think it was in the Missoula newspaper, but it ended up online**
134 **and someone passed it onto me that Jerry Daniel's brother wants his body exhumed**
135 **because he still doesn't believe that the story about his death is legit.**

136 Oh, my God. He must have—now, I wonder which brother. Is it Jack Daniels who was like a phys
137 ed instructor in New York or ...

138 **I don't think so. I might be able to find it. I think I saved it.**

139 There's another brother named Kent. I met all these brothers at the funeral. For some reason I
140 don't think it would be Jack, but it could well—very well be.

141 **Where did I save that?**

142 Well, if you ever find it ...

143 **Yeah, I'll be sure ...**

144 ... forward it to me. I'd be interested in looking at it because—that's interesting to hear after all
145 these years because I can remember being at the Missoula Airport with Vang Pao and hundreds of
146 other Hmong waiting for the coffin to arrive there via Denver. And one of my friends I worked
147 with and had known through USAID Laos, Jim Schill, he actually escorted the casket from
148 probably—well, he was in Washington, so he probably flew to Denver and—or he might have flown
149 up to New York and escorted it from New York onto Denver and they had to change planes right
150 into Missoula. And the Hmong, of course, wanted to open the casket immediately right there at the
151 airport. And of course, Jim had to convince them that just was not possible. And even over in the
152 funeral home, which they took over for a week, Gayle Morrison, I think describes this funeral in
153 probably more detail, although I've not read her book. I have a copy of it, but it's upstairs packed
154 with hundreds of other books sent here from Virginia. But I remember talking to her a little bit
155 about it. She was trying to get me to find the pictures I had from the funeral, but I never did locate
156 them in this house. I know they're somewhere, but I just haven't come across them yet. But she
157 went ahead and published the book anyway. Have you come across that book?

158

159 **(21:43) *Sky is Falling?***

160 It's probably that one, yeah.

161 **Yeah. About the evacuation of Long Tieng?**

162 It could be. Yeah. Was Jerry's funeral mentioned in that book or was it a later book?

163 **Well, I heard stories that she was working on a biography of Jerry. But if she is or has I**
164 **haven't seen that book.**

165 Oh, OK. Well, maybe that's the book she was trying to get the pictures for.

166 **That could well be.**

167 Yeah. But that doesn't surprise me if maybe the years and years of the Hmong trying to convince
168 the brother that either Jerry isn't inside or that he didn't die the way everybody said he did or
169 whatever. Because I know there were rumors that somebody had zapped him—maybe Thai
170 intelligence—because of his efforts to pursue the—what do you call—the yellow rain that it wasn't
171 bee pollen. Or it was bee pollen and not insecticides, I guess, that the Pathet Lao were showering
172 down on the Hmong to drive them out of the hills. I guess that's what—well, I guess that's where
173 that storyline leads if one follows it.

174

175 **(22:57) Oh, indeed. Lots of interesting conspiracy theories in the Hmong community.**

176 Oh, yeah. Sure. But I'd be interested in seeing that if you ever stumble across it.

177 **No, literally, someone just sent it to me today. So I'm sure, at the very least, when we're**
178 **done talking I can get online and send you the link to the article.**

179 Oh, was it—it must have been a recent article then?

180 **Yeah. Yeah. It was a picture of this brother holding a picture of Jerry and I wish I could**
181 **remember his name. But he goes by Dan Daniels, but Dan isn't his real name.**
182 Oh, well, wait a minute. I think there was a third brother that I didn't—well, I guess I met them all
183 there at the funeral. Could be Dan. I don't remember the name. For some reason Jack stuck in my
184 mind because of the bourbon, but—and I think Curt and of course Louise. I met her there and I
185 met her later in—or earlier in Washington when she was traveling around. But anyway, of course,
186 like you told you in the e-mail, I didn't have any experience with the Hmong until I got involved in
187 the refugee program out of Thailand.

188
189 **(24:15) Well, that's perfectly fine. In fact, I'd be interested, if you don't mind, in talking**
190 **about your experiences in Southern Laos a little bit. I think, particularly in communities**
191 **like the Twin Cities, where the Hmong are so prevalent, there's this near-myth that the**
192 **Hmong were really the only people who were fighting in Laos and that all of the action was**
193 **really happening in Military Region 2. So I'd be interested in just some of the memories**
194 **you might be willing and able to share about—you said you were in MR-4?**

195 Right. I was in Military Region 4, Pakse.

196 **So which groups of people ...**

197 MR-3 is Savannakhet.

198 **Right.**

199 MR-2 must be Long Tieng area.

200 **Yeah. Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua.**

201 And I don't know whether the headquarters was actually in there or was it somewhere else?

202 **I think Long Tieng was probably—that ended up being where the CIA building was, but I**
203 **know there was also set up in Udorn because after all, after '62 with the Geneva agreements,**
204 **we were supposed to be out of Laos as were the Vietnamese. So ...**

205 They would not have called Udorn Military Region 4 ...

206 **No.**

207 ... for cosmetic reasons for Laos. MR1—must be Luang Prabang or Huai Sai ...

208 **Yeah, I think so.**

209 ... or something like that. I don't know. But—have you—the general—or Hugh Tovar didn't put
210 you onto General Soutchay?

211 **I've heard his name, but nobody seems to—in fact, maybe I'll have to go back to Hugh**
212 **Tovar and I've also talked to John Vessey, who is actually here in Minnesota. So both of**
213 **them have mentioned him, but ...**

214 General Vessey?

215 **Yeah.**

216 Oh, OK. Not his son. His son has ...

217 **Yeah, his son was—exactly.**

218 I can't remember. I just saw his e-mail address the other day. I forget where he is.

219 **I think he's maybe Southeast?**

220 Well, he was then—when he was still working, before he retired, he was in Falls Church. And I
221 don't know—Falls Church, Virginia. I don't know if he's still there or not, actually.

222 **I'll—I think I have his e-mail somewhere. I'll have to see if I can reconnect with him**
223 **because we talked about having a conversation and then we just kind of lost track of each**
224 **other, I think. General Vessey lives just north of the Twin Cities about two hours, so I drove**
225 **up to his house a couple of years ago and we chatted for awhile. He's actually a big**
226 **supporter of Concordia. So there's sort of an established relationship there already.**

227 Oh, that's great.

228 **Plus there's a charter school named after him and I ended up being Concordia's liaison**
229 **because every charter school needs a sponsor and Concordia is sponsoring it because the**
230 **General's name is attached to it.**

231 Wonderful. Oh, that's great.

232 **So, yeah, I'll have to—have to redouble my efforts there and get ahold of him because I**
233 **know he's been mentioned to me now a couple of times. Now you're the third, so ...**

234 Well, John, the son, was assigned to the consulate in Udorn when Mac and I—well, he was there at
235 the airport waiting for my evacuation flight from Savannakhet. He was not the number one in
236 charge, though. I'm trying to think of the guy's name in—who was in charge of our evacuation out
237 of the consulate in Udorn. Well, it will eventually come to me, but John Vessey was certainly a more
238 likeable character than the guy whose name I can't remember. But he would—he could you fill
239 you—if you track him, John, Jr. or John the third he is or fourth ...

240 **Yeah, he would be the third. That's right.**

241 Third. He would have been involved in orchestrating our evacuation from—well, not only our
242 evacuation from Savannakhet, where I was at that time, and the other—my colleagues out of Pakse
243 into Udorn and then we had to report to Bangkok and onto the States. But I think, what I was
244 going to say, is John Vessey probably was involved with the evacuation of the Hmong from Laos by
245 air into Nam Phong airbase there outside of Khon Kaen, which—they vary in our circle of Hmong,
246 General Vang Pao, et cetera, probably the six or seven wives, probably—oh, and then hundreds of
247 others ...

248 **Yeah, the people who were ...**

249 ... in his association were flown right into Nam Phong airbase.

250

251 **(29:06) Exactly. Did you spend any time at Nam Phong?**

252 I did go there at least once that I can recall.

253 **Because that was one of the things that Mac wasn't sure about was in—I think it was**
254 **October of '75 when Lionel Rosenblatt showed up. And he said he thought you were there**
255 **then.**

256 It was '75. Well, if—I would have come down from Udorn probably with Mac. If—well, I know I
257 went there. It's just under what circumstances I went there. Whether I was accompanying an INS
258 officer to do interviews or I was going with Jerry and Mac or I just don't recall right now. But it was
259 for purposes of identifying people to use our—what was it—3,466 aliens numbers. I don't know if
260 Mac can fill you in on why it ended up being that number.

261 **Why—yeah. I've talked to Lionel, too, and I do remember him saying there was a certain**
262 **number of people left over from Vietnam where they had basically said, "OK, we've**
263 **assigned—or we've signed up this many people for Vietnam, but we still have this number**
264 **left over." And after Lionel had visited Nam Phong and met the Hmong, he was just like,**
265 **"OK. We need to get these people into the line and use this number and fill it with Hmong**
266 **people."**

267 OK. That makes sense. But now I'm wondering if I went to Nam Phong during Lionel's visit.

268 Unless Lionel made more than one trip there.

269 **I think he might have. But as Mac—and this is sort of my mishmashing of what Mac told**
270 **me and what Lionel told me.**

271 Right.

272 **Mac said it actually started with another guy from INS who came in September of '75 and,**
273 **in fact, maybe since I've got my computer on here I can find that quickly. Sam Feldman?**

274 **Does that name sound ...**

275 Yeah, Sam Feldman was out of Hong Kong—INS Hong Kong.

276
277 **(31:24) So he came out first and met them and so he said he would personally select—I think**
278 **it was mainly around 1,500 to be taken under parole authority. And then Lionel came just a**
279 **little bit later. And then he also, after having met them and saw how many of them had call**
280 **signs and spoke English and were nurses and all these other things, just felt moved to make**
281 **a special effort to ensure that they would indeed be included as part of the resettlement**
282 **effort.**

283 Right, but not necessarily a part of the initial 3,466 numbers because it became very apparent, based
284 on Lionel's visit and Mac and I working the camps, that 3,400 numbers were totally insufficient for a
285 people who could claim close association who were pouring out of Laos. And I know you know the
286 background about why the Lao were not included in the initial **ViCam** legislation, so we don't need
287 to ...

288
289 **(32:28) I'm not sure I know that story, actually.**

290 Well, the reason—well, OK. Phnom Penh fell first in, what, the second week of—I want to say
291 April 15, April 17. And then a couple weeks later, April 29, was the big evacuation from Saigon that
292 you see replayed on the TV.

293 **Right. The biggest air evacuation ever.**

294 Yeah, the chopper taking off on the top of the embassy and somebody beating the refugees off with
295 a paddle or something—the ones who were holding onto the runners. And then, of course, the
296 helicopters crashing into the—not crashing, but being thrown away into the ocean. That was April
297 29, April 30 timeframe. So those people were sent to—the ones who were evacuated that way by
298 air. So another embarking place was Sattahip airbase, U Taphao in Thailand from Cambodia. It was
299 called Operation Eagle Pull out of Cambodia. I don't remember the code name for the Vietnamese
300 evacuation, but anyway they were, they went to the—either the Philippines and then down to
301 Anderson Airbase at Guam or some may have gone directly to Guam by air. And then other
302 ships—a lot of Vietnamese vessels—Navy vessels—were told to just go to the Philippines. And I
303 ended up working in the program and getting the camp set up at Bataan, another refugee processing
304 center, but that was much later. That was like in February of '80. In fact, Jerry Daniels would have
305 stopped there on his way from the States back to Bangkok. And then he and I flew from
306 Philippines back to Bangkok together on April 6 of 1980. I was in—I was only in the Philippines
307 for two months getting that camp set up. And no Hmong went to that place. Only Vietnamese,
308 Khmer and selected Lao went. Of course, they were all pre-selected. You had to already be
309 approved by INS at a camp and then sent to that processing center, not to be processed, but just to
310 learn English for six months and the cultural orientation while the sponsorships were worked out.
311 And then people went from the RPC in the Philippines onto the States.

312 **Yeah, I think most Hmong went to Phanat Nikhom didn't they?**

313 But that was not a processing—that was not in the same sense—oh, wait. Oh, wait a minute.
314 Maybe it was. That was after I left. Was that a—was that—did they learn English there?

315 **I thought so.**

316 OK. That took place as I was—either while I was in the Philippines or while I was packing out of
317 Bangkok because I left for good in June of '80 and I had never been to Phanat Nikhom. I don't
318 think I—no, that was **Uran Puta** I went to. No, I've never been to Phanat Nikhom. Wait a
319 minute, Phanat Nikhom was that one up in the Nakhon Phanom Province or where is that?

320 **I think, if you look at ...**

321 Chon Buri.

322 **If you look at Thailand minus the long panhandle, it's in the—I think it's in the**
323 **southeastern, south central quadrant.**

324 OK, that's—OK, that's not what I'm thinking. That's not the holding area up in Nakhon Phanom
325 Province where ...
326 **No.**
327 ... Lao started being held after they escaped from Laos because the Thai would not let more Lao go
328 into Nong Khai camp.
329 **Oh, you might—well, I'm not sure I have the name right and I may be thinking of a**
330 **completely different place. But was a place called [Song Kau Tau].**
331 No, Song Kau Tau is an abbreviation.
332 **Right.**
333 It's SKT for—God, what does it mean?
334 **But that was the place with the sort of aluminum walls where you could see really nothing**
335 **but sky and dirt.**
336 Oh, that was in Nong Khai—that was on the way to—that was between Nong Khai town and Nong
337 Khai camp. It was like a—yeah. That's exactly what it was. It was [songasi]. Songasi is the
338 aluminum sheeting which they used to make a fence around this holding area. That's where you
339 got—you went first when you were picked up by Thai authorities or you walked in and said, "I just
340 got over from Laos. Do something with me." And you got processed and then you got admitted to
341 the actual Nong Khai camp, which was another couple kilometers east of there. But Song Kau Tau
342 is not a camp per se. It was a holding area, like a—it wasn't really a jail, but the closest thing to a jail.
343 **It sounded like it. I mean, basically, feces and urine everywhere and ...**
344 Well, I'm sure the sanitary conditions were pretty gross, although I'm not remembering that very
345 well. I'm sure I was there, but I'm not remembering any aspects of it. Maybe they wouldn't let me
346 in. I can't remember.
347 **Well, that's possible.**
348 So anyway, the—yeah, we had a lot of refugees in—wait a minute, we got off on another tangent.
349 You were asking me what I did in Laos before the evacuation.
350 **Well, I figure we're probably going to have to talk again later, so I'd just let you say what**
351 **you wanted to say and then maybe we'd structure things a little more when—I hate**
352 **interrupting people. [Laughs]**
353 Well, golly. We're jumping around back and forth, aren't we? I know, I was saying you definitely
354 need to—I would suggest, if Soutchay will meet with you and I'm surprised Hugh Tovar didn't put
355 that notion in your ...
356 **Well, I'll send him an e-mail tonight. He's very good at getting back to me. I think we**
357 **established a reasonably good rapport, so I'll see if maybe I can get that information. I'm**
358 **actually going to be in the D.C. area in a couple of weeks, so ...**
359 Yeah, that's what you said in the e-mail. Actually, Soutchay is probably still very cautious about that
360 and I'm not sure what he's still doing at Dulles Airport or for National Defense University right
361 now, but without a reference or without Tovar's reference, Soutchay may be reluctant to talk to you.
362 **Understandable.**
363 He just had bypass surgery here three, four years ago.
364 **Oh, and General Vessey's wife was diagnosed with cancer and had surgery a few months**
365 **ago. So I've been loath to bother him.**
366 Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, although I've never met her. But he's certainly a fine gentleman.
367 **Yeah, he really is.**
368 But I think Soutchay would—oh, Soutchay 's well, I mean, now. I had dinner or lunch at his house
369 right after he had his surgery and while I was still pondering whether to have major spinal surgery or
370 not. He was trying to convince me, "Go ahead and have it. You'll feel a lot better." And I said,
371 "Yeah, but we're talking about different parts of the body." But anyway ...

372
373 **(40:17) Well, let's just—yeah, if you don't mind, let's just go ahead and I'll ask you a few**
374 **questions and we'll continue where we leave off when we're done here. But I think all this is**
375 **good and once it gets typed up, we can put it in the right order and make sense of it, so I'm**
376 **not too worried about us jumping around at least for a bit.**
377 Oh, OK. Yeah. Sure. Shoot. What do you want to focus on?
378 **Let's just sort of very briefly—just give me your kind of 'born and raised and educated'**
379 **story, just so we know a little bit about your background.**
380 Oh, me? Oh, OK. Well, I was born in Akron, Ohio.
381 **Oh, so you've come home.**
382 Yeah, literally. My parents purchased this house about 1951. We lived down the street in the house
383 they purchased in '48 and this has really been home to me since '52. Of course, I was old enough to
384 remember helping my mom move stuff in my little red wagon from down the street up to this house
385 and then let the movers do the heavy lifting and stuff. Yeah, I went to public school right here in
386 the area and then went to Western Reserve University in Cleveland, which is now known as Case
387 Western Reserve, which I'm sure you know. Oh, another—I just happened to think—another
388 couple and they're so close to you, you've probably already met them—who worked, two doctors,
389 medical doctors who worked in the Nong Khai camp in the '70s and wrote a book about it. Do you
390 have—I've got the book right here on—let me get up here. I can give you their names. It's Karen
391 something. It's the hyphenated Swedish name. You know who I mean?
392 **No.**
393 Oh, wow. I can't believe that. Hold on.
394 **Well, maybe I—maybe I—OK. Are you talking Kathie Culhane-Pera?**
395 No, no, no, no. Her name is Karen with a K, Olness—O-l-n-e-s-s. And his name is—I think that's
396 the husband or her son. There's two names here with the same last name—H-a-k-o-n—maybe, I
397 don't know if that's Swedish or not. But the family name on the male side is T-o-r-j-e-s-e-n.
398 **J-e-s-e-n.**
399 Yeah, this is—and then the third name on the jacket here is Erik—E-r-i-k—Torjesen. And this
400 was—this was—well, close by—The Garden in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.
401 **My goodness. How have I missed them?**
402 They could get you a copy of it, I'm sure. Notes of a volunteer family at a refugee camp. *The Gift of*
403 *the Refugees* is the actual name of the book.
404 ***The Gift of the Refugees.***
405 It was printed—the copyright 1981 by Hakon Torjesen, published by The Garden. It's even got the
406 address and the zip here, if you need that.
407 **OK. Well, I'll do some looking around. So it's Karen Olness.**
408 Yeah.
409 **And Hakon Torjesen and Erik Torjesen.**
410 Right. It's got 23—it looks like 23 chapters divided into five—no, four major sections. A Day at
411 Nong Khai with six ticks on it, six chapters, The Refugees with another five or six chapters,
412 Healthcare and then The Last Five Months. And I haven't read it in a number of years. But if you
413 can't locate a copy of it, I could send this up to you.
414 **Well, if they're from Eden Prairie, I would guess I'll be able to find them and talk with**
415 **them.**
416 Yeah, it must be—the book must be in the—in fact, there's even a picture of the family here on the
417 back jacket.
418 **OK. Well, I'll have to check and see if the Center for Hmong Studies has a copy. Chances**
419 **are they do.**

420 They certainly should. They worked—they were first overseas contingent of a group called
421 Minnesota International Health Volunteers.

422 **OK. I mean, I've met people like Joe Westermeyer and Jim Anderson and his wife, Liz.**

423 Now who is Jim Anderson?

424 **Jim worked for the IRC.**

425 OK. Now, he must have—in Thailand?

426 **Yeah.**

427 It must have been after I left.

428 **He might—in fact, yeah, he might have come just about the time you were leaving.**

429 It looks like the Hakon Torjesen is not a medical doctor. I misspoke. It says he spent 11 years in
430 U.S. foreign service, five of them in Laos. I don't ever remember meeting him, but maybe Dr.
431 Westermeyer does.

432

433 **(45:10) And then did you know Dennis Grace at all?**

434 Oh, yeah, sure. I worked with him. We were the same timeframe.

435 **OK, yeah. Dennis and Jim, I think, worked pretty closely. In fact, Jim Anderson married
436 one of Fred Walker's daughters.**

437 Now who's Fred Walker?

438 **Fred Walker was chief pilot for Air America.**

439 Well, I wonder what his code name is.

440 **That's a good question.**

441 A lot of those guys I didn't even know their real names. We had—oh, Gray—I was thinking Gray
442 Fox in Pakse. That was his code name. And now for the life of me I can't think of his name—the
443 other Air America guy in Pakse. But anyway, I did four years at Reserve. Stated out in pre-med and
444 switched to pre-law. I ended up with a degree in political science and sociology. But I had decided
445 early on to do Peace Corps anyway and got accepted to an advanced training program which was—it
446 was one of which was done the summer between my junior and my senior year at the University of
447 Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. And it was a rural development program. And I decided, toward
448 the end of the program, I didn't really want to be doing rural development. So the Peace Corps said,
449 "Well, when you go back for your senior year at Reserve, if you'll audit a couple of these courses like
450 linguistics and TOEFL or TOESL, depending on which term you prefer, that they'd let me into
451 phase two of the teaching program, which was going to—was going to continue after we all
452 graduated in '67 at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. But then I never got the ticket or
453 anything further on it after I graduated, so I called them and they said, "Oh, well, if you want to go
454 to Thailand, you've got to do malaria eradication." And I said, "Just send me the ticket." At that
455 point I was so PO'd that here I'd wasted time auditing the two courses they wanted me to audit to
456 catch up with the program. They had the other part—of the other advanced training program. But
457 anyway, I ended up being retrained all over again in Hilo, Hawaii, which wasn't too hard to take. and
458 continued on at the World Health Organization, Malaria Eradication Training Center in Manila and
459 then into Thailand and then we were assigned as deputy branch—deputy zone chiefs in an existing
460 Malaria Eradication Program with the Royal Thai government. In fact, my Peace Corps group, they
461 were all male, 24 of us. We had our first reunion after 40 years this past July in Chicago. And we
462 had 13 of the 24 fellows show up for it. So that was ...

