

Interview with Michael E. Tolle

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

MICHAEL E. TOLLE

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Initial interview date: March 16, 1996

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Q: Today is March 16, 1996 and this is an interview with Michael E. Tolle. We are going to be concentrating on his time in Vietnam and dealing with Vietnam but first I would like to ask when, where you were born, a bit about your family, thus giving people a feeling about who this person is.

TOLLE: Okay. I was born February 26, 1947 in Garden City, Kansas. My parents were inhabiting a trailer around the university about that time.

Q: He was a vet?

TOLLE: Technically not, he was in the Merchant Marines. We moved to Michigan some short time after that and then to New York, at which time my father received his doctorate in education, taught for a while at Brooklyn College and we moved out to the south shore of Long Island. I attended public schools in the East Islip public school system and graduated in 1965. I was accepted at the Georgetown University Foreign Service School and entered in the fall of 1965.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about what prompted you to go to the School of Foreign Service?

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TOLLE: I had about as long as I could remember an interest in foreign affairs, current events. I have memories of watching election returns at a very young age. During the Kennedy years while in high school I wrote some for a newspaper, etc. One of the faculty at the high school was a Georgetown graduate who steered me towards Georgetown. As I looked at the schools at that time that focused on foreign service, because about my junior year I had decided to become a Foreign Service Officer, I had a choice of either Washington, DC or Dartmouth University in New Hampshire. I figured I could either study for the Foreign Service in the snow ten months of the year or I could be in Washington, DC. That wasn't much of a choice. It seemed like an almost automatic thing. I can't point to a particular date or particular event, it was what I was interested in from the very start and it matured into a desire to become a formal Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Well, let's talk about Georgetown's School of Foreign Service. How did you find it and what was the thrust of it when you were there?

TOLLE: At the time I was there the school was in considerable turmoil. This was from 1965 to 1969. It is not looked back upon as one of the better years for the Foreign Service School for a number, I think very justifiable reasons. It was attempting to preserve its independence from what was at least interpreted by its students and some of the faculty at that time, to be an attempt to bring it into the fold and lose its identity.

Q: Within the fold of Georgetown?

TOLLE: Yes, within the fold of Georgetown itself. We took great pride, somewhat perversely, I think, in being independent. We were out on the East Campus and not on the Main Campus, and our course selection, of course, was entirely different. It was very much an autonomous...if not necessarily the best quality because of that, I think. My years in Georgetown were colored by Vietnam. I was part of the class of 1965. It was a fascinating experience to attend Georgetown and to