463 **That's pretty good.**

464 ... fun. Yeah. It was good. It was a good turnout and we're going to—then a group of them went
465 onto to Bangkok the first week of December. Not onto Bangkok, but they had a second mini
466 reunion. About six or seven fellows went out for that, but I didn't feel I was ready for another 30-
467 hour flight ...

468 **I hear you.**

469 ... at this point after my surgery, so—but they had a good time and they e-mailed—they were very
470 good about e-mailing pictures back to the rest of us who didn't go. But fortunately, no one has
471 passed away yet out of the 24 ...

472 **Wow.**

473 ... which is sort of unusual, I think, considering it's been 40 years since we trained for that. But
474 then I think I've told you, after Peace Corps—and I came back to Akron and worked in my dad's
475 real estate company for a little while and knew that I didn't want to do that for the rest of my life.
476 So I found out about this AID program in Vietnam and, as I said, I ended up applying for that and
477 going to Laos because they needed a Lao speaker there. So that's sort of a thumbnail sketch.

478
479 **(49:40) Sure. So tell me about your responsibilities in this—did you go straight into the**
480 **refugee program in south Laos? Is that right?**

481 I did. There was an ongoing refugee—what was the office called? ORR—Office of Refugee
482 Resettlement—Refugee Resettlement and Relief or—I know the name changed at some point while
483 I was in Laos. ORR sticks in my mind. Yes, I went to Vientiane for a very brief orientation and
484 then Bob Wolf, who is from Minneapolis, I think, but I understand he's passed away. He escorted
485 me down on the milk run, which was—anybody talk about the milk run yet?

486 **I keep hearing that phrase and I confess I haven't made anybody stop and explain it to me.**
487 **So yes, please go right ahead.**

488 OK. It's very easy. It's a plane that took—I think it was a C-130, although Mac could confirm the
489 type of aircraft it was that took off from Bangkok and went to Udorn and Vientiane and then
490 Savannakhet and then Pakse and then it—RON'd at—we overnighted in Pakse and then the next
491 day turned around and went back. Savannakhet, Vientiane, Udorn, Bangkok. And people who
492 needed to get training at those places would use it—it was the preferred means of transportation for
493 a lot of reasons. One, it was going anyway. Might as well hitch-hike a free ride with it. And two,
494 you avoided the hassles of Thai and Lao immigration that way. And because I can remember flying
495 into Udorn on it and Bangkok even and—for a day or two break from my work and going back on
496 it. It—I guess it was an Air America flight. It was all personnel. I don't remember any
497 commodities being on it. And then we had other flights like that from—like Pakse over to Ubon
498 airbase to go to the commissary or—a couple times a week or—Vientiane probably had smaller
499 aircraft also going into Udorn to do just basically a shopping trip or, for whatever reason to—since
500 the air strikes were controlled out of Udorn. That was another thing you—most people need to
501 realize. Heine Aderholt ...

502 **Oh, yes.**

503 The general's name.

504 **Yes.**

505 Colonel—no, he was a general—is a general.

506 **Yeah, I think he was a colonel at the time, though, yeah.**

507 That's right. Yeah. Right. Have you met him yet?

508 **Yeah, I met him—well, I met him a couple of times, including just this past January. He's**
509 **in pretty rough shape. He was hospitalized for several months.**

510 Oh, I had not heard that.

511 **But he's also—I mean, I think he's 87 years old.**

512 Yeah, he's getting up there, I'm sure. Have you ever looked at the—Mac Thompson got me to join
513 this Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood Organization, which he helped found here about six or
514 seven years ago. Have you ever gone into their website?

515 **No.**

516 OK. I give you the thing. You can either Google Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood or, if I
517 can remember correctly, tlc-brotherhood.org, maybe.

518 **OK. I'll give that a shot.**

519 That'll take you directly in there and it's a lot of interesting out there. There's a roster of people who
520 have joined it and there's probably an archive of their quarterly newsletters, which they mail out to
521 us with interesting stories written by anyone who wants to write something, whether they be pilots
522 for Air America or ...

523 **Oh, yeah. I've ...**

524 ... [Perry] guys or whatever. I think Mac just wrote an article for it or he's in the process of writing
525 an article for it about his trips the last couple months up into Long Tieng and giving out funds or
526 supplies that this organization distributes as a part of its assistance program. They have a yearly
527 reunion, they call it, which is at different places around the country. I've been to two so far—one
528 in—no, I've been two of them in—both in Washington. One in Manassas and one in Rosslyn there.
529 This coming year—no, this year it's in Philadelphia for the first time. Last year was in Dayton,
530 Ohio, which they have had before there. They've got an interesting group of guys that show up for
531 it and—anyway, that's what that organization is all about. But if you're looking at the roster, I guess
532 you could tell which guys were—let's see, there might be mini bio. Yeah, if you go through the
533 roster section, click on the roster—oh, the cursor is interesting. It's an airplane. It automatically—
534 your cursor will automatically turn into an airplane. And in the roster section, you can get mini bios
535 of where guys served and who they were with, whether it was military or AID or whatever. Some of
536 the guys were in the transportation unit right there at—in Khon Kaen. That was a very small unit.
537 A lot of people were out of Udorn, obviously. But it's—the reason the organization was formed
538 because, at the time, there was no, like, affinity group for people who had served in Laos. I mean,
539 everything was always Vietnam. Vietnam Veterans of America, this and that or whatever. Of
540 course, some of the guys also served in Vietnam, either before or after their service in Laos. But
541 that's what that organization is all about. You might find something interesting in that website.

542

543 **(56:12) So we were talking about the refugee program that you were a part of.**

544 Oh, in southern Laos. Yeah. I flew down on the milk run and Bob Wolf, who had been trying to
545 cover Pakse for several months on TDYs down from Vientiane sort of introduced me around to my
546 counterparts in the ministry of social welfare who were responsible for the emergency relief and the
547 resettlement schemes in that part of southern Laos. Now keep in mind, there were—there was
548 another guy in Savannakhet named [Jerry Nell] who did the Savannakhet program under Sandy
549 Stone who was the AC. When I got to Pakse, Lou Connick, who just passed away last year, was the
550 AC for Pakse. And he was replaced by Bob Zimmerman, a USIA employee, who had come out of
551 Vietnam with USIA. He's also deceased. In fact, I was talking to one of the guys who worked on
552 another part of our program—not refugees, but the rural development program. He's in
553 Arkansas—Bill Jackman. He called me the other night and I hadn't talked with him in 30-some
554 years. But we had a big program. Refugees—I was the primary refugee officer in Pakse and
555 primarily responsible for the care and feeding of refugees who were coming out of [Serivan],
556 Attapeu. Some were already there and couldn't return. Others were already in resettlement areas
557 where you try to get—you try to get them to build semi-permanent or more permanent, I should
558 say, housing than the temporary shelters they make with the blue or black plastic sheeting we'd
559 distribute with the pots and pans and blankets and garden seeds. And of course, where there was a
560 PL-480—you know what that program is?

561 **PL-480.**

562 No? OK. That's an agriculture program for the U.S. government, where they buy up or they
563 acquire surplus commodities from American farmers and repackage it and send it abroad. You've

564 got bags of cornmeal, bags of soybean meal, bags of soybean oil—or tins of soybean oil, those kinds
565 of things, commodities, which Congress, I guess, mandated that we distribute with the rice ration,
566 per capita rice ration to refugees when they're either in a temporary holding place or even the more
567 permanent resettlement schemes, which were designed in—with our Ministry of Social Welfare
568 counterparts for refugees who could—clearly could not be returning to their home areas until the
569 war was over.

570
571 **(59:45) So which groups of people were you working with—which ethnic groups? Or were**
572 **these lowland Lao?**

573 No, they—most of them were not lowland Lao who were there when I got there. They—many of
574 them were—if they came from Attapeu and Serivan, most of them who were in the camps were
575 tribes like—I can't even spell these tribes—[Nia], is one of them. [Nihun] is another one. [Daoi, La
576 Wen, La Wa]. [Laughs]

577 **I'll ask Jim Chamberlain. He'll know.**

578 Yeah. Definitely. Or Bill Sage. If you haven't run across him yet, you probably should.

579 **OK. Where is he?**

580 Well, he's out of—I think, still with Church—well, you know what Dennis Grace did in Bangkok
581 with the refugee program. Bill Sage did the same thing before Dennis in that office of—which IRC
582 created to mesh with the direct hire ...

583 **So JVA.**

584 That's it. Yeah. Yeah. That's it. He was head of JVA before Dennis Grace was. But he's
585 probably—well, I'm in contact with him. He's got an e-mail address which I can't remember, but he
586 does a lot of traveling out of—he lives in New York City in Queens, has an apartment. But works
587 probably with Church World Service. So—and does various details to Africa, South America for—
588 oh, golly, I don't know what the term is—helping people deal with natural—well, it could be natural
589 disasters, but I'm thinking 9-11 is when he really got into this hot and heavy, working with church
590 groups to design and implement types of programs for people who were involved in conflicts,
591 whether they be civil or natural disasters, that kind of thing. I'm not explaining it very well, but
592 anyway, Bill is very knowledgeable on the southern Laos tribes because he lived and worked in Pak
593 Song, which is further east of Pakse there, up on the Bolovens Plateau. He might—he must have
594 been IVS, which is why he was in Pak Song. And he—Bill later moved up to the north in Ban Huai
595 Sai. And we were all a part of the same office. It's just that they were considered contract
596 employees, whereas people like me were career foreign service employees working side by side in the
597 same office. But those tribes were similar, but yet very much different to the Hmong in that they
598 were very primitive, many of them. Oh, I don't want you to think that's only the—that's the only
599 kind of refugees we had because we certainly had lowland Lao who were in the civil administration
600 and the military also come pouring out of any area that had fallen to the Pathet Lao. We had, two
601 doors down from me where I lived in Pakse was the governor in exile from another province which
602 fell while I was there, but was later recouped by the Royalist Military—Wapikhamthong is the name
603 of that province. At least that's the old name. I understand the Pathet Lao have changed the name
604 of that to what, I don't recall. But the city was Khong Sedone—K-h-o-n-g—Khong Sedone—S-e-
605 d-o-n-e. Two words. That would have been north—and still is north of Pakse on the road up to
606 Thakhek and then ultimately Vientiane. It must be Route 13. So we had these civil administrations
607 in exile. We had, certainly, the Serivan administration, the Attapeu administration, all living in and
608 around Pakse. And of course they were trying to operate and take care of—well, they were refugees
609 themselves, but they were trying to take care of their constituents, if you will, of those areas. And
610 then, as I said, Wapikhamthong, we had—that fell and then we did a major reconstruction effort.
611 That was one of the programs I was involved in. But we had—at one point, we had feeding sites for

612 over 110—at over 110 locations. And we had—I was asked if I wanted anyone to come down and
613 help me. And I said, "Sure." And they ended up sending a fellow down who did help out while he
614 was there, but he, for some reason, he decided he wanted to be number one and tried to undermine
615 what I was doing and get me booted out. So he ended up getting booted out by our big boss, John
616 McQueen, in Vientiane. So he didn't stay with AID. I'm not even sure what he's doing now or
617 where he is. But he was helpful while he was there. He could speak Lao, which is why they sent
618 him down. He had also been an IVS volunteer. But I wouldn't really recommend trying to track
619 him down unless you want to.

620 **(1:06:31) We'll leave it at that. Yes, I think that's probably for the best.**

621 Yeah. What was I going to say? So we had—what year am I talking now? I can't remember when
622 Wapikhamthong fell, but we had—oh, I should mention this big resettlement scheme, Kilometer 12
623 on the road to Pak Song and you turn left—called Phou Ba Tieng, P-h-o-u for mountain, Ba—B-a.
624 It means forest. And Tieng. I'm not sure what the—Tieng could mean like an angled—one
625 definition is some kind of an angle. But I could be wrong on—that's my definition of what it
626 means. But that was very fertile land owned by Prince [Boun Oum]. Have you heard that name?

627 **Yes.**

628 OK. He donated—well, in parentheses, donated this land for resettlement purposes for refugees,
629 but in fact I think he just wanted somebody to build a road into it and open the area up for his own
630 purposes, thinking he'd probably run the refugees off at some point in the future and then the road
631 would be left behind and wells and structures, whatever. But maybe his heart was in the right place,
632 maybe it wasn't. I don't know. But that never came to be. I mean, he never reacquired the land
633 because he was run out like everybody else. But anyway, it was—and I've got my old report
634 somewhere upstairs, my monthly reports I had to write over the years, which told what we had
635 accomplished during the—a given month and how many kilometers the roads, which are USAID
636 public works unit, which was under a different umbrella than our refugee program. But they worked
637 side by side. The number of kilometers of road that were built, fish ponds that were dug, wells that
638 were drilled, schools built, whatever. But it was—I'm trying to remember how many little villages
639 we had along that road—probably between 12 and 15 separate clusters. It was huge. Unfortunately,
640 I don't remember the number of kilometers long that road was or number of hectares or—I guess
641 we called it hectares, not acres, that were being developed. But the land was very rich and could
642 grow about anything. Even the fence posts that they'd stick in the ground would start sprouting
643 leaves. That's how rich it was. The bamboo that they'd cut down and—to build things. Little
644 stores sprouted up and some semblance of—and a temple here and there. And a few, as mentioned,
645 fish ponds which sort of became problematic because refugees decided that since they didn't really
646 like the PL-480 products that they were getting instead of rice, that they'd just use the bulgur wheat
647 to feed their fish and then eat or sell the fish out of there, which—GAO wouldn't let us turn a blind
648 eye to that. But we had to walk very gingerly on those things because they didn't like the U.S.
649 products being diverted that way—what they considered diversion. But I'm sure that took place up
650 north with the Hmong as well. So that was just one of the programs we had going on down there.
651 Of course, we had other branches of the USAID office. We had education. We had public health.
652 And they all had little activities in this refugee—in these refugee schemes. We tried to coordinate a
653 lot of the things so that there wasn't duplication. Teacher training I think we got into, some
654 textbook publication. I know they had this other scheme that was in place at Huai Nam Phak was
655 the name of that. Huai is stream. That was—let's see, if you go east of Pakse, at Kilometer 8 there's
656 a fork in the road. You can either continue going straight up the Bolovens into Pak Song or, if you
657 make a right and take the right fork, you run down Route 13 the length of southern Laos and
658 ultimately through Cambodia and into Saigon. But we had another resettlement scheme that was
659 already in place when I got there at Huai Nam Phak, which we also monitored. And the goal was to

660 try to get refugees off of the food dole and have them grow their own rice on land which the
661 government would allocate. Now in some cases, it meant taking it away from other people who
662 claimed to be the rightful owners, which became problematic. But I'm thinking now in [Phou Ba
663 Chieng], back to that other project, I had a whole—I had four teams of surveyors who, in addition
664 to surveying roads, they divided Prince Boun Oum's land up into chunks which were—which
665 refugees were supposed to be given title to at some point in the future. But I don't think that—in
666 most cases, that didn't happen.

667
668 **(1:12:52) Well, it sounds like your situation was rather different from the sort of typical**
669 **USAID person who was in Military Region 2, at least in two ways I can think of—and you**
670 **can correct me if I'm wrong—but it sounds like, first of all, once you got a refugee into a**
671 **particular site, the chances were pretty good they could stay there for awhile so that they**
672 **could, for example, plant their own rice.**

673 If it was considered to be—if it was clear that they were not going to be able to return to their
674 home. Now when Wapikhamthong fell, we had dozens of temporary sites where we never really
675 had permanent plans because we were all confident they'd be able to return to Wapikhamthong.
676 And so we did not develop those grand schemes. That was just feeding for 18 months or so until it
677 was safe for them to return. That's correct. But then there were other areas that it was determined
678 they could not return as long as the war continued the way it was. But no, you're quite right. Now
679 another element I'm not mentioning is the—you were asking me about the Royalist Army troops
680 under General Soutchay. Now you should also be aware there were Thai mercenary troops—
681 [Tahaan Supapan] was one—king—Queen's Cobras was it or were they in Vietnam? Have you ever
682 heard that term? Queen's Cobras?

683 **No, I haven't.**

684 OK. That's—those were Thai mercenaries, basically. They were recruited out—or at least I was
685 told they were recruited out of the jails and, well, some of them were anyway. Because they were
686 really hell raisers.

687 **Well, I did speak to a guy in Bangkok that Mac arranged for me to meet who was a Thai**
688 **mercenary. I don't think he was in prison, but it did sound like perhaps he was recruited**
689 **under less than completely open circumstances.**

690 Yeah. Yeah. In fact, I had—I knew—some of my malaria workers from Thailand, who were
691 government officials—legitimate government officials—they ended up doing details to Vietnam
692 with the Queen's Cobras. That's why I think I'm using the wrong term here. Another group was
693 the Black Panthers. Maybe those were the guys who went to Laos. I just can't recall now. I haven't
694 thought about this in years. But anyway, they were—and I don't know that—well, I can delete it if I
695 don't like the way it comes out, but the last thing that the Royal Lao government soldiers wanted to
696 do was actually fight. So that's what led to the CIA recruiting certainly the Hmong up north and, to
697 a certain extent, the Thai soldiers getting involved to really fight on the front lines, supposedly in
698 conjunction with the Lao career military, but also because they really didn't want to fight that much.
699 They were more interested in their illegal sugar operations or timber sales in Thailand. They'd
700 convert whatever equipment, trucks, whatever they had and they would divert their resources for
701 other means than what they were intended for is what I'm trying to say. And that's why I think the
702 U.S. government decided to use these Thais and—oh, we had SGUs in the Lao—yeah, have you
703 ever heard the term SGU?

704 **Yeah, but usually only applied to the Hmong.**

705 Oh, no. There were huge contingents of SGUs in southern Laos. Now I'm remembering. And
706 these were villagers, not necessarily tribal, depending on where they were recruited from. In fact, I

707 ended up processing a lot of these guys as refugees to the States here. And they are some of the
708 most successful refugees I know who came here.

709 **I can believe that.**

710 Because they didn't enter the States with high expectations or think that any work was below them.
711 They learned English on the job. Kids are doing really well in the number of families that I continue
712 to follow up with. And it's in the hundreds, really, when I was able to travel back and forth. And
713 I'm still in touch, certainly through e-mail and telephones with a lot of—not only SGUs, but other
714 people I met in the camps that I didn't even know in Laos when I was there. But these SGUs—
715 there's probably—this was that PS—I'm thinking of one place they were trained over on the
716 Mekong. PS-18, have you ever heard of that site?

717 **No.**

718 It was a hospital that wounded were medevaced into for trauma treatment. It was somewhere
719 between Laos and Thailand on the water. That's about all I remember. I used to fly around it or
720 over it when I was—oh, I forgot to mention. Mac Thompson arranged a cost sharing thing with
721 USAID public health, because we had a lot of clinics, which I failed to mention, all over the country.
722 You probably heard about them up in MR-2.

723 **Yeah, Doc Weldon. Yeah.**

724 Yes, exactly. We had them elsewhere as well. And of course these clinics had to be inspected and
725 the medicines replenished, et cetera. But—so Mac arranged a cost-sharing thing where refugee
726 office and public health office would split the cost on these little Bell Jet Rangers. And I would have
727 access to those periodically where I could visit 10 to 20 sites in a day by air, whereas if I tried to visit
728 those places by road, you could only do one or two in a day maybe. And some were located in areas
729 where the road had already been interdicted and I couldn't go anyway by road safely. So those Jet
730 Rangers were really nice to have at our beck and call when we needed them.

731 **I'll bet.**

732 What was I thinking? Oh, trying to clarify that there were Special Guerilla Units who were—and to
733 this day these guys talk—when I'd see them, they'd talk about their, let's see, GM, that's a French
734 term.

735 **Groupe Mobile.**

736 Yeah, exactly. Their GM guy, and they all had code names so that's how I knew they were spooks
737 [CIA]. But they still talk about them and the training. And they want to know how to contact them.
738 They look at them as their old boss. God, there's—I don't even think—I only knew the name of
739 one of them, Lionel Williamson, and I have no idea what ever happened to him, although I do know
740 he went to Africa.

741
742 **(1:21:17) So how closely did USAID people and the CIA types or the Sky types or whatever**
743 **they were called down in your part of Laos—how closely did you work together or associate**
744 **with each other?**

745 Well, there were—there were a lot of Americans in Pakse when I was there. I won't say—certainly
746 nothing like Vientiane, but I'd say between 60 and 100.

747 **That's a lot.**

748 Because by the time you added up the Air America guys and the CIA guys and between IVS and the
749 Fulbrights and the AID—well, just our AID office had between eight and 10, probably, full-time
750 direct hires doing different things. We did associate with—and we didn't have any club per se like
751 we did in Peshawar, Pakistan, an American club that was right next door to my house, which
752 became the focal point for the whole international relief community. We didn't have a place like
753 that in Pakse. We just had the local bars, officers club was the hangout of choice for a lot of people.
754 People did a lot of entertaining, as one might expect. We had commissary rights, but the

755 commissary was in Vientiane, so you had—to get anything out of it, if you didn't want to fly up
756 there yourself, you'd just fill out a commissary list and enclose a check or replenish your account and
757 submit it on a certain day. And four days later you'd come home from work and the stuff would be
758 already delivered to your house and whoever, whatever kind of domestic help you had in the house
759 would have put it all away by then. So it was really quite convenient in that respect. There were
760 quite a few good restaurants in Pakse as well. Military did a lot of entertaining and, of course, we
761 were always included on the guest list. General Soutchay had some wonderful parties there at his
762 house. I remember a great ox roast he had for New Year's Eve one year. That was a lot of fun. A
763 lot of champagne, I'll tell you. So we did interact socially. Now work-wise, at least at my level, no.
764 Now there were daily meetings which—I guess we had a daily meeting which was—usually didn't
765 drag on too long, but there was another thing—a brief—daily briefing out at the airport, which
766 General Soutchay sort of chaired, which was open to anybody who wanted to go who had an official
767 reason to be there. With what had happened the previous 24 hours militarily and if we were doing
768 anything significant in refugees, then I would get up and put my two cents in. But—and sometimes
769 we had to help them out. When, for some reason, the military rice didn't get there and we had—I
770 had a lot more rice than they did and for some reason I'd let them borrow my rice and then they'd
771 pay me hundreds of bags of rice back later when they got their shipment in. But that was just
772 worked out between me and the Lao fellow—the Lao officers. I mean, the Americans weren't really
773 involved in that.

774
775 **(1:25:35) But for example, this Jet Ranger you talked about. Was that an Air America Jet**
776 **Ranger or where did that come from?**

777 Yes. That was an Air America—it was a—yeah, that was Air America. Oh, it was another contract.
778 Wait a minute, I take that back. One company was Arizona helicopters, so that must have been a
779 subcontract from somebody in the U.S. government. And the pilots were probably—maybe they
780 were ex-military, ex-Air America. Oh, we had other smaller aircraft, too. I'm forgetting all the
781 smaller—the small fixed-wing aircraft we had, which like—what did we call those things?

782 **Like a Pilatus Porter?**

783 Exactly. Yeah. And you know why? Because they could take off and land on ...

784 **Oh, STOL.**

785 ...different runways.

786 **Now you're probably talking about STOL—short take-off and landing aircraft.**

787 Exactly. That was the aircraft of choice. But we had—there were other aircraft flying in and out of
788 Pakse Airport that the forward air guides [FAGs] used to call in—and we had FAGs in southern
789 Laos as well not unlike the Hmong guys up north who would call in the B-52 strikes along the Ho
790 Chi Minh Trail.

791
792 **(1:27:08) Now this may not be something you know for certain, but just from the maps that**
793 **I've seen, that I haven't seen a lot, it seemed to me like there really wasn't any of the Ho Chi**
794 **Minh Trail in Military Region 2, up where the Hmong were. It would have been further**
795 **south. Is that your understanding?**

796 Yes. Yes. I don't have—I don't think I have access to a Lao map. Maybe I have one in the
797 basement framed, but, yeah, I don't think the trail went into that interior part of Laos up in the
798 north.

799 **Yeah. It's one of the things that the Hmong veterans like to say up here in Minnesota is,**
800 **"Oh, yes, we fought along the Ho Chi Minh Trail." And my feeling was, "Well, maybe you**
801 **fought on Route 7 or cut off supply lines that way, but I can't imagine you were that far**
802 **south."**

803 Route 9 sticks in my mind. I don't know why. There were railroad tracks, but there was—and a
804 railway station in Thakhek, but there was never a train. And whatever it is, there is a road that's
805 completed now that goes east and west right into Vietnam and it's somewhere between north of
806 Savannakhet and southeast of Vientiane, but I've not—I haven't been back to that part. I've been
807 back to Laos two times, but not to that part. Only Vientiane—'93 and '95.
808

809 **(1:29:14) All right, well, I'm more than happy to keep talking, but you said you only wanted**
810 **to talk for an hour and it's going to be about twenty to nine your time now.**

811 Oh, yeah, it is. Yeah, maybe we ought to cut off for tonight because I've got to make a couple calls.
812 That would be good.

813 **Sure. Understandable.**

814

815 [The two discuss plans to talk again the following night.]

816

817 **I appreciate it. I hope this isn't too tedious for you. It's very interesting to me.**

818 No. Hey, this is a piece of cake compared to another friend—well, another friend Lionel sent to see
819 me when I was still in a nursing home recovering from my surgery. Which got—did get to be
820 tedious, believe me. But no, this is nothing like that. I'm enjoying this, actually.

821 **Well, as am I. But yeah, we haven't even gotten to the refugee camps yet, so we've got a**
822 **little ground to cover yet.**

823

824 Yeah, I was just going to say here I should probably go through my—a couple of my telephone
825 directories here and look for a few Hmong that you might now know yet. I know there's a
826 wonderful family in Las Vegas and I know he worked for Jerry. When I went through Las Vegas on
827 the way to—well, here's how I even remembered them. I got a Christmas card about 1996, thanking
828 me for sending him here. And I honestly didn't even know who he was. But he tracked my address
829 down somehow, probably from the Lao in Las Vegas and so when I—and I had never been to Las
830 Vegas. So on my way to a Peace Corps conference in San Diego that year, I made it a point to see
831 him and he took me out to his—he met me at the airport, took me to his house. But that family of
832 six kids—three already had acquired PhDs. The other three were on PhD tracks. Just blew me
833 away, [Laughs] because I don't have that many contacts with Hmong around the country. And I
834 was just quite happy to hear how successful his children had been. And then the family who's quite
835 close with—I'll pick that guy who's—that fellow's name and address up for you and hopefully give it
836 to you tomorrow. And then, in Missoula, several of Jerry's right-hand men are in Missoula and
837 that's why they're there, because of Jerry. And there's actually Hmong here in Akron that—I went
838 to a Hmong New Year's party November 17. Even dug up—I figured they wouldn't know who I
839 was from Adam, so I found a picture of Jerry and I at a dinner we had in Bangkok in late 70s.

840 And—but these Hmong didn't seem to recognize Jerry for some reason.

841 OK. Fine. Well, I'd better let you go for tonight and we'll talk again tomorrow night around seven
842 then.

843 **I appreciate it.**

844 OK.

845 **OK. Thank you, sir.**

846 Thank you. Sure. Bye-bye.

847 **Bye now.**

848

849

850

851 John Tucker 2

852

853 [The two men engage in a few social pleasantries before returning to their previous conversation.]
854 OK. Let's see. Yeah. I was in Pakse three years and then I told you already about moving up to
855 Savannakhet. I thought of something after we hung up last night regarding that resettlement
856 scheme, but now it slips my mind again. Oh, I know. All the other components that we had. I
857 guess I failed. I'm pretty sure I told you we were building schools and clinics and the clinics were
858 supplied by USAID medics, et cetera. But I guess I—and I mentioned my land surveyors. I think I
859 failed to mention—I probably told you we had one Filipino TPN heading up the surveyors and then
860 I—but I also had a Filipino ag fellow who had come to Pakse from the north who worked with my
861 agriculture team on developing things the refugees could plant for cash income and to supplement
862 their diet, that kind of thing. That was another facet. And I did mention the PL-480. We had these
863 home economics teams of ladies trying to teach the refugees how to make more palatable recipes
864 from the products that were distributing as—to supplement a certain percentage of their monthly
865 rice ration. I guess that's—those are a couple of things I failed to mention.

866

867 **(02:53) OK. I was just curious to know how much you were told or how much sort of**
868 **filtered down or filtered up, for that matter. Did you in the south know that much about**
869 **what was going on in the north and vice versa?**

870 Well, I'm sure my boss did, the AC, the area coordinator. He probably mentioned some things at
871 the morning meetings that he picked up from either classified telegrams or meetings that he—or
872 secure phone lines that he had available to him. I don't remember—I had my hands so full, I don't
873 remember focusing that much on what was happening in the north. I—in terms of the end, the last
874 few weeks there, I remember going to Vientiane with—oh, by that time I was already in
875 Savannakhet and I went to Vientiane with my boss, the AC of Savannakhet, and he was like in denial
876 about what he was hearing about what was happening in the north. Because clearly the handwriting
877 was on the wall. Keep in mind, this was early May already.

878 **Oh my.**

879 And Cambodia and Vietnam were history at that point. Refugees were still pouring out. But he
880 acted like it was—business would continue as usual. And I remember we flew back to Savannakhet
881 and, not more than a few days after that, the Pathet Lao marched into Savannakhet and brought the
882 Russian tanks in and the leftist students were demonstrating. And they hauled three of the USAID
883 people off to kangaroo court, accusing them of being CIA agents and took over the USAID
884 compound, took over our radio station. And the real spook was just wheeling around on his bicycle
885 in town. They clearly didn't know who he was or what—how he was involved in the U.S. effort
886 there in Savannakhet. But they had some kind of meeting between the Pathet Lao side and the
887 Royalist side. And they came up with a list of people who could stay in Savannakhet. And this was
888 not just—I don't mean Americans. I mean government officials and military, et cetera. They had a
889 huge meeting in—and this is while we were under house arrest still at our house with the leftist
890 students. And they drew up lists of people who could stay and people who had to leave within a
891 week and the people who had to leave within 24 hours. And we thought—we were led to believe
892 we were on the second list, that we would stay at least a week. But then a few hours later I got a
893 phone call to be at the airport in 45 minutes with two suitcases. So I had a turkey in the oven and
894 was getting ready to have a dinner party with a couple friends. And I suppose we were going to feed
895 the students who were babysitting me as well. And just walked away from it all, went out to the
896 airport and the plane took off and we landed in Udorn. So clearly, he—my boss didn't really—if he
897 knew what was going on, he didn't want—either didn't want to alarm us or I still think he was just in

898 denial because he had spent over 10 years in Laos and pretty much in the same place there and he
899 had a lot of things that interested him in the overall effort and staying in Laos.

900

901 **(07:27) Were there things that you were noticing already before it became apparent to your**
902 **director and to everyone, that it was sort of clear to you that he was either missing or not**
903 **telling you or was it something where you just look back now and you say, OK, he was in**
904 **charge. He must have known things and he wasn't telling us.**

905 Wow, good question. Wow. We knew what was happening up north. How we knew, I don't recall
906 now. Either through phones or radios, but we knew that Hmong were moving and probably leaving
907 and we knew that the prime minister had told the Royalist troops not to put up a fight when the
908 Pathet Lao troops encroached on the cease fire lines. And the prime minister told them to lay down
909 their arms. Now I later found out, after the fact, when I was in Thailand from interviewing refugees
910 who were military officers, that some of them believed what the prime minister said about, "Hey,
911 we're all Lao. Let's not fight anymore. We've had so many years of war already. Lay down your
912 arms" type of thing. Well, I have friends who are still involved in the resistance efforts, primarily in
913 San Diego, where it's headquartered, who didn't—thought that was a bunch of B.S. and either
914 buried their weapons or hid them elsewhere and then fled to Thailand themselves because they
915 knew—they had so much close association with the U.S. government that their days would have
916 been numbered if they stayed in Laos. So it's good they came out. I mean, because a lot of people
917 didn't. They believed the prime minister and, of course, they were sent off to seminars and
918 reeducation camps and either perished in them or came out many years later, ill or whatever. I don't
919 know if you've ever talked to any of these fellows who ended up—many ended up coming to the
920 States as refugees long after I left because they sure as hell weren't out by 1980 when I left, many of
921 them weren't. But yeah, we sort of knew things were going on. But to a certain extent you know
922 you just can't—and we knew—I had a radio. I'd listen to VOA [Voice of America] all the time and I
923 knew what was happening in Cambodia and Vietnam. We weren't totally ignorant about what was
924 happening. And so, on May 22 is when our plane flew out of Savannakhet for Udorn, put things in
925 proper perspective. But that was clearly a month after Cambodia and almost a month after Saigon.
926 And we were able to stay until then and then I think the timeframe for Mac was they were
927 negotiating with the Pathet Lao in Vientiane about how to turn over our assets and I guess it got to
928 a point where Mac just said, "Well, here's the keys to the warehouse. I'm leaving." And he took his
929 Volkswagen bus across the Mekong to Thailand himself.

930 **And his Foster's beer, if I remember correctly.**

931 [Laughs] That's right. That's probably true. Yeah. Yeah.

932

933 **(11:20) Well, you just said that you heard that the Hmong were leaving. Do you have a**
934 **sense, looking back now of what, however little it may have been, you knew about the**
935 **Hmong before you came to Udorn?**

936 Knew about them in what—with respect to what?

937 **Well, really just anything, because you were saying that you didn't really meet your first**
938 **Hmong person until you were in Thailand, so I'm just wondering ...**

939 Oh, the more I think about that, that was a bit of a premature comment. I remember having taken
940 one trip up north.

941 **OK.**

942 I was in Vientiane probably in January, February of '75 or perhaps in the fall of '74 when I had an
943 opportunity to hitch a ride on a Jet Ranger that was taking medical supplies up to 272—is that Ban
944 San?

945 **Yeah.**

946 OK. We had stopped in there for a few hours. Had a cup of coffee at the cafeteria or Air America,
947 whatever it was. And then got back on the plane and went up to Long Tieng. So I actually got to
948 spend an hour or two in there. I know it wasn't more than two hours because I had a friend who
949 had been in Pakse with me. He had come from Vietnam—Jim Schill—S-c-h-i-l-l—had come from
950 Vietnam over to Pakse and then was asked to go up to Long Tieng at some point, probably late '73
951 or '74. And I spent—he drove me around for an hour or so until I had to be back at the airport to
952 fly back to Vientiane. But—so I'm sure I saw Hmong when I was up there. I don't remember
953 talking with any. But it was such a hurried visit. But I never spent an overnight anywhere up north.
954 So unfortunately, I've never been to Luang Prabang. I've never been to Huai Sai. Now Thailand's
955 another matter. I've traveled all over Thailand, mostly when I was a Peace Corps volunteer, but also
956 when I was doing refugee camps in the north and northeast. But no, I knew—I knew quite a bit
957 about our involvement with the Hmong. And you asked me something about whether we had any
958 association with other Agency-types in Pakse and, sure, we knew what these guys were doing. I
959 mean, they had to be doing something to have that many people down there. And I knew for a fact
960 they weren't involved in any of our USAID programs. And I mentioned that—oh, you ought to
961 pursue that one—that trauma hospital that was set up. And I think they were probably—it was
962 probably staffed by Operation Brotherhood Filipinos as well—OB—over, golly, what was the
963 name? PS—I want to say PS-18. The one that I mentioned last night was on—it wasn't really an
964 island, but it was on water, which probably would have been the Mekong there between Laos and
965 Thailand, where the war wounded were taken. And it was a hospital (***) center-type place. I also
966 had—I didn't mention last night that after the ceasefire—let's go back a minute or two to '73. Is
967 that when the ceasefire was?

968 **Right. Yeah.**

969 OK. After that, General Soutchay—and don't let me forget. I've been going through my address
970 books the last hour looking for interesting names that you might want to pursue and I [have] phone
971 numbers, et cetera, if they're still valid in some cases. General Soutchay provided the military
972 helicopters for a visit from Vientiane of—what was his name—I want to say [Pang Phongsavan],
973 who was probably the minister of social welfare for the whole country. And a couple other very
974 high-level government types came down—made an official visit to Pakse and we must have taken
975 five or seven military helicopters over to a place that it's sort of in a crater in Attapou Province call
976 Koang Mee—K-o-a-n-g—Mee—M-e-e or M-i-i, which you choose—Koang Mee. And I think
977 that's PS-88. That crater always remained loyal to the Vientiane government, the Royalist
978 government, even though they were completely surrounded by Pathet Lao troops during those war
979 years. And then, after the ceasefire, it was determined that they should be rewarded or somehow—
980 for their loyalty. So that's what triggered this visit. And we flew over, I know, a lot of salt because
981 that was one of the commodities they had trouble getting and vegetable oil. And I don't remember
982 whether we took rice or not, but I remember a lot of pots and pans being on the helicopters. And it
983 was fascinating when we got off because they were all tribal. I'm not sure which tribe, but they had
984 these huge gongs, like may four or five feet across, and they were banging these gongs—in a
985 cadence—some kind of tribal cadence, almost like American Indian war drums or something as we
986 got off the helicopters and walked over to the reception area. And we had a meal there and, of
987 course, we had the tribal home brew in the clay urns with the long straws, which you stick down in it
988 and then ...

989 **They're call Lao-lao?**

990 What is it? Sorry.

991 **Is it Lao-lao?**

992 That may be a Hmong name for it. In Thailand, at least northeast, it was made out of glutinous rice
993 and yeast, which is fermented for a few days inside the earthen jar. And rice husks are sort of put on

994 the top to sort of close or prevent air from coming in. And then it ferments and then you jab these
995 four-foot long straws, bamboo straws, into the opening of the earthen jar to suck out the mixture,
996 the alcohol. And it's really quite intoxicating. [Laughs] In fact, our chopper pilots, it was like they
997 were playing leap frog in the air on the flight back. Actually, they were drinking, too. So I guess
998 we're all lucky we got back alive. But that was an interesting sideline. And now, someone who is
999 more knowledgeable about what were doing in Saravan and Attapou before they fell to the Pathet
1000 Lao would certainly recognize that area or that village called Koang Mee and might be able to give
1001 you the exact tribe that was living there. Maybe there were more than one tribe.

1002 **That's possible.**

1003 Anyway, where does that take us now?

1004

1005 **(19:48) Well, so you got on a plane with very little notice, left a turkey and your friends**
1006 **behind and ended up in Udorn.**

1007 Yeah, that's right. And I had—I was really irritated. I had just shipped over—I was coming off of a
1008 home leave in '74 and I had just shipped over a POV—privately-owned vehicle that was my mom's
1009 1972 Camaro—brand new Rally Sport, wide tires and I—it made it safely to Pakse and I drove it
1010 myself from Pakse to Savannakhet when I moved to Savannakhet. And hardly got to use it at all.
1011 Just four or five months there and then left it behind. So that was the evacuation. And went down
1012 to—well, we got to Udorn. I went to Bangkok and they wanted us to report to Washington. Well, I
1013 said I'd need to go back to the border because I had grabbed—instead of grabbing about 12 or 15
1014 rolls of undeveloped film, I grabbed a bag of shoe polish and flew it out, and I was trying to make
1015 contact with some of my employees to go to the house and try to find the film and bring it over.
1016 And the way I got a note into Laos was, on our flight, we had—it was not just Americans. It was
1017 TCNs and their significant others as well. And one of the Filipino doctors had a Lao wife who,
1018 once she got to Udorn, decided she wanted to go back. She didn't—she was just caught up in all the
1019 hype of leaving and then had second thoughts about it once we got to Udorn. So she agreed to
1020 hand carry a note for me, which actually got to Vientiane to a person and I went up to—went across
1021 from Savannakhet—Mukdahan—is that the—it's not—yeah, it must be Mukdahan—district
1022 Mukdahan in what province? Is it Nakhon Phanom or Sakon Nakhon? I'm forgetting right now.
1023 Anyway, I missed by about one hour the connection time and so I missed the fellow. He did come
1024 over—cross over to Thailand, but he was—he felt so intimidated by the Pathet Lao border guards
1025 that he went right back when he didn't see me practically immediately. I later found out that he
1026 went back, I guess, with my film, too. But he later came out and has been living in Wichita for
1027 almost 30 years now. So I went back to Bangkok and then flew to Washington. I had asked before
1028 I left Bangkok if they needed any help on Guam and, of course, they said, "No, you got to go where
1029 your orders tell you to go." So I got to Washington via Akron here. I spent a day or two in Akron
1030 and then went to Washington, reported somewhere and they asked me if I wanted to go to Guam.
1031 So I said, "Well, sure. Why didn't you let me go there from Bangkok, like I wanted to go?" And of
1032 course, they don't have an answer for those kinds of questions. And came back to Akron and then
1033 went to Guam for—it was supposed to be three months. And I think I was—let's see, I got there
1034 probably May, June—sometime in June. And then, by August I—actually, before August. From
1035 Guam, I had sent a letter to my former boss in Washington, Len Maynard. He was the head of the
1036 refugee program in Vientiane after John McQueen left. These are names other people may have
1037 thrown out to you. And I was asking him, "Hey, what's going on with the Lao? There's no
1038 mechanism yet to move Lao refugees in Thailand to the States like the Vietnamese and the
1039 Cambodians." And the next thing I knew, within a week it seems like, after writing the letter, I had a
1040 telegram authorizing me to go to Bangkok to work on the Lao refugee program. So there were
1041 clearly things at work that I didn't know about on Guam. I—and Jack—when I got to Bangkok—

1042 well, another guy from Guam went with me. What's his name? He—O'Neil—Hugh O'Neil. He
1043 had come out of Vietnam and spoke Vietnamese. So we went over together. Oh, my sister was
1044 visiting, too. She was a 16 year-old at the time and my dad thought it would be interesting for her to
1045 see what was happening on Guam. And so she was there when I got my orders to go to Bangkok.
1046 So I called my dad and we got her a passport real quick and she flew to Bangkok with me via Hong
1047 Kong and stayed in Bangkok for a week for—I put her on a plane with this General Soutchay, I'm
1048 telling you about, actually. He escorted my sister back to the States because he was ready to move to
1049 the States for resettlement, too. He was one of our first cases we processed out of the embassy
1050 there in Bangkok. That's before I had gone—that's before I went up to Udorn to work with Mac.
1051 We had a refugee operation there in the political section of the embassy with the political officers
1052 and other people in the embassy who were helping sort out all these people who were coming to the
1053 embassy every day—Cambodians, Lao, Vietnamese. We didn't really have a refugee program in
1054 place at the time. But then, after Ambassador Whitehouse, I guess, got tired of walking over
1055 refugees who were sleeping on the steps of the embassy there, that we finally moved over to the Soi
1056 1—you know what Soi means?

1057 **Yeah, street.**

1058 The Soi 1 office, we called it, where—USAID Laos liaison office was—had been—that's the
1059 building I was trying to think of. That was the office that Mac Thompson in Vientiane would
1060 contact when he needed rice or commodities, mosquito nets, blankets, in huge numbers. And then
1061 that office is the one responsible for getting them to Laos. But anyway, that became the refugee—
1062 the first refugee office so we could get out of the embassy. And ...

1063

1064 **(27:08) What do you see as Whitehouse's level of interest in assisting with refugee**
1065 **resettlement?**

1066 [Chuckles] Well, I didn't have much contact with him until I was there by myself later on in '77. I
1067 was left behind to do the—maybe Mac told you, after the initial programs, parole number
1068 authorizations wound down, we had to move everyone that we, that INS tagged a number on, to the
1069 States, to the camps in the States. We had to move them—no, I'm sorry. We had to move them to
1070 the States by the end of December of '76 is my recollection. Now the only ones who moved on
1071 those parole numbers—well, no, wait, I can't remember now whether the Tai Dam—the Tai Dam
1072 moved with numbers, even though they were tagged as Vietnamese, they came—did they go straight
1073 to Iowa or did they go into refugee camps first and then go from there to Iowa? Do you recall?

1074 **I can't say I know. I mean, I know they ended up in Iowa. I'm an Iowa boy myself. But I**
1075 **can't remember if they were at camps. I think they might have been in camps first.**

1076 Oh, wait, we had charter flights of Tai Dam. Wow, we'll have to straighten that out. Jim Schill was
1077 kind of responsible, being from Iowa himself, Sioux City, he was friends with the then governor
1078 whose name slips my mind.

1079 **Robert D. Ray, I would guess.**

1080 Yeah, that's it. Bob Ray. And Jim sort of put the bug in the governor's ear that the Tai Dam should
1081 remain an intact community, to a certain extent. And that's how they ended up all being, at least
1082 initially, sponsored around Iowa. Now there were other—there were secondary migrations later on
1083 out of Iowa. Some went to Texas. But I think that was an internal Tai Dam political deal where
1084 there were two factions, as there usually are [in] any of these groups and some of them followed—I
1085 can't remember the guy's name. Probably something **Ba Kham** to Texas. But most of the Tai Dam,
1086 as far as I know, remained in Iowa. But what was I thinking of—whether they flew into camps or
1087 not, I don't remember. But anyway, they had to—I do remember that anybody coming to the States
1088 under the EPP program—expanded parole program of '76—had to be in the States—or had to—at
1089 least had to be airborne by the end of the year or the numbers would be lost or something magical

1090 like that. And that happened again later because I remember Hank Cushing got himself into trouble
1091 by sending a lot of people on charter flights before the end of the year into a holding area in
1092 California—that Air Force base we used as a—what was it? North of San Francisco. The charter
1093 flights would go there and then they'd be moved out of there onto their sponsorships. I can't
1094 remember the name of the Air Force base. But—oh, there were later programs after '76. But the
1095 only—well, why was I left behind as the only refugee officer? Well, I was asked sometime in
1096 December if I wanted to stay, keep the lights on and—because Shep Lowman—actually, Shep
1097 Lowman was out—was visiting and said there was a mechanism to move Vietnamese boat cases—to
1098 continue moving Vietnamese boat cases, but nothing for the Khmer or the Lao. And that's a
1099 program called conditional entry. So I said, "Sure, I'll do it." So I—they said, "Well, you have to go
1100 back and take the visa section of the consular course, FFI, in Arlington." And I said fine, so I did
1101 that. Got to go home and went through this course for two weeks and then I came back. And the
1102 office was—I had to be attached to the consulate over on [Saton Dai] Road. Andy [Antipas] was
1103 the—what did we call him? Head of the consular section. And that became the refugee office, a
1104 much smaller office than we were used to. Did anyone ever explain that program to you? The—
1105 maybe you're not interested in it.

1106 **Which program? I mean, there was the parole program, which ...**

1107 Yeah, well, another parole program came around in August '77, but between January and August,
1108 the only program was conditional entry for Vietnamese. You shouldn't be aware that it existed.
1109 You may not want to use it in your book. But basically you had INS officers come—there were two
1110 camps we were interviewing in, primarily. And I was going back and forth with JVA personnel to—
1111 like make a trip and then document it and then go to the other camp, document it. And the INS
1112 would come in from Hong Kong and we'd take them back and they'd slap a conditional entry
1113 number on the head of the family and get the paperwork ready for the followers or the other family
1114 members for non-preference immigrant visas. But those could only be issued in Hong Kong. So
1115 once INS approved the family unit for these two various types of immigration visas, the family
1116 would fly to Hong Kong, after they had their medical clearance and their sponsorship in place,
1117 they'd fly to Hong Kong and then the head of the family would go to probably the INS officer and
1118 get his approval. And the rest of the family would go to the consular section and get their
1119 immigrant visas. And then they'd all fly out on the same flight to where their sponsorship was. But
1120 that was a mechanism to move more people during those eight months of '77 because driving this
1121 whole thing was to preserve the principle of first asylum in the Southeast Asian countries.
1122 Otherwise, if the, say, the Thai government didn't see enough movement from the camps to third
1123 ...

1124 **Third countries.**

1125 ... countries for resettlement, they would close the border and start pooling or turning the boats
1126 back out to sea and God knows how many people perished because of it or if they couldn't float all
1127 the way to Malaysia or wherever. So that's why Shep and Hank and certainly Lionel wanted to keep
1128 some kind of a program going. Meanwhile, I was trying to figure out what we were going to do with
1129 all these other refugees who kept coming out who where not from Vietnam and therefore not
1130 eligible for that conditional entry program. So where am I going with this? In that I was able to try
1131 to keep my finger on the numbers, to the best that I could. Certainly in the Nong Khai and the
1132 Ubon refugee camps. Oh, there's a whole period there of '76 where I moved up and actually
1133 worked out of the consulate in Udorn with Mac and we were processing people out of there. When
1134 that program was over, I went back to Bangkok. But I was trying to get statistics together any way I
1135 could—but I couldn't get the reporting cable out of Bangkok. I couldn't get the ambassador to sign
1136 off on it because he, like many people in Washington, thought that Vietnamese—Vietnam was
1137 history and wanted to turn the light off. Well, people like Lionel were back there trying to drum up

1138 support on the Hill for additional parole numbers. And in fact, he was successful. And that wasn't
1139 the only time Lionel did that. He had to do it again and later on, after the expanded parole program
1140 numbers were exhausted in—well, now that was—EPP was '76. I can't remember the name of the
1141 other program in '78 and later on. But Lionel was able to get—oh, what was his name—out on
1142 NBC network. [Frank?] Reynolds was his name and the film crew, the TV film crew. I can't think
1143 of his first name. He's dead now, unfortunately. I took him to—I've got a copy of the videotape
1144 downstairs. My dad called New York and was able to get a copy of it. And he also got a copy of the
1145 Mike Wallace interview on 60 Minutes, which aired a few months later. That was the second film
1146 crew that came out. And this was an effort on Lionel's part to put pressure on the Hill to get
1147 another—approval for another program. And he was successful.

1148
1149 **(37:52) So we didn't say it exactly, but it sounded like, from your chuckling, that perhaps**
1150 **Whitehouse, at least initially, was not an avid supporter of—or at least someone who**
1151 **energetically supported people who were assisting refugees and helping to resettle.**

1152 Well, he did what he had to do. I mean, yeah, you're right. I mean, I couldn't get a reporting cable
1153 out. But where was I going with that? I had to call Lionel and Lionel had to have a cable—a state
1154 cable come to Bangkok requesting a numbers reporting cable. And that was the only way we got
1155 Whitehouse to sign off on the cable because Washington had demanded that the numbers be
1156 reported.

1157
1158 **(38:41) You mentioned that Lao refugees were showing up in Bangkok. I guess I have the**
1159 **picture of the refugees that I know who come across the river and they're taken into some**
1160 **sort of holding area before they're processed and ended up in a camp. How did the**
1161 **refugees end up in Bangkok?**

1162 Well, the Thais didn't have their act together back in May, June, July, summer of '75 and fall of '75.
1163 The United Nations is always slow in reacting to doing what they're supposed to do, the UNHCR.
1164 We had, when the general, the air force general brought his air force guys out of Laos back in May,
1165 June, July of '75, they were camped in and around Udorn there and received a lot of support from
1166 the American Air Force guys who—because the base was still open—well, the U.S. Air Force was
1167 still on the base in Udorn. That didn't close until sometime—at least the U.S. involvement didn't
1168 close until sometime in '76. But they helped support these guys and—who were—many of them
1169 who were there with their families, wives and kids and staying in the Pepsi bungalows and the
1170 [Warooni] bungalow complex and ...

1171 **Warooni?**

1172 Yeah. That was one name of the—that was one bungalow complex. Like a motel-type place,
1173 commercial operation there in Udorn. There was no camp in Udorn and others would go all the
1174 way to Bangkok. Many Lao had connections in Bangkok either through family or whatever. And
1175 they were financially well off enough to pay for a hotel room and camped out in the hotel room and
1176 then in the daytime would come over to our refugee office or go to the French embassy or wherever
1177 they were trying to get to for resettlement relief. The Thais, once they realized what was going on,
1178 they did various roundups in Bangkok. They had amnesty—once they finally opened camps—the
1179 ones I'm more familiar with are Ubon and Nong Khai. They had an amnesty in Bangkok and said,
1180 "Well, even though you didn't come out of the woodwork before, we're having so many buses over
1181 here and we'll take you back to a camp and legitimize—or take you to a camp and legitimize your
1182 refugee status in Thailand. And quite a few refugees, many of whom were already approved for our
1183 program, but we didn't have the sponsorships worked out yet. So we had to encourage them to get
1184 on the bus and go back to Nong Khai and when the appropriate time came, we would move them
1185 out of the camp. Actually, I don't even know the numbers.

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(42:04) So before the camps were more formalized, were there any Hmong that you came into contact with who came to Bangkok to try to plead for themselves or for some larger group of Hmong people?

Wow. I don't remember seeing any. We probably ought to ask Mac because Mac was still in Bangkok then, I think or no, wait. No, he was up in Udorn the whole time. He didn't come down to Bangkok until much later in '78 or so. I don't remember seeing any Hmong in Bangkok. I remember seeing some come to the consulate in Udorn. But then again there was that Nam Phong operation I told you about yesterday. And I don't remember—I'm sure we didn't take all the Hmong out of Nam Phong. When the Nong Khai camp opened, there were two sections to it. There was a Hmong section and a Lao section. And what we probably did is move—well, I'm speculating here, but it makes—sort of makes sense that the Lao, the Hmong who were still in Nam Phong when the Nong Khai camp opened, were probably moved at the request of the Thais from the airbase up to the Hmong section of the Nong Khai camp.

(43:41) Yeah, I think that might have happened, although I think some stayed at Nam Phong until it closed and they may have gone straight to Ban Vinai.

Oh, that also is a possibility. Yeah. Yeah. Actually, that could make more sense. I can't remember when Ban Vinai opened up.

I'm trying to remember.

When I made my first trip there. Do you have a date for that?

I think it's—I have a date somewhere. I don't have it right at my fingertips right now, but I'm thinking maybe '78.

Are you thinking that the Thais let the Hmong stay in Nam Phong airbase until then?

Well, I don't think all of them, but I think some of them. Probably some of the higher ranking military or people that they didn't want that close to the Mekong at Nong Khai.

Right.

Because that was at least one of the stories I heard that one of the reasons that Vang Pao had to leave so quickly was that he was visiting all of these sort of makeshift villages along the river and the Thai government thought that he was trying to get ready for a reinvasion into Laos and they were pretty nervous about it.

OK. That makes sense. Of course, he was concerned about getting INS approval on his six or seven wives as well. And I can remember once we crossed those hurdles of bringing the—bringing them down, I think, in two groups. One had three or four and the next day the remaining wives and their kids came into the consulate in Udorn to get INS numbers slapped on them. And then I think we moved them out pretty fast after they got approval. They certainly—I don't know that they were ever living in the camps, but either Vinai or Nong Khai, but they probably were, at least some of them. I can't remember how many there were even in total. I just know there were six or seven wives.

(45:47) Well, I see, it looks like Nong Khai was closed in '79, at least for the Hmong.

Because I know at one point they had so much fighting between the Lao and the Hmong that they moved the Hmong out of Nong Khai and sent them to Vinai as well.

Moved the who out?

Moved the Hmong from Nong Khai to Vinai.

Really.

Yeah.

Golly, I though there were Hmong still in Nong Khai when I left there for good in '80.

1234 **Well, I'll have to double check.**
1235 I could be wrong.
1236 **Well, I could be wrong, too. Trust me.**
1237 No, I—just I've never thought about it since then. You're probably—if somebody told you that,
1238 someone like Mac, you'd better go by what he remembers and what he says.
1239 **Well, I think—there's actually a book written about Ban Vinai by a woman named—what is**
1240 **her name? Lynelle—I don't know. I'll get you the information, but she may be the one that**
1241 **I was referring to.**
1242 I am not familiar with that.
1243
1244 **(46:58) Well, I'll see if I can find that date and if I do, I'll send that along to you after we've**
1245 **finished up. You mentioned earlier that you had expressed a concern that there was no**
1246 **established refugee program for Lao and that the response was you basically got sent—was**
1247 **it to Bangkok from Guam?**
1248 Yes, correct.
1249 **But you don't have any sense of why that happened or who was responsible for it or what**
1250 **you were supposed to do when you go there?**
1251 The program was still being written while I was—after I was told to move there. Let's see. That
1252 was Hank Cushing's office at State Department in, golly, and Pat Derian, she was the [Assistant
1253 Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs] in the Carter Administration. She
1254 later married Hodding Carter who was one of the—I think was a spokesperson for the White House
1255 or something. I can't remember what his exact title was. But they were designing the program and
1256 writing the—I'm trying to think all this through. Oh, also I'm leaving out a very crucial part here
1257 was Julia Taft's Inter-Agency Task Force, which someone has probably briefed you on already.
1258 **Well, Lionel has referred to it. In fact, I managed to send an e-mail to Julia Taft's husband**
1259 **to see if she would be willing to talk to me and I never heard back from her.**
1260 She was ill last year. I don't know what that means if she didn't—you sent it to Will Taft.
1261 **Yeah.**
1262 Golly, who would have Julia's e-mail?
1263 **Well, Lionel might. I suppose I could ask him.**
1264 Yeah. Well, let him know that you weren't successful. She may be too ill to do interviews. I just
1265 don't know.
1266 **Yeah, it certainly could be. But yeah, go ahead and please talk about it. It would be**
1267 **interesting to hear it from another perspective.**
1268 Well, not that I was—I was just—I just knew it existed. They were the ones who decided to do the
1269 four camp thing for the ViCam program—Vietnamese-Cambodian program before refugee camps
1270 in the States to where refugees were moved from, primarily the Philippines and then held there until
1271 they were sponsored out of those camps. But it was determined that for the Lao program, the Lao
1272 would not go into the camps because they were trying to close those camps. So the Lao program
1273 had to have a new twist to it in that once they were INS-approved in Thailand, Lao would remain in
1274 Thailand until the sponsorships were worked out through the—what's it called in New York—the
1275 consortium of voluntary agencies—but it was called ...
1276 **Is that JVA again?**
1277 No, no.
1278 **It something different. OK.**
1279 I'll think of it in a minute. They had meetings every Wednesday where they would divvy up the bios
1280 from—the family bio—graphic data that they would receive from the various JVAs from Singapore,

1281 Hong Kong, Bangkok, wherever, for sponsorship purposes. And then, of course, you know
1282 ICEM—it's now called IOM, were the body movers.

1283 **That's - is it Albert Corcos? Was that the man?**

1284 Right. Albert Corcos came out to Bangkok and headed it out of—headed the Bangkok operations.
1285 Right. It's now called IOM. They changed—the name of it changed at least twice that I know of.
1286 But they would be the ones that would interface with the Thai government on getting medical—in
1287 getting the refugees medically cleared and moving them to Bangkok. And we had like holding areas
1288 in Bangkok where they came from the camps once they were sponsored and then moved out to the
1289 airport for the flights onto the States. And IOM did—or ICEM did all that.

1290
1291 **(52:13) Now just to make sure that I have this clear in my own mind, please feel free to**
1292 **correct me. But once the refugee camps were up and running, essentially, once the refugee**
1293 **crosses into Thailand—and we'll just take an example of a Lao or a Hmong, if they're not**
1294 **sent back, they will be put into sort of a holding area where they have to make application to**
1295 **the United Nations to be recognized as a refugee. Is that correct?**

1296 Well, you know, I've only observed this, I guess, myself, in the Nong Khai situation. I can't
1297 remember going to a holding area in Ubon prior—where refugees might have been held until they
1298 were authorized for movement into the Ubon refugee camp. But the camps were so porous, at least
1299 for the Lao. One, because they had a semi-common language, unlike the Vietnamese camp in CQ—
1300 Khorat Province. You know where that...

1301 **Yes.**

1302 You know where that is. That was an old French Indochinese War holding area and—that the
1303 Thais had for which they reopened to use for Vietnamese from Laos that they identified as
1304 Vietnamese. And would—sometimes they would move them out of the Nong Khai camp if they
1305 entered the Nong Khai camp on their Lao names. Because many Vietnamese from Laos had Lao
1306 or—and/or Vietnamese names. But what was I thinking? What did you ask me?

1307
1308 **(54:17) About whether individuals had to make a sort of formal application to the United**
1309 **Nations before they were recognized as refugees and could be allowed into a refugee camp.**

1310 Well, I would have to say no because the UN was always playing catch up. They were never
1311 processing people in a timely fashion. Many people were somehow in the—I mean, Nong Khai
1312 camp was huge. There were almost 20,000 people in there in its peak, that I can recall. Somewhere
1313 between 6,000 and 8,000 Hmong and probably 10,000 to 12,000 Lao when it was really packed in
1314 '78 or so. On paper it was supposed to work that way, but people were always buying their way into
1315 the larger camp and bypassing the holding area—the So Ko Toe there. Or they were smuggled in. I
1316 guess I was trying to paint the picture that the Nong Khai camp was much more porous, certainly a
1317 facility like the one in CQ was, where it was almost impossible to sneak into the camp in CQ for the
1318 Vietnamese. They—and they weren't allowed out, either. That was true for the boat camps that I
1319 worked in, too. You had to bribe the guard with either booze or cigarettes to get out just to go
1320 downtown shopping or whatever. But as you know, many of the Lao and the Hmong probably
1321 worked downtown or on the farms just to get some kind of an income. There were a lot of Lao
1322 refugee taxi drivers running around Nong Khai and Ubon. They'd rent taxis from Thais who had
1323 extra taxis and probably have to pay the guards a certain part of their income to—in order to do
1324 that. That's—so I guess no—probably not everybody was registered with the UN at least in the
1325 early days because we certainly talked to anybody who wanted to talk to us. We didn't require any
1326 kind of a card or a UN refugee card or anything like that. Now I mentioned the amnesty in
1327 Bangkok. That was to legalize the refugee status, I guess, for those who were in Bangkok. And a lot
1328 of people never did move into a camp, which became very problematic for them later on. Certainly,

1329 when that facility in Nakhon Phanom opened up, that was—and there was no real program for the
1330 U.S. back at some point. And the Thais were getting sticky. It took them about four or five years
1331 before they really started tightening up on being legitimized as a refugee before you could move to a
1332 third country. And I don't think that UN process worked very well ever. Well, that's why we had to
1333 hire—we used JVA as a body shop and IRC as a body shop to get more people to help us out in
1334 documenting cases because, I mean, ideally, we would only talk to people—the embassies would
1335 only talk to people who were on some kind of a list that came from the UN. Well, it never really
1336 worked that way. So we developed cases and a caseload regardless of whether they had registered
1337 with the UN or not. And I don't know how those cases were resolved. Maybe IOM helped get
1338 them—if they were approved for third country movement, then maybe IOM—ICEM interfaced
1339 with the Thai government to get approval letters so that they could depart Thailand. Just—I know
1340 the Thais felt just totally overwhelmed by the sheer numbers, which is why they were such sticklers
1341 about closing the border at various times and turning people back.

1342 **Well, and they still had their own little Communist insurgency going on at the time, didn't**
1343 **they?**

1344 That's probably true. I remember it was really going on when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in
1345 Khon Kaen. I didn't really follow it that much, but I knew it was going on in the 60s.

1346 **Yeah, I don't think they offered amnesty until—I should know this by now—maybe '83 or**
1347 **'84?**

1348 Could be. I guess that's about the time I stopped following it and onto other things.

1349 **I have too many details to keep in my head. They don't tend to stay there very well**
1350 **sometimes.**

1351 [Laughs] You're doing a great job for not having been a part of the action.

1352
1353 **(1:00:28) Well, fortunately, through folks like you, I get to sort of feel like I was, at least on**
1354 **some level. Now you were technically an ethnic affairs officer like Jerry Daniels. Was that**
1355 **your title?**

1356 I was the Lao ethnic affairs officer. Jerry was the Hmong ethnic affairs officer. And there were
1357 other fellows, ladies, who were Khmer or Vietnamese ethnic affairs officers. That was just to give
1358 us a title and the embassy and—for embassy purposes, I guess, for the structure inside the refugee
1359 section for the ...

1360 **So how would you ...**

1361 Mac became the deputy coordinator under Lionel when—I guess I never finished it. When I took
1362 you up to August '77, I didn't move after that. Once the new program was authorized, Tom Barnes
1363 came out to expand the—or reinvent the refugee section and he was the chief of the refugee section
1364 and, golly, that's when I went back from being—from the Vietnamese boat cases to be the—to be
1365 the—to being a Lao ethnic affairs officer. And that's when we made other moves from—I guess
1366 that's about the time we moved to the Shell—no, the Chokchai building, 12th or 13th floor of a
1367 huge skyscraper with a steakhouse on the top out there on Sukhumvit. That was one of our offices
1368 for awhile. And then a row of townhouses just north of the embassy on Wireless Road became
1369 available and we moved in there. Oh, wait. There's another move. I forgot all about the Shell
1370 building directly opposite the embassy. When were we in there? Maybe we were in there before the
1371 Chokchai building. I don't know. It was just—I mean, it was bad enough just trying to stay—do
1372 our job and stay on top of the case loads without having to move the office every few months.

1373 **Oh, I can imagine.**

1374 But ...

1375

1376 **(1:02:57) So how would you—what would you say the job description would be for an ethnic**
1377 **affairs officer?**

1378 Oh, it was someone who had intimate knowledge of the language and the culture of the country
1379 that—well, they were identified as the ethnic affairs officers for—and in the case of Laos, you had
1380 certainly more than one language at work. But for most purposes, the lowland Lao, certainly, and
1381 then if—Jerry didn't speak fluent Hmong is my understanding and I know he understood a lot more
1382 than he could speak. But he always worked with an interpreter. Maybe that was just a cross check
1383 on himself. But certainly in terms of a job description, it would be someone who had intimate
1384 knowledge of the language and the culture and the probably the history and the political structure of
1385 the country and the society that he was working on. I know that's not a very good description.

1386
1387 **(1:04:20) Well, but would you then have people under you who would help with the**
1388 **interviewing process when new people would come in or ...**

1389 Oh, OK. Yeah, I've got to get you to understand that. That's why we had JVA. Would—because
1390 we—let's say we'd go to a camp. JVA would do registrations for, say, new cases. They would be the
1391 first point of contact for new—the registration of new cases. And the longer they were there, they
1392 developed their own set of forms and files and et cetera. And then, in many cases, refugees would
1393 have affidavits of relationship if they were claiming—do you understand the category system that we
1394 used to prioritize cases?

1395 **Well, I—Lionel described it for the Hmong.**

1396 Well, Washington gave us a—pretty much a set criteria. Category One was family reunification and
1397 generally meant to be immediate family—parents, siblings, certainly spouse, children. Category Two
1398 would have been direct employment by an entity of the United States government, the USG,
1399 category two. Category Three would have been close association with either the U.S. government or
1400 the former regime countries that they had departed. And then Category Four was everybody else.
1401 That included—there were various facets under category four to mean extended relatives who
1402 maybe couldn't meet the family definition in a category—in a family category of a higher category.
1403 But for humanitarian purposes, we would allow them to accompany the family unit under which the
1404 head of the family was approved, whether it be category one, two or three. Then we'd slap a
1405 category four number on the extra relative or relatives either because they were minors—minor
1406 nephews, nieces, aged uncles, aunts that shouldn't be left behind. Basically, that was the—another
1407 facet of category four. And then the bottom rung on the ladder was still alive and breathing in the
1408 camp and no other country took—had taken them, even though they tried to go somewhere else.
1409 And we took a lot of cases that way, too. A lot of illiterate farmers who couldn't speak French,
1410 therefore they wouldn't qualify to go to France and either Canada or Australia, wherever, were not
1411 interested in them. We ended up taking a lot of category four types who we would process—we
1412 prioritized by date of entry into the camp, and just whittled away at that case load. But JVA—oh,
1413 yeah, we would never have been able to pull this off if we hadn't had JVA personnel. Back in '76,
1414 when we got the expanded EPP program authorized, we—I don't know if I thought of it or Lionel
1415 did or, I don't know, maybe it was a group effort over a bottle of beer one night. But we said, "Hey,
1416 we need some Thai speakers real quick. Let's ask the Peace Corps if they've got any groups
1417 terminating and query them if any of these volunteers would be interested in staying on in Thailand
1418 and working in the refugee program. And we ended up with 20 or 30 people back in '76, many of
1419 them who turned that into careers with either IOM or—I mean, ICEM or IRC or voluntary
1420 agencies, several tested in the State Department and they're foreign service officers now or recently
1421 retired, all because we needed them and they were interested in helping us out back in '76.

1422

1423 **(1:09:26) So were you a part of this effort that—and it sounds like Lionel at least**
1424 **spearheaded to get the Hmong into this program or into this quota, if you will, where they**
1425 **had to have people, as you said off—on planes and out of the country by the end of the year?**
1426 Well, oh, the—you're talking about the whole processing process.
1427 **Well, Lionel was talking and maybe we're talking about two different things. So let me**
1428 **clarify what I was talking about, but ...**
1429 OK.
1430 **He said that he came to Nam Phong in October of '75.**
1431 Correct.
1432 **And I know you said that you weren't sure if you had gone to Nam Phong with Lionel or if**
1433 **it was on another occasion.**
1434 Right.
1435 **But he then spoke to Julia Taft and said, "Here are these people whose English skills are**
1436 **great and who clearly have worked with the United States government in the military and**
1437 **they have call signs. They have—they're nurses. And so I want them to be a part of this**
1438 **group of 11,000, which was the number that was left over from the Vietnamese group.**
1439 OK. That's the EPP program.
1440 **OK.**
1441 I know we had Hmong in the initial 3,466 pot of numbers for the first Lao program. The one that
1442 was the reason for my being sent from Guam to Bangkok to work on and why Jerry was at work
1443 identifying cases to present—to prioritize and then use whatever—boy, I wish I knew the number of
1444 Hmong out of that 3,400 pot that came. Mac would know off the top of his head. He's still got the
1445 old registers that we wrote everybody's name in by an alien number. But no, there's two programs
1446 there—the old Lao program, we called it, and then that 3,400 program. And then, you're right. It
1447 was 11,000 EPP numbers, which had to be issued by June 30, '76.
1448 **There we go. There we go.**
1449 Issued but not yet moved.
1450 **OK.**
1451 Now there was—when I mentioned the Inter-Agency Task Force, I did so because the—that task
1452 force, Julia Taft's group, was trying to close the refugee camps—golly, was it—maybe it was
1453 December of '75. Is that possible? Because our cases approved—well, I'm trying to remember. I
1454 was thinking that everybody who moved from Thailand had to be sponsored first before they could
1455 move, because they had to—specifically could not go into the refugee camps. But that's not—that
1456 wasn't true for some of the initial Lao—I mean, the initial Vietnamese and Khmer. They did go
1457 to—like they—we had flights out of Udorn airbase into the Philippines because some of the
1458 Vietnamese who came out of Laos, if they had a calling card from our political officer there, from
1459 Bob McCullum, if they presented that calling card, business card like to the consulate, they were
1460 plugged into the flights to the Philippines and then the numbers were not chargeable to the program
1461 from Thailand where you had to wait and use—you had to wait for a sponsorship before you could
1462 move directly to your sponsor. But you could not go into the refugee camps in the States. That's
1463 not very clear, but I'm trying to make a distinction between the two programs and why some people
1464 moved into the camps—moved into the four camps. Well, wait. They didn't go from the—they
1465 didn't go from Thailand into those four camps. They—I think they went through Guam and then
1466 from Guam we farmed them out into the four camps. That's why I'm not recalling how we moved
1467 the Tai Dam because they clearly were in Thailand and I know they didn't go to Guam. And they
1468 may have used Vietnamese numbers so that we could preserve more numbers for the Lao and the
1469 Hmong, who could not go into the camp. That's why I'm thinking the Tai Dam may have gone—in
1470 fact, gone into a refugee camp because we moved them under a different program. But then again,

1471 we knew the sponsorship thing was at work with the governor of Iowa. So maybe they did move on
1472 charter flights from Thailand directly into Iowa and avoid the refugee camps in the States. I'm just
1473 forgetting right now.

1474
1475 **(1:15:00) Interesting. OK. So as far—and this is one of those things that gets very**
1476 **interesting because General Vang Pao loves to say, "Well, I'm the reason that all of you are**
1477 **here because I went to President Ford and I said you're letting Vietnamese and**
1478 **Cambodians into the country. Why aren't you letting Hmong into the country?" And**
1479 **according to General Vang Pao, President Ford said, "Oh, don't worry, General Vang Pao.**
1480 **I will take care of your people." And Yang Dao likes to say—it's not that I'm totally**
1481 **disbelieving or trying to discredit either one of these men, but it's interesting when you're**
1482 **trying to tell the history or the story of how the Hmong came to the United States. Yang**
1483 **Dao said that he wrote letters to the King of Thailand and the prime minister of Australia, a**
1484 **number of other leaders in France and the United States. That he also came to Bangkok**
1485 **and spoke with Hugh Tovar and I think with—who else did he mention? I think he tried to**
1486 **talk to Whitehouse and he was sent on to Tovar. And then he says, "Well, it was because of**
1487 **those efforts on my part that representatives of the United States came to Nam Phong." But**
1488 **I guess the story, as I'm telling it, at least at this point, starts with Sam Feldman and Lionel**
1489 **Rosenblatt and with you and Mac just because I can at least—I can at least trace that story.**
1490 **OK. And the timeframe—yeah, you're working backwards here to—back to the genesis in '75 there.**
1491 **Right. So basically September, October of '75.**

1492 Yes, but I was already—wait a minute. You said something that—oh, you mentioned Ford. That
1493 triggered something in my mind because when we—I remember movement. See, the big thing was
1494 we had—in order to—here we get into the logistics of a pipeline. I'm thinking that, at some **probe**
1495 point, we had a program to move 7,000 a month into the States from all locations in Southeast Asia.
1496 And it was Jimmy Carter who went to Tokyo and announced a doubling of that number, is my
1497 recollection—from 7,000 to 14,000 a month.

1498 **I think that's right.**

1499 I don't remember if Ford—no, no. Ford lost the election of '76.

1500 **Right.**

1501 So anything you have regarding Ford would have been prior to January 20, '77, when he went out of
1502 office.

1503 **Right.**

1504 But when you mentioned Ford's name, I was—I remembered when we—when Carter doubled the
1505 amount of arrivals to show more movement from the countries of first asylum, indeed to preserve
1506 the principle of first asylum in those countries, because boats were being pulled back out to sea hot
1507 and heavy and Hmong were being shot in the river and other horror stories were going on. And all
1508 that was used to get—to pressurize Washington to approve larger numbers, larger parole numbers
1509 for the Indochinese. But—and I don't even remember what that parole program was called, but—
1510 or how many numbers we had authorized. It was probably a yearly allocation at that point, if we're
1511 into '78, '79, '80. Do you remember how many were authorized from all locations per year?

1512 **No, I can't—there again, I think I do remember reading something in Lynelle Long's book**
1513 **about Ban Vinai, but I—boy, I can't pull the number out of my head.**

1514 Well, it wasn't just Hmong, though. I mean, the Hmong were just one part.

1515 **Yeah, but she talks about the broader refugee numbers as well. She doesn't just talk about**
1516 **Hmong.**

1517 Yeah, the drama was—well, by God, then you had the killing fields of Cambodia in place.

1518 **And then the Karen [from Burma] and, yeah.**

1519 Right. Yes. Right. That's why the numbers finally got up to—well, we could do the math, I
1520 suppose. Twelve times 14,000 a month. Maybe that's about how many numbers we had on a yearly
1521 basis, I'm not sure.

1522 **Well, I do remember reading that in 1980, the United States accepted more refugees into its**
1523 **country than all other countries in the world combined.**

1524 Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah.

1525

1526 **(1:20:12) Maybe that's true most years, but I know there was a bit of a backlash in '80**
1527 **which, probably in no small part, explains why Americans voted the way they did in '80 in**
1528 **addition to inflation and Afghanistan and the Iran Hostage Crisis and everything else.**

1529 Right.

1530

1531 **(1:20:35) Well, let's just talk about some of the people you worked with for a few minutes, if**
1532 **that sounds all right.**

1533 Yeah, up until maybe 10 more minutes and then I've got—I need to get off the phone by quarter of
1534 nine.

1535 **All right.**

1536 What—like ...

1537 **Well, let's start with Jerry Daniels.**

1538 OK.

1539 **Did you meet him when you came to Thailand to do this refugee work or had you known**
1540 **him before?**

1541 Golly, I would think I would have met him in Laos when we were both working there together. I
1542 certainly didn't know him well. Maybe I never met him in Laos. I don't—I honestly don't recall. I
1543 might have met him at a refugee—we had periodic meetings in Vientiane of the refugee officers.
1544 Maybe I met him then. Or maybe I didn't meet him until I got to Thailand. I don't remember.

1545

1546 **(1:21:44) I know Gayle Morrison is writing this book about him now, but what do you see as**
1547 **sort of his role? I know you've already said he was the Hmong ethnic affairs officer, but**
1548 **how would you describe him and the work that he did as he went through these refugee**
1549 **camp in Thailand?**

1550 Well, he did kind of what I did—try to verify claims to close association with the U.S. government
1551 or the former regime. Now in Jerry's case—but I don't think that many Hmong worked for the
1552 former regime in Laos. So his—he principally was trying to verify their claims to having worked for
1553 the CIA or been—having been a Hmong T-28 pilot for the Lao air force or the whole close
1554 association thing. Or certainly the category two claim to direct employment by the U.S.
1555 government, because the CIA would never admit to having anybody on its payroll. And that
1556 becomes very problematic in terms of—I mean, if I might divert here a moment, for Amerasian
1557 children who were fathered by these CIA guys in Laos or wherever. In order to process a claim for
1558 American citizenship, you've got to prove that the father had physical presence in the country and to
1559 satisfy our wonderful consular officers in Washington. And the CIA would never document that
1560 their agents had physical presence in these countries. So that became problematic. But Jerry—he
1561 couldn't remember everybody on the payroll. He would have what we used to call dog-and-cat
1562 interviews. I did the same thing, but there are other reasons. In my case, I was trying to verify
1563 family relationship within a family unit, or two brothers presenting themselves as brothers in a
1564 case—one dark, one light. They clearly don't look like brothers. So you separate them and you do
1565 the same—you ask the same set of questions of each one and then compare the answers. That's
1566 what Jerry called his dog-and-cat interviews. He had to do this within Hmong families, too,

1567 especially when somebody says, "Well, he's my brother." Well, is he really your brother, your
1568 biological brother? Is he a half brother, given the whole polygamy issue in the Hmong clans? Or is
1569 he a cousin-brother? Is he not a real brother, but a cousin? What we would call a cousin.

1570 **A member of your clan.**

1571 But all this becomes very important in terms of immigration. So Jerry did those kinds of interviews
1572 to try to straighten the cases out. Oh, you asked me what Lao ethnic affairs officer—what the
1573 Hmong ethnic affairs officer did. We had—whereas JVA would register the case, the ethnic affair
1574 officers had to verify the bona fides in the case before it could be—or attempt to verify them—
1575 before the case could be presented to an immigration officer. So that's why the—Jerry and I were
1576 there, I guess. The program became larger and larger. And INS wouldn't see a case unless Jerry or I
1577 or another ethnic affairs officer had initialed on the cover sheet in the case. And we did not sit in on
1578 every interview, obviously, because there are other cases to get ready to plug into the opening of the
1579 pipeline. Because to move 7,000 a month from Thailand—and that was the number we were
1580 assigned out of the 14,000 a month, once Carter upped the numbers, we had to cram in three times
1581 that number every month into the opening of the pipeline. And believe me, it was—we lost track of
1582 what day it was and we didn't know what month it was sometimes, it seems like. Because we were
1583 working 18 hours a day in the camps, trying to get these cases ready so that we—ultimately, we
1584 could move that many. It was a logistical nightmare, really, when—considering you had to—the
1585 case paperwork had to move through—from Thailand all the way to New York and be divvied out
1586 and sponsorships confirmed and then a cable come back to Bangkok to say that the case was
1587 sponsored and they're ready to move. Well, when you're ready to move somebody, maybe the wife
1588 in the family is seven-and-a-half months pregnant and can't get on an airplane. So you have to hold
1589 them over and then get another number for the kid. Or maybe somebody shows up with TB on
1590 their medical papers and you can't let them fly—or another medical problem—until later on, until
1591 that's addressed. Or another relative comes out. You had minor kids approved in families who, as
1592 category four humanitarian—for humanitarian reasons and then an adult—an 18 or over sibling
1593 comes out or a parent comes out. Well, then you have to chop that person—the kid out of that case
1594 and leave them behind until—and be a part of another case or, in some cases, would add on the
1595 newly arrived relative. In the case of a spouse coming out at the last minute to an approved case, we
1596 had to—we didn't even get into the visa falcon clearance process here. Did anybody ever explain
1597 that to you?

1598

1599 **(1:28:08) I can't say I've heard that before. No.**

1600 It's a name check. The State Department has a whole set up terminology for clearing people from
1601 visas and it's called, well, it's a visa system. There's a number system for—well, there's an—there's
1602 an animal system for outgoing cables from constituent posts back into the seven or 10 or 12
1603 computers that have—that do the name check thing, looking for derogatory information. And then
1604 the answer would come back with a number by either—like doing a visa falcon, in the case of an
1605 Indochinese, you'd give the name, the birth date, if you could figure it out, or—and the birthplace.
1606 And that's all the information. Maybe occupation was on the telegram. And those were the
1607 outgoing cables that went to Washington and every place from NSA to FBI to CIA—every place.
1608 And these were the days when we had—we had—the secretaries had to type up these cables on
1609 carbon copy telegram forms, which were like seven or eight carbon copies. And we used to take
1610 these over in shopping baskets over to the communications room at the embassy and drop these
1611 things on these poor communicators who had to transmit them through the system. And that was a
1612 visa falcon, the outgoing cable. Once they're cleared, they're cleared with a number, whatever the
1613 number was. And it slips my mind now. Or maybe it just came back visa falcon cleared. Because
1614 you couldn't move a case until the name check thing had come through in addition to the medical

1615 check and then the sponsorship confirmation. So it—really, when I say it was a logistical nightmare,
1616 I'm not kidding. To be dealing with this many people. But how did I get off on that? If I ask you
1617 ...

1618
1619 **(1:30:38) Oh, well, let's see. We were talking about the Hmong ethnic affairs officer and ...**
1620 Oh, yeah. We chopped—we had to chop off on the—verified the case before it could go to
1621 immigration. And then, assuming the interview went well, they would swear and then sign and
1622 swear in and sign the—some kind of form and INS would slap a number on them. And then it
1623 had—I-94s had to be typed up back in the office. And then once they were visa falcon cleared, then
1624 somebody like me would initial each and every I-94. That's the immigration document. Maybe you
1625 didn't know that. Any visitor or a parolee would have their own I-94 immigration document.

1626
1627 **(1:31:37) Well, it looks like we're looking at seven—or 8:45 your time. Is it all right if we**
1628 **spend at least one more time trying to wrap this up?**

1629 OK. [Pauses] Sure. What's tomorrow? Tuesday?

1630 **No, Wednesday.**

1631 Are your schedule—is your schedule still open?

1632 **Still open.**

1633 Well, OK. Let's shoot for seven tomorrow night.

1634 **OK.**

1635 [Further conversation ensues, then call ends]

1636

1637 **John Tucker 3**

1638 Well, where did we—we did we let off?

1639

1640 **(02:28) Let's see. I was asking you to just sort of reminisce about Jerry Daniels and what**
1641 **kind of guy he was and sort of your estimation of the work that he did for Hmong refugees,**
1642 **as you witnessed it.**

1643 Oh, by the way. I don't have a computer here at the house and I have to—I'm at the mercy of the
1644 library near my house. And I did catch that article you forwarded to me today. I found it very
1645 interesting. In fact, I printed it out and brought it home. It's nine pages long.

1646 **Oh, my goodness.**

1647 When you print—I guess there were two articles, actually.

1648 **Yes, that's right.**

1649 And I was able to print out the picture of Kent. I know him as Kent. I don't why he's using the
1650 name Dan, if indeed they had another sibling named Dan who's deceased. That's strange, but that's
1651 the fellow I met. He looks 25 years older, of course, since I've seen him. But that was quite an
1652 interesting article.

1653 **Indeed.**

1654 Yeah, I guess that reminded me of what Jerry was actually doing in Laos with Vang Pao. I knew he
1655 was involved up in Long Tieng, but he—everything in that article was true, from my point of view.
1656 I mean, he certainly was dedicated and what I—oh, I know. I thought it was interesting that of all
1657 the places in the United States where there was supposedly a live sighting, one of them is my town
1658 here [Akron, Ohion].

1659 **Yes, I saw that, too! [Laughs]**

1660 And I can only think that that's because I live here and I've gone to a few Hmong functions over the
1661 years. That somehow they got me confused with Jerry, if that's possible. I don't know how it could
1662 be, but there's no other way it could have happened that I can figure out.

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(4:21) Well, it would be interesting—it would be interesting to get ahold of the reporter if they know specifically who in Akron, Ohio supposedly saw him.

Yeah, yeah, well, I know he's never—he was never here, to my knowledge. They have no reason to come here. There weren't many Hmong settled here back before he died. But anyway—well, his heart was in the right place. I don't think there's much truth in a conspiracy theory about his—the circumstances that he—under which he died. And I can remember at the time, I guess the person—oh, that article raised a question of why it took the embassy three years to—or three days to start looking for him. And I'm trying to remember now why there was the delay there. Of course, it probably was a weekend. I think they may have known that he was coming down with a cold or something anyway, and maybe they weren't all that concerned. Plus it could have been a three-day weekend. For some reason, that sticks in my mind. Either an American holiday or one of the many Thai holidays that threw the weekend into three days. I'm just not sure. My memory fails me on that point. Maybe Mac remembers. I remember getting a call from Hank—I was in Virginia at the time, of course. And I remember getting a call from Hank Cushing, who was also in Virginia, but—on a Sunday morning, giving me the news, which, of course, was upsetting. And the person who—I think I told you who escorted the casket from somewhere, once it hit stateside, was Jim Schill. But—and I was sort of the lead person. I went out two days before the casket was due to arrive just to sort of be there, I guess, more so than anything else. And it was, I'll tell you, it was a real cast of characters. A lot of these Americans who had worked in Laos with the Agency had—were already there when I got there, and more came. I didn't even know their names. I'd never seen most of them and they weren't very forthcoming about introducing themselves at that point. But it was, like I said last night or the night before, it was a weeklong funeral. They just took over the entire funeral parlor there. And I'm remembering now I did leave—I didn't leave so much as a day early, but the day the casket was supposed to go to the actual cemetery is the day I had to fly back, so I missed the cemetery side of it. But I was there for everything else and there were—I remember Vang Pao had a huge affair at the gymnasium of the—maybe you've heard all this before.

No. No, I haven't.

He had a huge affair at the gymnasium of the local high school with movies—I guess the old 8 mm or Super 8 movies that he had in his personal collection of Jerry in Long Tieng and activities up there. And of course, lots of food. And I remember spending a lot of hours there and—before I went to the motel where most of us were staying, and stayed up probably half the night talking with some of Jerry's old cronies. The Hmong were very organized in terms of logistics for—because they knew a lot of people would be coming in from out of town for that funeral. And they had pretty much a transportation service from the airport directly to the motel. And they were just—I just remember being very impressed about how organized they were. One name in the article is Yang Lue, whose code name is Lucky. That's one person I was going to give to you anyway, if you haven't met him yet.

No, I haven't.

And he's had one or two personal tragedies in his family in the last year or so. I just heard from Lionel Rosenblatt about two months ago. One of his boys, who was an adult, I guess, at this point, died and the other one has got some kind of health concerns. So I don't know how forthcoming he's going to be to—I mean, maybe he's over that now, I don't know. But his wife, it's interesting that his wife is sort of a nurse's aid. I got the impression was a nurse's aid and was very close with Louise Daniels. And in fact, was one of her caregivers as she started deteriorating toward the end there. I didn't know that until a few years ago when I called and talked with Lucky and/or his wife. And there's a few more code names, which I can't—Yang See is another one. Tall, thin guy.

Yeah. He's in—he's in St. Paul.

1711 Oh, you know him?

1712 **Glassman.**

1713 Yes. Exactly. I never would have remembered that. Oh, he ended up there. Because he was in the
1714 Virginia area back in the '70s.

1715 **Yeah, I've been—we've sort of swapped messages. We have yet to get together, but I keep
1716 trying.**

1717 Great. Well, he'd be another one that I know that Jerry was especially close with. Because we were
1718 all working out of the consulate there in Udorn and—for a while when we weren't in the camps,
1719 with Jerry in Nong Khai and Vinai once it came on line. And we used to hire refugees to work with
1720 us. And well, they were—well, we'd get them approved first for immigration. And then while they
1721 were awaiting their sponsorships, we'd put them to work helping us with—manage the caseload and
1722 the interview process and all that nine yard thing. And—so those—I can't remember whether Yang
1723 See was an interpreter, but I know Yang Lue was. And I think I mentioned that when—after I went
1724 to the Philippines to start that refugee processing center, at least the Lao component of it, I flew
1725 over with a group of Lao who were Lao and Khmer, most of whom could speak Lao because they're
1726 from a Lao-speaking part of Cambodia, believe it or not, over in the Batambang area. I flew over on
1727 an Air France regular flight with those that we determined were too weak or pregnant to go on these
1728 old military transport things, which I can't remember the name for it, where they hold hundreds of
1729 people. Troop carriers, which general—which President Marcos offered up to, I guess, it would
1730 have been the UN to transport refugees to Bataan there from wherever. A couple Americans were
1731 on board, too. It was a pretty bad trip to see and I think it was wise that we did flow the somewhat
1732 feeble and pregnant refugees over on a flight rather than put them through the torture of that trip.
1733 Anyway, that's why I was on the flight and went there to the Philippines. But then as I was finishing
1734 up there, Jerry wanted to see the center and was finishing up one of his leaves in the States and he
1735 flew into Manila and I took him out to the—out to the center. We had a few days together in
1736 Manila and at the center and then we flew back to Bangkok together on April 6th of 1980. And I
1737 guess I didn't see him all that much after that because he went back to work in the camps and I was
1738 primarily concerned with packing out my house in May. But there were a few weeks between April
1739 6 and mid-May, when I was working with the camps up north, primarily lowland Lao and some of
1740 the other northern hill tribes who were in that—in those camps in Nam Yao and that's Nan
1741 Province, I think. And then there was a camp in Chiang Rai. But—so I guess I didn't see Jerry after
1742 that at all. So I don't know what else I can say about him. I mean, we worked side by side. We
1743 were sort of interchangeable on the mechanics of—the process of processing refugees as I've
1744 mentioned before. When I would take leave in the States, I'd cover—he'd cover my caseload, in fact
1745 lived in my house in Bangkok. He didn't have a house in Bangkok like I did. He was more oriented
1746 up country. And then I—in fact, it was—I remember when hearing these stories about how he may
1747 have died, when he—my house, the master bedroom upstairs had a—they called them geysers—
1748 these little hot water things on the wall that are gas-heated. And I remember telling him that mine
1749 was acting up at the time. And I—every time I took a shower, to activate the hot water thing when
1750 I was taking a shower, I would always open up one of the windows in the bathroom just to get out
1751 any potential gas leak or smell from it. And then I remember that, when these stories came out
1752 about how he may have died from carbon monoxide poisoning—another interesting thing. When
1753 what's his name in Seattle—IRC Seattle, Johnson? I forgot his first name. I don't know if you know
1754 him or not. He was involved with—may still well be there. He, for some reason, when he went to
1755 visit Louise, she let him take his pick of Jerry's ties that were returned to her in Missoula, I guess,
1756 with the other—with other personal effects. But—and so this guy named Johnson—whatever his
1757 first name is.

1758 **Dick Johnson?**

1759 What?

1760 **Dick Johnson?**

1761 Dick? No, that doesn't sound right. And it's not Wayne Johnson, whom I know very well in Des
1762 Moines.

1763 **Yeah, Dick Johnson was a Sky guy, but ...**

1764 No, this fellow wasn't old enough to have been involved in that level of activity in Laos in the '60s
1765 and '70s. He was a little bit younger than the rest of us. I've forgotten his name. But what I
1766 thought was interesting, at some dinner party that Hank Cushing had in Arlington, Virginia, when
1767 this Johnson guy was in town, he pulled out a bunch of these ties that Louise had given him from
1768 Jerry's effects. And I was going through them. And I'll be damned. There was one of my father's
1769 ties that was on my tie rack in my house when Jerry was staying there. And I was thinking, man, this
1770 tie had gone full circle then. And I ended up back with it again. I didn't even notice it was missing
1771 from my tie collection until he showed it to me. But anyway, he was a unique individual. And he
1772 was funny and had a very dry wit about him. And that article was quite right. He'd come up with
1773 the craziest Jerry-isms and things and just out of the blue, which I—maybe he picked them up when
1774 he was smoke jumping up in Montana. I don't know. But they were—they were really funny
1775 sometimes. I can't remember any on the top of my head, but—off the top of my head, but maybe
1776 Mac would. I don't know.

1777 **I'll ask him.**

1778 I don't know what else I can say about Jerry. Just a tragedy. And I don't think trying to exhume this
1779 thing is going to—I hope it doesn't go very far. I see one of the siblings there in Missoula is not in
1780 favor of it, from the article.

1781

1782 **(19:49) Well, let's turn our attention to sort of the process of getting a refugee accepted and**
1783 **have a sponsor take them on. And now they're—I don't know where in the line this falls,**
1784 **but somewhere along the line they have to go to INS. And I've heard various things. I**
1785 **think Dennis Grace was probably a little more kind or sympathetic or whatever, but I think**
1786 **both Mac and Jim Anderson, this fellow who was with the IRC for 10 years and who's now**
1787 **in St. Paul—both of them gave pretty low marks to the average INS person and ...**

1788 Mac did, too?

1789 **Yeah.**

1790 Huh.

1791 **Yeah. I think he used the words Cretans and Neanderthals. Maybe he was thinking of one**
1792 **particular person he had to deal with one too many times. But ...**

1793 Wow.

1794 **... what was your take on that relationship between the State Department trying to get**
1795 **refugees through and the INS, I suppose, at least on some level, kind of serving as a**
1796 **gatekeeper?**

1797 Well, you already mentioned Sam Feldman's name, who was the first INS officer I met when I was
1798 still working at the embassy. He was a one-of-a-kind fellow. I don't know if anybody's told you this
1799 or not, but he was a real hypochondriac.

1800 **[Laughs] No.**

1801 And not that I'm—now I'm remembering on that flight—I want to say on that flight to Manila—no,
1802 it wasn't that flight. It was another flight I was on back—maybe I was continuing onto the States.
1803 But I got up—I'm remembering this now because I got upgraded to first class by the I—by probably
1804 Albert Corcos on the flight. And back in cattle class, surrounded by Hmong, was Sam Feldman, like
1805 in the middle of one of these wide bodies, the middle row in the middle of the middle row. And of
1806 course, he was shooting nose drops and eye drops and all this because I went back to see how the

1807 refugees were doing and that's how I discovered Sam was on the same darn flight. And I don't think
1808 he—I don't think it sat with him very well that I was up in first class and he was probably senior to
1809 me in government rank and he was back there in the economy section. But I—once he came
1810 across—once he understood what was going on, I found him almost fun to work with. You could
1811 predict how he was going to react. There were—so I don't have any bad words for Sam.
1812 Unfortunately, he later killed himself because of some perhaps terminal ailment he had probably just
1813 couldn't deal with it. But that is—that was very much in character for him. Anything health-wise,
1814 he just couldn't deal with. And that came out just from the contact we had with him. But there
1815 were other officers in '75 and '76. One was Don Young out of INS Hong Kong, who I traveled
1816 with to—I guess I went to the Hmong camp in—Vinai must have been opened by then because I
1817 remember—or maybe it wasn't Vinai, but we interviewed refugees who were outside of the camps.
1818 That point didn't come across too well in our earlier conversations, other than the fact that there
1819 were refugees living outside of camps in '75, '76 and even '77. And I remember taking Don Young
1820 to some camp outside of Loei Province where there were a few refugees. Maybe they were in a jail
1821 and hadn't—maybe hadn't been moved to one of the regularized camps yet. But that didn't stop us
1822 from interviewing them if we had identified them and they had a claim for relief under the selection
1823 criteria. But in fact, when I went through Hong Kong, I remember getting together socially with
1824 Don Young and his wife took me out to buy some kind of dishes or something that I later sent
1825 back. But there were other officers who were fun to work with. A fellow out of JFK Airport, some
1826 of the old Irishmen who seemed to enjoy his work and again was sympathetic with the Lao. And
1827 I'm sorry—and Mac knows all these people. I'm just surprised that he would come down so hard
1828 on all of them ...

1829 **Well, and he ...**

1830 ... as a class because—that's not to say there weren't some real difficult people. One I had a
1831 problem with who is also deceased now—Tom Prokopowicz, a Polish guy who—well, I don't know.
1832 He just looked for a conspiracy in some of the cases, like we were trying to pull something over on
1833 him, which certainly wasn't the case. So there were—there were all types. I mean, and you'd expect
1834 there would be. I mean, golly, there must have—I could—if I sat down and tried to remember their
1835 names, I'd come up with several dozen who came out at various times on details from wherever.
1836 Some of them were down on the Texas border. Some were, like I mentioned, the JFK Airport and
1837 elsewhere on TDYs out to Thailand. And of course, I had—I worked with them in the Vietnamese
1838 camps as well.

1839 **Well, and Mac did speak very highly of Sam Feldman.**

1840 Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's good to know.

1841 **Yeah, so I may—like I said, I may have just caught him at the wrong time or asked a**
1842 **question in such a way that maybe I unintentionally goaded him a little bit. I'm not sure.**
1843 **But yeah, he, at the very least, said that there were some INS people he worked with who**
1844 **just—he couldn't stand because of the way they treated some of these applicants.**

1845 Well, Mac—yeah, I can see, I can see Mac saying that. Again, because he, like I, felt very close to a
1846 lot of these people, having lived in Laos. And didn't appreciate some of the verbal abuse that some
1847 of these INS characters would put on the refugees. Most of them couldn't understand they were
1848 being verbally abused anyway. They didn't have the command of English. But well, it's a mixed
1849 bag, I guess. You—there were strong—there were good ones and there were not so good ones.
1850 And some of them were quite crude. I can see why Mac would—and Mac was closer with many of
1851 them than I was. I don't know what else to say on that.

1852

1853 **(27:37) That's perfectly fine. Lionel Rosenblatt did mention Albert Corcos, but we didn't**
1854 **really have much time to talk about him or about ICEM, for that matter. You don't happen**
1855 **to know what ICEM stood for, do you?**

1856 Intergovernmental Committee ...

1857 **Oh, so it's C. OK.**

1858 ... for European Migration. Now you can see why they changed the name.

1859 **Yeah.**

1860 The name probably came—goes back to, golly, it could even be the 40s.

1861 **Yeah, post-World War II?**

1862 The Nazi thing and the movement of displaced persons in Europe and resettling them elsewhere.

1863 But—and then they didn't get around to changing the name until sometime in the 70s—between '77

1864 and '78, '79. I know IOM is what it's called now, but I think there was yet another name between

1865 ICEM and IOM that they tried and decided they didn't like it. But that's what ICEM stands for.

1866 **Thank you. I kept trying to Google that one and I was getting nowhere.**

1867 Oh, were you using an S?

1868 **Well, that's just it. I heard ICEM and I didn't know exactly what the letters were. And of**

1869 **course, it could be ISIM, ISEM, ISOM and Albert Corcos doesn't yield much either.**

1870 OK. Well, go back and try IOM—what would it be? International ...

1871 **Organization for Migration?**

1872 Overseas Migration.

1873 **OK.**

1874 That's the only thing I can think of. But oh, they've—historically, they've resettled Japanese in

1875 Brazil at some point in their history and they're always the ones called on to move the people out of

1876 the country where they're considered a refugee and to all points where they're going to be resettled.

1877

1878 **(29:48) So essentially—and I'm just guessing, so please correct me. So ICEM was in**

1879 **charge, essentially, of moving refugees that had been accepted somewhere in the world,**

1880 **putting them on buses, getting them on planes, sending them out?**

1881 Yes, but before the actual movement, as I might have mentioned, they—they're involved in doing

1882 the medical screening. Once the cases are identified with INS, then a medical section has to develop

1883 a medical portfolio on them. There were some times, especially in the Hmong camps, when the use

1884 of opium would—was a concern in addition to the polygamy concern. But again, so—in '77, we

1885 contacted a laboratory where we ran urine samples of every adult refugee through for a nanogram

1886 testing to see if they had any kind of narcotics in their system. And ICEM personnel, primarily

1887 Thais, would go up country and collect these urine bottles and then bring them on down to

1888 Bangkok on the night bus or fly them down on a flight to—and then get them over to the

1889 laboratory. That's one of the many things ICEM did. And TB screening was another one. If they

1890 were—a case was—and a family member in a case was put on medical hold, they were responsible

1891 for getting the person the right—and if it were TB, getting them the right treatment to make them

1892 acceptable. And I can't remember now what the treatment was in '77 before they could be moved

1893 to the States. I don't think everybody had a chest X-ray. I don't think so. I'm not sure about that.

1894 Maybe they did, but I don't remember.

1895

1896 **(32:10) It might have been if there were other signs that justified doing it they did.**

1897 Correct. It might have been that, especially among many of these older people. But certainly the

1898 pregnancy holds, they—and they were—sometimes they misjudged it or the refugee would—either

1899 they didn't know how far along the woman was or they didn't want to be held up any longer. So

1900 they would lie about or, again, because they didn't know, and we indeed had one child born on a

1901 flight to the States, on a Pan Am flight, I think it was. And once that happened, then ICEM
1902 [Chuckles] instituted a more rigorous test, I guess, or scrutinized them a little bit closer to make sure
1903 that—or try to ensure that would not happen again. I can't think what else ICEM did. Once they
1904 got the bio data, once they—ACVA—that's the acronym I was trying to think of in New York.
1905 American Council of Voluntary Agencies which I—I'm pretty sure morphed into Interaction. Have
1906 you ever heard that term?

1907 **No!**

1908 You don't know Interaction, either. OK. Interaction ...

1909 **Is that hyphenated?**

1910 No, I think it's one word and, golly, you might want to Google that, too, but it was interesting that
1911 Nan Borton, who was one of the first IRC people to work with me in '77 in the boat camps, after
1912 the JVA concept came to be, she later became president or the head of Interaction and I'm thinking
1913 Interaction was in Washington by that time, by the time Nan was heading it up. And I don't know if
1914 a subset of Interaction, but I knew as ACVA in New York, the—maybe a subset of Interaction did
1915 the refugee bios as they came in from around the world for sponsorship purposes. That's—because
1916 when I went, I actually had to go up and cover one Wednesday morning meeting for Carl Harris,
1917 who was a guy—an ex-Peace Corps Volunteer—I just learned the other night, the same group in
1918 Africa—the fellow who called me from Arkansas that I used to live in Laos with—not live with, but
1919 work with—and I didn't even know Carl had been in the Peace Corps. He's also an Episcopalian
1920 priest and has a boat now up in—docked in Seattle. But he's still—golly, he's got to be approaching
1921 80, and still gets involved with monitoring elections in Bosnia or wherever these off-the-wall
1922 assignments pop up around the world. But that meeting in—Wednesday mornings, where you'd
1923 have a representative from the 10 or 12 voluntary agencies who had contracts with the State
1924 Department to do the R&P grants—the reception and placement grants, which, at that time in '75,
1925 '76 and '77 was approximately \$525 per capita that went from State Department to the voluntary
1926 agency, whichever one it may be. It could be IRC. It could be LIRS—Lutheran Immigration
1927 Resettlement Service, HIAS was the Hebrew one—H-I-A-S [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society].
1928 Golly, do you know—there's a—you probably know the names of most of these anyway.

1929 **Yeah, I've got a list. And Red Cross, of course.**

1930 I don't know what the current ones were. Just as I was phasing out of the program in 1980, the
1931 Episcopal Bishops' something something came on line and had a contract with State to do R & P
1932 grants. But at that Wednesday meeting, the fresh bios would be divvied up. Certainly USCC—U.S.
1933 Catholic Conference. They got 60% of the total Indochinese caseloads, primarily because of their
1934 network of parishes and churches around the ...

1935 **World Vision?**

1936 World Vision—they were not involved at the time I was working. That means they must have—if
1937 they were involved, it must have happened after spring of 1980. But one of the jobs I had, the three
1938 years I was at the Department, still with—still on a reimbursable detail to State, we—groups of us
1939 would go out to, in my case, I went to Boston for a week or two and LA for a week or two with a
1940 team of three to four other people and we would go around and visit refugee families who had
1941 arrived within the—no longer than six months to check up and see how they were being serviced by
1942 these voluntary agencies. What kind of assistance they had, in fact, received from, whether it be—if
1943 it were a church resettlement or a **USCC** case and how they were treated by the resettlement group
1944 there. That was interesting. I did—I said I did Boston with Carol Hecklinger and John Lloyd, our
1945 deputy to Hank Cushing there at the Department. And Carl Harris. Golly, one night Carl and I
1946 drove way up outside of Boston along that route that—what's it—where Wang—I guess out to
1947 Lowell, Mass., where quite a few Lao had been settled. And of course, I was the only one who was
1948 language qualified, certainly in Lao, but we may have looked up some Cambodian cases and

1949 Vietnamese cases. I just don't recall right now. And if we did, we probably—I'm sure we would
1950 have had to have taken an interpreter with us. But that's another subset of the whole thing that the
1951 refugee office in Washington did—the Bureau for Refugee Programs—did was following up on the
1952 reception and placement grants. Because it was a big chunk of money with that many people
1953 involved at \$525 a head.

1954
1955 **(39:25) Sure. So what was Shep Lowman doing?**

1956 Oh, he was—he was on top of this whole thing in Washington. Oh, I mentioned Pat Darien's
1957 office—Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs. Maybe that's what it was called in '75, '76.

1958
1959 **Pat Darien.**

1960 Don't know the name? You ought to Google her. She later popped up on the news in the early '80s
1961 where she was off in one of these emerging countries in Europe. Maybe it was late '80s where, like
1962 the democracy movements that were springing forth in places like Poland or Eastern Europe or the
1963 Captive Nations type thing. She was protesting something in one of the government buildings and
1964 was caught on the news as she was being escorted out of the building by the local Gestapo-types.
1965 But in that office, at least in the early days, they're the ones that Julia Taft, who headed up the Inter-
1966 Agency Task Force, liaisoned with at State—of course, then you had the INS—Department of
1967 Justice, I guess it would have been—representative on the task force and whoever else was involved.
1968 And frankly, I can't remember who—what it was comprised of—the task force per se. I'm just not
1969 remembering right now.

1970 **Well, let's go back to ...**

1971 But—excuse me, you were talking about how—but then that evolved. That office that Pat Darien
1972 was in charge of, it had a component for refugees where Shep Lowman, Hank Cushing, Jim Carland,
1973 I think his name was. God, I think I met him once. He was involved in those early days. They
1974 were the architects of the whole—of the programs, basically and handled the policy side and were
1975 on the Hill every other day trying to get congressional support for the programs. But then when
1976 they restructured it, then it was the Bureau for Refugee Programs. Shep might have been like a
1977 number two to a civil servant whose name I don't know how I'm going to remember.

1978
1979 **(42:10) Well, I'm hoping to talk to Shep when I go out East.**

1980 Oh, good. I had lunch with him and with Lionel about three or four months ago out at his house.
1981 He lives right on the corner of Route—you go out Route 50 and as you're approaching, I think—is
1982 it Falls Church or you'll get the address from him if he invites you out or—it would be good to go
1983 with Lionel, actually. Lionel will try to get a group to agree to meet at some restaurant or some—
1984 one of our favorite places and then Shep usually invites us over to his house for lunch or dinner
1985 because his wife's quite a good cook.

1986 **She's Vietnamese, right?**

1987 Oh, yes. Yes. And she, in her own right, is very active in the Vietnamese Buddhist Association and
1988 the Buddhist Association in Northern Virginia and helped a lot in getting entry-level employment
1989 for newly arrived refugees back in the '80s when they—'70s and '80s. And now here thing is—the
1990 Dalai Lama—and I think the—she's got a picture in her—in fact, she has moved all the furniture
1991 out of one of her rooms there with—sort of a porch room where's she got a Buddhist altar like and
1992 pictures of the Dalai Lama when he came to visit her house and quite interesting. She's a delightful
1993 person.

1994 **It sounds like it.**

1995 And yeah, it would be good. I can't think of the guy I'm trying to think of who was Shep's—kind of
1996 on paper was Shep's boss in the Bureau for Refugee Programs. It will probably come to me after we
1997 hang up.

1998 **Well, you've got my e-mail address.**

1999 Yeah. Yeah. Oh, there was also—there was—oh, God. I've forgotten about Dan. The State
2000 Department had—the refugee coordinator's office, which was yet another office which—I'm not
2001 sure I ever really understood what they did, but a lot of the political types would get assigned there,
2002 depending on which administration was in the White House. And they, I guess, they had oversight
2003 responsibilities for the State Department's Bureau for Refugee Programs, perhaps. Shep could give
2004 you a much better explanation as to what they were supposed to do, because I didn't have that much
2005 contact with them. From my point of view, they just muddled around and think they knew more
2006 than we did and we didn't get along all that well. But I mean, we tried to be civil with each other, at
2007 least. Who else? I wonder if there's other names out there that—oh, well, we sort of got off base
2008 here. We were talking about the movement of refugees and how they got moved down. Once the
2009 sponsorship cable came in, then ICEM would know where to book the—would know how to staff
2010 out the logistics of moving refugees from—God, how many camps did we have? Seven to 10
2011 refugee—Lao refugee camps plus the couple Khmer camps and a few Vietnamese camps. And a list
2012 would have to—an approval list, a manifest for a bus list would have to go to the Thais and I guess
2013 then ICEM was responsible for getting the buses to appear at a certain time in the camp and getting
2014 the refugees on the bus and for the trip to Bangkok. I'm wondering if we moved anybody by train.
2015 I don't think we ever flew anybody in from camps, but ...

2016
2017 **(46:51) I haven't spoken to anyone who traveled by train, but that, of course, doesn't mean**
2018 **it didn't happen.**

2019 No, and I'm trying to remember how we moved people from Songkla in the south. That's a 12-hour
2020 train ride. And I honestly—I have to call some of the Vietnamese I know from that camp and see
2021 how they moved up to Bangkok, whether it was by bus or train. I was never down there when it
2022 came time to move them from the south up to Bangkok. Anyway, then once they came to Bangkok,
2023 they were—there was a couple—we called them transit centers. I don't know if you've heard that
2024 term or not.

2025 **Yes.**

2026 One was Dindang, which means red earth.

2027 **OK. Yeah, someone said there was a place called Red Earth. OK. That makes sense now.**

2028 **OK.**

2029 That was a facility the Thais sort of put together. It might have been an old—some kind of a school
2030 or something. But of course, the people would have to be fed. They weren't—once they were put
2031 there, they weren't supposed to be just being—just be able to walk out the gate and go shopping
2032 without approval or something. Although the Thai guards were quite good. In some respects, they
2033 would let refugees go out and shop and buy things and come back as long as they were back by the
2034 curfew hour. We also used the immigration jail for a transit center. And I'm thinking there might
2035 have been another one. I'm remembering now the Dindang facility was probably an old school
2036 because there were levels to it. There was a second and a third story to it, as I'm remembering it.
2037 Because there were screens that had to be replaced before we could get the refugees—before we
2038 decided it was—or ICEM decided it was acceptable to use it as a transit center. So that's where
2039 they'd be and, again, manifest would have put—when it's time to go to the—get on a bus and go out
2040 to the airport, the name list would be put up the day before and refugees would know to get their
2041 stuff together and then appear. They'd get on the bus and be transported 45 minutes or an hour's

2042 ride out to the Don Muang Airport, which is the older airport. I understand there's a new airport,
2043 which I have not seen yet.

2044 **Oh, it's vast.**

2045 Now have you been—have you been out there?

2046 **A couple of times. Yes.**

2047 And then they were in the holding area and then they moved to get on board the flight, like
2048 everybody else. Now, there were charter flights, as well, from Bangkok, but I can't shed any more
2049 light on any of those. I'm forgetting the name of the airbase north of San Francisco we used as a
2050 transit center in the States when we were moving 14,000 a month. Where the charters would come
2051 into and then ICEM would move them out of there onto other—and the commercial flights would
2052 transport around the country. I happen to be in Akron, and the refugees here that I knew had told
2053 me, "Hey, we've got relatives coming in out at the airport." And I said, "Oh, let's go along and see
2054 what happens. See what this end of it's like." And we got out there and the kid got off the flight. It
2055 was a Lao. He got off the flight and said, "I'm supposed to be in Nashville and the kid who is
2056 supposed to come to Akron got sent to Nashville and neither of us knew enough English to be able
2057 to explain the problem to the airline person." So I came back to the relatives here in the house who
2058 were—in Akron—who were disappointed that they had the wrong relative. Or they had some—the
2059 wrong person. Indeed it wasn't even a relative. So I called Chris Warton, who is in Baltimore, who
2060 was, at that time, stationed in New York to sort this thing out. And I was fortunately able to get
2061 him and the ICEMs were—sorted it out the next day and made sure that the right person got to the
2062 right location. So there were some screw-ups in the system, but you ...

2063 **Well, there'd have to be.**

2064 ... expect that once in awhile with trying to move that many people.

2065 **Absolutely.**

2066 It's a wonder more didn't have ... [Both laugh]

2067

2068 **(52:07) So what was Albert Corcos' background?**

2069 Oh, good question. Oh, his background? Oh, Lionel—you've got to ask Lionel the question
2070 because Lionel has actually visited him in the south of France where Albert lives in some kind of
2071 a—I don't know if it's a lighthouse or just a very tall townhouse. But he attributes his longevity to
2072 having to walk up three flights daily up and down this structure he owns. I think his wife has passed
2073 away. But he has just published his memoirs and I think he let Lionel review it in French and I
2074 don't know that it's been translated into English yet. But Lionel is trying to get copies of it sent to
2075 important libraries, certainly around the States and other French-speaking libraries in the world
2076 because it's a definite—it's a real treasure of his experiences, probably throughout his entire life. It
2077 may be, indeed, be an autobiography, not so much only a mini-history of the Indochinese program.
2078 But he was brought out of retirement. Whatever he did, he was brought out of retirement in his 70s
2079 to head up the ICEM office in Bangkok. And ...

2080 **My goodness, how old is he now?**

2081 Ninety-six.

2082 **Oh, my goodness! [Laughs]**

2083 Yeah. Certainly over 90.

2084 **You weren't kidding about that longevity thing.**

2085 No, I wasn't. No. Well, golly, if he was 70 something when I knew him in '77, that's another 31
2086 years. Oh, yeah. He must have been in his 60s when I knew him.

2087 **Even so, wow.**

2088 Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, Lionel's the one to fine tune that one because I never got into this background.

2089

2090 **(54:23) OK. Well, as—and I realize you spent the majority of your time with ethnic Lao and**
2091 **not with Hmong, but were there—were there different problems or different approaches or**
2092 **different issues that went along with being either Lao or Hmong as far as trying to make**
2093 **application and be accepted and those kinds of processes?**

2094 Accepted by the criteria of the U.S. resettlement program?

2095 **Yes. Yes.**

2096 Well, the categories crossed the board for Khmer, Vietnamese, Lao, Hmong, whatever. They were
2097 the criteria, the category system which I went through—category 1—immediate relatives, two—
2098 direct employment, USG employment, three—close association with either the U.S.—actually, I
2099 didn't say U.S. And by—I think I said the former regimes. It was also U.S. Here's the
2100 differentiation. An Air America person would be a category three because they had a contractual
2101 relationship with Air America, not a—like a direct hire, USAID or embassy person would be, which
2102 would make them a category two. Or Operation Brotherhood, the Filipino hospital. The Filipino
2103 doctors, nurses. If a Lao or a Hmong worked in an OB hospital, that would give them a bona fide
2104 category three relationship. Oh, you know what I failed to mention? Mac came—I think it was
2105 Mac—came up with the point system based on the Canadian immigration point system for—
2106 which—it sounds like you're familiar with it.

2107 **Well, it's not so much that, but I had heard about the point system, but no one had really**
2108 **said anything about whether anything else had inspired the point system. Lionel ...**

2109 Oh, OK. Well, that's the background of it. And I don't know if it was Lionel or—I don't think it
2110 was Mac.

2111 **Yeah, Lionel talked more about the point system. But he just said we came up with one, so**
2112 **he didn't necessarily assign credit to any one person.**

2113 Well, it might have been Mac. And I don't really know. But anyway, a point system existed and we
2114 had this little score sheet. Every file, by the time—well, as I said, Ethnic Affairs officers were
2115 responsible for chopping off on the case before it went to immigration. Well, I can remember
2116 taking boxes of files home to my house on a—well, some nightly, but certainly on weekends if I
2117 didn't want to go into the office. And sitting there and doing file after file of scoring, I had a
2118 score—JVA would put a score sheet in the first page of the file. What do you call those clip things
2119 that hold the papers in the file?

2120 **The clipboard—oh, in the file. Yeah, I know what you mean.**

2121 Yeah, well, they put a—one of those on the top and then we—whoever—me or Jerry or whoever
2122 was pointing up the category threes would go through the bio data as listed and either—if it was
2123 clear enough to us and the dates were clear enough, we'd score them. If there were—appeared to be
2124 discrepancies or it was unclear, we'd have to send it back for more information or amplification of
2125 the bio data, as presented in the file in order to give it a fair score. Because these points became
2126 important when—oh, brother—are you familiar with the U.S. visa system, how it changes monthly,
2127 how the priority dates change monthly?

2128 **I'm sorry to say I'm not.**

2129 Wow. OK. Well, it would make your understanding of what we were faced in priority, in category
2130 threes a lot simpler to understand.

2131 **Monthly changes in the visa. I was not aware of that, no.**

2132 Yeah. When you—for people who are waiting immigration—for an immigrant visa, an IV visa, the
2133 petitioner files a petition. If it's family reunification, it would be an I-130—I-130—immigrant visa
2134 petition. For work-related visas, it's got another name on it. And then—but there's a two pile, two
2135 categories. One, a professional visa for, say, a doctor or a lawyer or a musician or something. And
2136 then the unskilled labor in short supply, that's the low—the other pile of employment-based visas.
2137 Well, there's only so many visa numbers a year. Now each country is authorized up to 20,000 a year.

2138 At least—I'm explaining the system as I knew it when I worked in it. And every month—once the
2139 petitions are filed, the date they're filed with INS, the case is assigned a priority date. So let's say
2140 today—let's say I'm filing, as an American citizen, I'm filing a petition for my married brother who's
2141 in the Philippines. Well, a computer reshuffles the deck every month, based on the amount of
2142 petitions that have been filed, in the Philippines case, for the previous 15 to 20 years. That's how
2143 long they have to wait for petitions to—for their priority date to become current. Meaning that that
2144 particular month, they are eligible to receive visa numbers. Now there's only so many numbers, as I
2145 said—20,000 per country per year. So you can see how in a country like the Philippines, why people
2146 would have to wait between 12 and 20 years for a brother. Now other higher preferences of—
2147 certainly, married son or daughter is a higher preference, for spouse and minor children of American
2148 citizens, there is no waiting period. INS has another black bag of numbers that they don't tell
2149 anybody about, but they just give the numbers and they're not chargeable to the annual country
2150 quota. I don't know how to make it any simpler. It's so complicated.

2151
2152 **(1:02:04) But it sounds like, in short—and I realized this is a gross oversimplification, but**
2153 **depending on the category you're in ...**

2154 Right.

2155 **those requests are made and then you don't know how many you can request the following**
2156 **month or the following months until those have all been tallied up and assigned their**
2157 **appropriate category so that you know how many are left over.**

2158 Right. In the immigration visa business, based on the worldwide priority dates, even though they're
2159 divvied up by countries somehow—but in—for—the reason I'm trying to give you the background,
2160 because our point system sort of mimicked this. On a given—in a given month in, say, Thailand,
2161 well, we knew we'd have 7,000 a month that we were trying to move. We would—well, Mac and the
2162 head shed down there in Bangkok would tell us, "OK. This month the Lao caseload can have X
2163 number of numbers. Now you go through your—you cull your files and see how many category
2164 ones you have, how many categories twos you have and then, once you get those taken care of,
2165 numbers are left over for category threes. Well, then you start prioritizing within Category Three,
2166 based on the point system that we've awarded to an individual case. One month you could have 20
2167 points—20-pointers qualify for immigration interviews in a particular camp, where the next month
2168 maybe we could drop down and—to 10-pointers or seven-pointers or even go into category fours.
2169 But if the category threes exhausted all the numbers, then the category fours just sat there and their
2170 case was rolled over to the next month to see if they would qualify for numbers the next month.

2171 **I think I get the gist of it anyway.**

2172 OK. That's important.

2173 **Absolutely. No, I didn't quite understand that dynamic. So that's a good thing to**
2174 **understand.**

2175 But again, it's only Category Threes. Category Twos and ones, you were shoo-ins for numbers,
2176 assuming there were enough numbers to accommodate them all. I don't think we ever had to
2177 prioritize, unless we did it by date of arrival in the camp, which now that I'm thinking, we did do at
2178 times when there were just so many ...

2179
2180 **(1:05:51) Yeah, I think Mac said that you sort of developed a system whereby a person had**
2181 **to be in the camp for a minimum of year before you'd even allow them to be a part of that**
2182 **process.**

2183 Maybe later on. But I know a lot of cases certainly didn't spend a year in the camp. It might have
2184 been based on the nature of the relationship. If the husband's in the States and the wife came out, I

2185 don't think we made her wait a year, once we identified her. No, I don't think we did that. So I
2186 don't know why Mac would say that, but ...

2187 **Well, like you said, it might have been later.**

2188 Yeah. Yeah, that could be as well. And I'm not sure how they decided how many cases—how
2189 many numbers would be given to each ethnic group. I never saw a part of that in—I never saw that
2190 angle of it in Bangkok because I was up in the camps trying to get cases ready for INS interviews.

2191 **Well, and I think as far as sort of designating quotas, for lack of a better phrase, Lionel said**
2192 **that the Hmong were never their own separate category. That they were just part of the ex-**
2193 **Lao category.**

2194 Well, OK. That would mean there was no quota, on a monthly basis, for x number of Lao and y
2195 number of Hmong. Is that what he's saying?

2196 **I think that's correct.**

2197 Yeah. Yeah. They would be lumped together. Yeah, that's probably correct. If that's what they
2198 said, then let's go with—let's go with that. That would be more equitable, probably.

2199

2200 **(1:06:38) Yeah, well, I think, too, both Mac and especially Lionel were saying that there was**
2201 **at least some sentiment in some quarters that the Hmong were too primitive, that sort of a**
2202 **lot of the mountain people were too primitive to ever be considered for relocation to Western**
2203 **countries.**

2204 OK. That's a very good point that I meant to mention last night because I can remember, in fact, I
2205 kept—I think I've got a copy of a cable that one of our senior USAID management types in
2206 Vientiane had put on paper that they were indeed to—when he was queried somehow about the
2207 suitability for resettlement in the U.S., that they were just—he put on paper that they were far too
2208 primitive to ever be considered for settlement in the U.S. because they were straight out of the trees.
2209 That guy's dead now. [Harry Carr] was his name. Mac knows him. Mac used to work for him, I
2210 think. But certainly that element was there and it doesn't—wouldn't surprise me if Ambassador
2211 Whitehouse, Charlie Whitehouse, would have chimed in with that sentiment as well based on his
2212 exposure to the Hmong in Laos when he was an ambassador there. Now he had—keep in mind, he
2213 had served in Vietnam as well, so he had probably seen a lot of these Vietnam Montagnards prior to
2214 coming to Laos. So the Hmong should not have been that much of a surprise to him. But given his
2215 blue-blooded background, it's somewhat understandable why he would think that they shouldn't be
2216 resettled in Newport, Rhode Island, where he was from.

2217

2218 **(1:08:41) Well, I know Yang Dao says that when he went to Bangkok to try to talk to**
2219 **Whitehouse and then ended up talking to Tovar, that he met some man in the embassy who**
2220 **basically made that kind of remark that there would be no place for the Hmong because**
2221 **they were too primitive. And of course, at least as Yang Dao tells the story, he sort of puffed**
2222 **himself up and said, "Well, do you know who I am? I am Dr. Yang Dao and I am a Hmong**
2223 **and here is a man who is a Hmong and he has a master's degree. And how dare you say**
2224 **that we're not good enough to go?"**

2225 Well, good for him. I wish I'd knew who that person was because I don't know if they would have
2226 been in the political section or not. I guess I'll never know unless I ask Yang Dao if he can describe
2227 him.

2228 **Yeah, he might—how did you meet Yang Dao? Did it happen here in the States or did you**
2229 **know him in Thailand?**

2230 I probably met him in Thailand first. He may have come into the consulate when I was up there
2231 working with Mac or I met him when he came—well, I can't remember which camp he came from.

2232 **Well, he was in—I know he was in Nam Phong and from there he went, I'm pretty sure, to**
2233 **Vinai.**

2234 Oh, OK. I'm pretty sure I met him before he left Thailand for resettlement. So he may have come
2235 to the consulate when Mac and I were there or I might have met him in Vinai before he left. I'm
2236 just not recalling. But I've also been to his home in Minneapolis for dinner back in the late '70s or
2237 early '80s after he came here.

2238

2239 **(1:10:25) Yeah, he's in sort of a northwestern suburb now called Brooklyn Center.**

2240 Oh, OK.

2241 **I've been out to his house a couple of times. His wife is another wonderful cook.**

2242 OK. Where is his PhD from? France somewhere?

2243 **Yes.**

2244 Australia?

2245 **University of Paris.**

2246 Oh, OK. OK. I recall meeting him at a Hmong New Year's party in the late '80s when I was in
2247 Minneapolis or St. Paul on another trip, private trip. But I've not seen him since then.

2248 **OK. Well, I will be sure to tell him hello.**

2249 Yes, please do. I'm sure he remembers me.

2250 **I'm sure he will.**

2251 Right.

2252

2253 **(1:11:10) Well, how often did you actually go to places like Vinai where the Hmong**
2254 **population was pretty high? Like I said, I understand that you worked primarily with Lao,**
2255 **but I'm sure, like you said, sometimes Jerry had a home leave or something and you picked**
2256 **up the slack on his end. So I'm sure you had some experiences in those areas that you still**
2257 **remember.**

2258 Oh, golly. Well, keep in mind there was still a—there was the Hmong component of the Nong
2259 Khai camp and I remember doing more Hmong interviews in the Nong Khai camp than I did in
2260 Vinai. But now that we're talking about it, I remember overnighing in the Vinai camp with Jerry
2261 when he was up there, which means I must have gone there to help him out with the caseload at the
2262 same time, not necessarily when he was gone from Thailand on a leave. Now I can't remember
2263 whether I went back by myself without Jerry or not, because I don't remember going back a second
2264 time or a third time without Jerry, is what I'm trying to say. Because I definitely remember
2265 overnighing there in the camp, rather than going back to Loei Province where the closest hotel
2266 would have been. Well, that's why I knew his staff, the people who were part of his processing
2267 team, I guess, because of that trip. And well, in Nong Khai, Jerry would come back to Udorn,
2268 usually, as well. Or no, we overnighed in downtown Nong Khai a lot rather than make—drive
2269 another 30 minutes back to Udorn where I had a house. Jerry never had a house there, though. I'm
2270 talking '76 now—latter half of—well, January to—well, actually, October '75 to June or July of '76,
2271 maybe even later before I moved down to Bangkok. It must have been later '76. What was the
2272 question? I'm sorry, I've been reminiscing about ...

2273

2274 **(1:14:05) No, that's quite all right. Putting it all in context is good. I was just asking if you**
2275 **had any specific memories of working with the Hmong in these camps that stood out in**
2276 **your mind.**

2277 Well, there was not that much difference between—I mean, once—if you had, basically, a literate
2278 family, then it didn't matter whether they were Khmer or Lao or Hmong. I mean, they'd—of
2279 course, they were scared to death to come in for any kind of a direct confrontation for an

2280 interview—part of an interview process. I mean, a lot of comical things happened when—and I was
2281 with Jerry a couple times when he even would throw his hands up and say, "There is no way in hell
2282 these people could be related by blood." And he would sense that somebody was trying to pull over
2283 a second wife in the family at the same time. Now on the Lao side it wasn't so much polygamy, but
2284 it was working in either an extended relative as a blood son or daughter, or—I even had cases
2285 where—a case that was a shoo-in, based on the principle of applicant's work history that they would
2286 be approached by a wealthy Chinese merchant who would have been bottom of the barrel Cat 4 and
2287 who would have paid off the head of the family to incorporate the young son or daughter into the
2288 family just to get them to the States. There was that element we had to deal with and Jerry had to
2289 deal with it not so much of paying people off, but of trying to get in minor wives or extended family
2290 members rather than left—be left behind in the camp now. I would say, in the Hmong situation,
2291 with so many of them—adult males—killed during the war years, that many of those minor kids
2292 who were incorporated into the family unit were legitimate cases because they were nephews of the
2293 head of the family or nieces. And Jerry had to sort all that out and, to the best of his ability, to
2294 determine that they were, in fact, related and they weren't being paid off by somebody else to—just
2295 so the kid could come to the States. So it was a different variation on a theme, I guess, among the
2296 kinds of caseloads we individually had to deal with. But as I said, some comical things happened.
2297 One little kid—of course, the kids don't wear diapers there and one little kid just stood right up and
2298 started whizzing right on the interview table. I mean, it was barely old enough to even stand up. Or
2299 another case where the—comical things between husbands and wives. When we'd ask the husband
2300 if he were the head, usually the head of the family, to answer and the wife could not resist answering
2301 the question to the point where it was not unusual to see a husband elbow the wife in the head,
2302 knocking her right off the interview bench because he got irritated, too, of her trying to answer the
2303 question before he even had a chance to answer the question. Crazy things like that happened. But
2304 we had sort of our own security setup in the interview room, which was usually a large open-air—
2305 but it might have had mesh or cross boards, like—what do you call that thing you make underneath
2306 decks and ...

2307 **Like a trellis?**

2308 Like a trellis, a cross-hatch thing, to keep the crowds out. Of course, people would—that was the
2309 biggest show in town. They'd spend hours looking, peering through the holes in the hatch work to
2310 see what was going on and try to overhear the interviews to get a jump on the interviews. In fact,
2311 there were little schools that popped up in—and like you, too, can be an SGU. At night, after we
2312 would all leave the camp, there would be training sessions to train these, primarily young kids, what
2313 the—try to give them some basic military training or learn how to answer the questions, to be a
2314 fake—have—to come up with a fake military history kind of thing. And—or even in the category
2315 ones, there were—sometimes they would come, bring letters in which—to prove that they had
2316 relatives in the States. And then we'd ask to borrow the letters and send them out to—for 15
2317 minutes, take a break. And then we'd read the—we'd have our interpreters read the letters to us and
2318 there would be things like this is what you say when Tucker comes to interview you. You say that
2319 we are—our fathers were brothers and this and that, try to—somebody in the States was trying to
2320 help a friend come as a brother-type thing. So we had to contend with attempts like that to get into
2321 the program. Oh, the biggest pain in the butt was the Thais who tried to buy their way into family
2322 configurations.

2323 **Interesting.**

2324 Primarily—I don't know if this happened in the Hmong camps or not. I just don't know whether
2325 the Hmong who were already in Thailand would try to pass themselves off or embed themselves
2326 into Hmong ex-Laos families. I don't even know who to ask that question of. But it certainly
2327 happened in the lowland Lao population. In fact, it happened even more after I left because I

2328 understand that people who replaced me were not as strenuous in their trying to get to the—down
2329 to the meat of the case as I was.

2330

2331 **(1:21:53) Well, I understand. I assume probably already before you left there was this cry**
2332 **from the Thai government that these people aren't refugees. They're economic**
2333 **opportunists and they're just coming across the border because they know they can have a**
2334 **better life here.**

2335 Here in Thailand?

2336 **In Thailand, yes.**

2337 Yeah, I'm sure there was an element of the Thai government who would espouse that outlook.
2338 But—and there was a point after I left, even in '80, that, oh, golly, we're missing the whole element
2339 of our INS officers, U.S. immigration officers, making a distinction between legitimate political
2340 refugees and economic refugees. I don't know who started it first. Maybe you do. But it happened
2341 sometime in the early 80s or mid 80s.

2342 **Was this a result of the Refugee Act of 1980 or was this something independent of that?**

2343 Oh, golly. Why don't I know about the Refugee Act of 1980 or am I just forgetting it? Do you
2344 remember the month it came out?

2345 **Oh, it might have been after you left. I was talking to Dennis Grace about it.**

2346

2347 Well, I would have left Thailand, but I stayed in the Department in the Refugee Bureau until '83. So
2348 I'm just—I can't believe I wouldn't have been aware of it, whatever you're alluding to.

2349 **Well, let me see if I can get Dennis' words here so I can—let's see. OK. I'm quoting**
2350 **Dennis Grace here. He said, "The refugee camps became kind of a testing ground for the**
2351 **Refugee Act of 1980. The thrust of the Refugee Act of 1980 was individual determination on**
2352 **a case-by-case basis based on a fear of having suffered persecution or having fear of**
2353 **persecution along certain lines." So it sounds like they are creating a distinction between**
2354 **economic and political refugees. He said, "This comes out of refugee protocols done,**
2355 **starting from the early '50s. Kind of the definition of a refugee. But it really became**
2356 **ingrained with the Refugee Act of 1980. INS had worked under the presumption of refugee**
2357 **status, which is the way the program had operated in the '70s. If you got there and you**
2358 **walked up to the table and you had gotten off that boat or you had come across from Laos,**
2359 **you were a refugee. You speak Lao, you must be a refugee. That ended with the Refugee**
2360 **Act of 1980 because it was then incumbent on the INS officers to say, 'OK, you're from**
2361 **Laos.' But for the purposes of the U.S. resettlement program, you need to be here and be**
2362 **determined to be a refugee based on having suffered persecution or fear of persecution." So**
2363 **yeah. It sounds like that's what it was.**

2364 Wow. OK. I can remember, it was sort of getting to be that way in the late '70s anyway. But I
2365 could tell by the line of questioning many of the INS officers were pursuing at the time. Although I
2366 didn't sit in on all the interviews, there were a lot of interviews I did sit in on. Or when I was off
2367 doing something else, an INS officer would call me over to be involved in the actual interview even
2368 though I would have already signed off on the case prior to it being presented to him or her. Wow.
2369 I can remember one case, one lady who we said, "Why did you leave Laos?" She said, "Well, the
2370 price of sugar went up and I couldn't sell my desserts anymore and make a profit." And my eyes just
2371 rolled in the back of my head, thinking, man, she'll never make it past INS. That must have been in
2372 one of the initial interviews.

2373

2374 **(1:26:32) That sounds sort of like what's happening with Huai Nam Khao right now. I**
2375 **mean you have the people from Wat Tham Krabok that are there and you have the Chao Fa**

2376 who have come out from the jungles and then you have this other group of people who just
2377 seem to have decided, "Let's leave Laos and go to Thailand and our lives will get better."
2378 Uh-huh. And these are Hmong or ...
2379 **Yeah, they're largely Hmong. In fact, I think they're almost entirely Hmong. There's**
2380 **about, I think, 7,000 of them. The Thai want them all to go back to Laos.**
2381 Oh, OK.
2382 **And I think the Hmong from Wat Tham Krabok are literally categorized differently.**
2383 **They're in a separate—well, not necessarily separate, but distinct part of the camp and I**
2384 **think they're recognized as at least having some claim for resettlement. But I think pretty**
2385 **much everybody else—and I sat down with the Thai colonel who runs the camp. And he**
2386 **basically said, "These people need to go home."**
2387 Hmm.
2388 **This was just November of last year I was there.**
2389 I got something I read today on my e-mail. Had something about what happened to some of the
2390 people even now who are being forcibly repatriated.
2391 **Yeah. Yeah.**
2392 That—well, we've always—I was always of the impression that anybody who having made the
2393 political statement of fleeing Laos, no matter under what conditions they were returned or showed
2394 up back in Laos, that the Pathet Lao would never trust them again ...
2395 **Yeah, exactly.**
2396 ... without sending them to some kind of incarceration or forced reeducation or—and probably
2397 never trust them even then. And the longer they've been in Thailand, the less they're going to be
2398 acceptable to the current regime in Laos.
2399 **Yeah. Yeah. I think that's true.**
2400 Yeah.
2401
2402 **(1:29:39) Well, did you, during your time in Thailand, hear any stories about yellow rain?**
2403 Oh, yeah. Let's see. This is—I'm trying to remember some of the—it was about the same time as
2404 Jack Reynolds, that was the guy's name, from, I think NBC and then whatever network Mike
2405 Wallace was from.
2406 **CBS.**
2407 CBS. It's about the same time and I think that's '78 is when these stories started. In fact, Jack
2408 Reynolds had his film crew—the typical scenario was the film crew would come up three to five
2409 days ahead of either Reynolds or Wallace and we were told to present them with maybe half a dozen
2410 possibilities for a story. And I would talk to whoever the producer was and—or they would be
2411 briefed already in Bangkok by Lionel or Mac. And anyway, one of the stories was—because people
2412 were coming across during the night and then crawling up the Thai side of the river, Mekong River
2413 there, one of the film crews was there trying to get shots of people as they were escaping. And they
2414 weren't really all that successful in doing that. But one story we had was one little boy—and this is
2415 now almost 30 years ago that—Bee Xiong was his name, that's right. And I had to ask him with
2416 Jack Reynolds, I think it was, interview the little boy as to what his escape was like. I think that's the
2417 story they ended up using on that piece. But it was—the point being that all the adults in his party
2418 were killed.
2419 **Oh, my goodness.**
2420 And he was the sole survivor of this family cluster. He was—it had a happy ending, actually. He
2421 was adopted by two NBC producers in Tokyo and I never heard what happened to him after that. I
2422 think Mac was trying to track him down. I know they had no children of their own and they put the
2423 kid through private school. I don't know where he is now. I'll have to e-mail Mac and find out.

2424

2425 **(1:32:50) Yeah. Well, what about the Hmong resistance? People who would sneak across**
2426 **the border and go back into Laos and fight and then maybe come back into the camp and**
2427 **live for awhile. Or maybe they were primarily in Laos, but snuck across into Thailand to**
2428 **either get money from people who were sending it from the States and elsewhere or maybe**
2429 **they commiserate with the Thai or I've heard different stories about the relationship**
2430 **between these resistance fighters and the Thai government.**

2431 Oh, wow, I don't have any knowledge on the Hmong side ...

2432 **That's OK.**

2433 ... of that. Only the lowland Lao. In fact, one fellow I visited in Beaumont, Texas, a former
2434 military—went back and was later killed or died of malaria. But a lot of the Lao—I guess a lot of
2435 the fundraising activities or parties they would have, it ostensibly to raise money to send back to the
2436 resistance back in the '70s and '80s. And then the stories leaked out. And again, I'm not addressing
2437 the Hmong because I don't—I never had any exposure to that aspect of it here in the States, but
2438 certainly the Lao side, people would tell me privately, we're tired of all these fundraisers because the
2439 money never really gets back to where it's supposed to go, certainly in the amount that they raised.
2440 And they just got turned off by all these efforts to solicit funds from the average refugee family here.
2441 So they started channeling their—the proceeds from these affairs. And I went to one Saturday night
2442 here in Akron to raise money for the local Buddhist temple here, Lao Buddhist temple here in
2443 Akron. And people became very soured by the hint of corruption going on because they knew their
2444 government in Laos was corrupt and they expected something more here in the States and certainly
2445 they are getting it. But they—I've even had Lao tell me, if we ever can go back to Laos, we hope
2446 these people don't go back and try to reassume authority because we'll never be able to trust them
2447 again. I'm sorry I can't ...

2448 **Oh, it's OK.**

2449 ... shed any light on the Hmong resistance activities.

2450 **Well, it never hurts to ask. And it's always fine if you say I don't know because, after all, you**
2451 **can't know everything.**

2452 Yeah—one—again, I've alluded to this colonel in San Diego who I know is involved. In fact, and
2453 behind his house he's got sort of a bamboo hut he calls his war room with a private phone line and a
2454 fax line. And he's the guy who had a good—a farewell party in Nong Khai. He was living down—
2455 well, I guess he was living downtown with relatives from the Thai side of his family and he had a—
2456 like a dinner party the night before he was to get on the buses in Nong Khai and go down to
2457 Bangkok for the flight to the States. And he had a—quite an elaborate party. Well, he invited a
2458 couple of us from the consulate to it and we did go up to it. Didn't see anything wrong in it. And at
2459 about 10 'til 12, his formal subordinates in the military started passing out champagne glasses and
2460 then they started opening all these bottles of champagne. And at the stroke of midnight, he said,
2461 "Raise your glasses. This is my good-bye to the Pathet Lao." And about that time, an ammo dump
2462 on the other side in Laos blew up for the fireworks at the party. That's a true story.

2463 **[Laughs] All righty then.**

2464 Yeah. And then, of course, we were saying, "My God, why are we here, a part of this?" Some
2465 second thoughts. But anyway ...

2466

2467 **(1:37:45) Well, when you look back now over 30 years, 25 to 30 years since you left the**
2468 **situation in Thailand, what are the things that stick with you? The sort of, if you will, major**
2469 **themes or most prominent memories that seem to come back to you most often?**

2470 Golly, well, if—I guess I don't think about it all that much, but now that you're asking the question,
2471 I guess I would have to say the utter resilience of—human resilience of people caught in these kinds

2472 of circumstances and the squalor they had to live in, in the camps, and the ability to adapt and
2473 conform and just survive from day to day. There was a whole racket on refugee real estate within
2474 the camps when one family would—who'd maybe fixed up their little section of the larger building.
2475 When it came time for them to leave, they would either just outright give it to other relatives or
2476 they'd sell it for an acceptable price to someone in the camp who wasn't currently housed in as nice
2477 of a structure. I mean, I'm just talking walls, basically, flappy, very flimsy walls. But I guess the
2478 human ability to adapt under those conditions and keep a happy attitude. That's what surprised me
2479 a lot, that you didn't see people moping around. I mean, they just developed their own little society
2480 and there were coffee shops that sprung up and restaurants and—our favorite place to have a beer
2481 after—well, the fact that they even had beer in—the entrepreneurial spirit of some of these refugees
2482 who, finding themselves in this kind of a situation would try to earn a little extra money, either by
2483 selling food or beer or noodles or—one of them even brought a jukebox in. Because I can
2484 remember bringing—old 45 disco music back with me on—from a home leave and she put it all in
2485 her jukebox and [Laughs]—just to add a little atmosphere to the camp. And little associations
2486 would have parties at night they'd invite us to. The Lao air force had a send-off party for a group of
2487 their officers who were leaving, complete with a band and music and nice food and sometimes you'd
2488 wonder, "Golly, am I really in refugee camp here when—with all this kind of activity going on?"
2489 That's basically Nong Khai. Nong Khai was much—was a more of a middle- to upper-class camp, I
2490 guess, than certainly the Ubon refugee camp was. Things like that didn't happen that much down
2491 in, if at all, in the Ubon camp.

2492
2493 **(1:41:35) How did that happen that you had certain camps that had more prosperous people**
2494 **in them than others?**

2495 Well, the question. Let me see if I can address it. Well, it wasn't by choice. I mean, you couldn't
2496 come out and decide you wanted to go to one camp or the other. And you went to the one that was
2497 closest, usually. So you had southern Lao in the Ubon camp and then people from the Vientiane
2498 plains area in the Nong Khai camp and—maybe it was—I mean that's not to say you didn't have
2499 business men and prosperous people in the Ubon camp. Maybe they just didn't show their assets or
2500 their wealth to the extent that the ones in Nong Khai did. And of course, as people started
2501 immigrating abroad, they would be sending money back to those relatives and friends still in the
2502 camp. And a dollar would go a hell of a long way in those days in Thailand. I don't know why it
2503 was that way, but it was. There was a definite distinction between the two camps. Nong Khai was a
2504 much larger camp than Ubon was. Don't know what else to elaborate on that aspect of it. It just
2505 happened to be that way. Did somebody tell you about the fire that broke out in the Nong Khai
2506 camp?

2507 **I can't say I've heard about a fire in Nong Khai, no.**

2508 Yeah, this was right as I was preparing to move to the Philippines to set up that refugee processing
2509 center. It—there was a fire in February of '80 and—let me go back a step. We had two groups of
2510 Lao classical dancers that we were trying—who came out and wanted to remain intact. One was
2511 from the royal capital, Luang Prabang, and the one was from another cultural dance school in
2512 Vientiane. And between Bill Sage and Carol Compton, sponsorships were worked out for the
2513 group. Well, they both came through the Nong Khai camp. One group from Vientiane was
2514 resettled in Iowa and the group from Luang Prabang, royal capital, was resettled in Nashville. And
2515 they had—one group or the other lost all their costumes and their instruments in the fire in the
2516 Nong Khai camp. And they were delayed while they tried to raise money and replenish those
2517 instruments and costumes that were lost in the fire. But I'm not sure they ever figured out how the
2518 fire started or why, but it happened after I—after I had—well, as I was preparing to leave. So it

2519 would have been February of '80. I don't remember if it affected the Hmong side of the camp as
2520 well or it was just the Lao side. I'm not remembering now.

2521 **Oh, I never—I'm sorry. Go ahead.**

2522 But there was a—there was a pretty major fire. It probably burned at least a quarter of the camp.
2523 And I don't think there was any loss of life. What were you going to say?
2524

2525 **(1:45:38) I never asked you if you ever met or spent any significant time with Pop Buell.**

2526 Oh, Pop I met—it's interesting you'd ask that. The most time I ever spent with him was when Jerry
2527 and I went over to his apartment in Bangkok together. When would that have been? I did not work
2528 with him or probably even know him in Laos. Maybe I met him once in Laos. I'm not even
2529 remembering that right now. But I do remember going over to his apartment in Bangkok or a hotel
2530 he was staying at, at the time. Now what year was that? Do you remember—recall the date that he
2531 died? I think it was after I was already back here in '91 or ...

2532 **Around 1980.**

2533 OK. Well, why was he living in Bangkok all that time? I guess he thought he was trying to—he was
2534 not going to abandon the Hmong or didn't feel comfortable coming back here when all the action
2535 was out there or—well, I know he traveled into the camps a lot.

2536 **Yeah, I don't think his health was very good toward the end, either. He'd had I don't know
2537 how many heart attacks before the one that killed him.**

2538 Yeah, he had gone over to visit friends in Manila for Christmas or Thanksgiving and then I guess
2539 after the meal just passed away during the night there, is my recollection of it.

2540 **Yeah, that sounds about right. Yeah.**

2541 It was an American friend he knew from public works, probably up north. I can't remember who it
2542 was now.

2543 **Interesting.**

2544 Ernie Kuhn would remember all that.

2545 **Oh, yes. Yes. He's another—his basement is like a museum and an archive. I mean he's
2546 just—I can't believe all the materials he's accumulated.**

2547 Oh, yeah. Yeah. Because I remember the—when they erected some kind of memorial to Pop,
2548 somewhere here in Ohio or Indiana.

2549 **Probably Indiana, but I guess you never know.**

2550 Now I'm trying to remember why I'm thinking it's Ohio. Is it because a daughter lives here? Ernie's
2551 from Newark, Ohio. He still goes back summers. He has a cabin somewhere there. Maybe it was
2552 because one of the daughters—Pop's daughters is in Ohio still. But it would make more sense if the
2553 memorial would be in Indiana, you're quite right, since he was from there. Yeah. That's about all I
2554 can tell you about Pop.
2555

2556 **(1:48:31) OK. Well, that's quite all right. Well, I think I've let a good part of another
2557 evening get by you here. I hope you don't mind.**

2558 No, no. Not at all. I was just going to say, on the Mike Wallace piece.

2559 **Oh, yes.**

2560 Pop was interviewed at the same time by Mike. And I don't know if you've seen it or not.

2561 **No, I keep hearing about it, but I guess I haven't taken enough time to find out if there's
2562 some way to get a copy of it.**

2563 Well, I have one somewhere, but it's on videotape. I suppose I should digitize that.

2564 **There are a lot of places now where you can take a video and they'll put it on DVD for you.**

2565 Well, it's a question of finding it now.

2566 **I hear you.**

2567 I'll tell you, technology has just revolutionized the world. And it's hard to keep up with it. I mean,
2568 there's no stopping it now.

2569
2570 **(1:54:49) It's fascinating, though, that this group of refugees whose kids are coming of age**
2571 **in this technological time are really taking advantage of all of those different media to sort of**
2572 **transmit their culture around the world and to keep in touch with all these different groups**
2573 **of people. And in that way they certainly have advantages that previous immigrant groups**
2574 **never had.**

2575 Oh, definitely, definitely. And I've—because I was at the Voice of America for a year—'83, '84—I
2576 go into the VOA website occasionally and, of course, I think there's still a Lao service. Maybe
2577 there's no longer a Thai service, but you can get the daily broadcast—used to be able to get the daily
2578 broadcast playing back right there on the Internet, if you wanted to listen to them. Certainly the
2579 newspapers or—and golly, it's just sort of mind-boggling that all this is happening. When I was a
2580 Peace Corps volunteer in Khon Kaen, I used to have to go to Bangkok to call my parents if I didn't
2581 want to wait seven to 10 days for one of those flimsy light blue air letters that you wrote on and
2582 folded over and mailed them off.

2583 **Oh, yes. I remember those.**

2584 [Laughs] Yeah. Yeah.

2585 **Very interesting.**

2586 Well, look. Feel free to—if you—if there's something that's still unclear, feel free to contact me
2587 again and I'll try to amplify it or clarify it.

2588

2589 **[Further small talk ensues, then interviewer thanks Mr. Tucker and call ends.]**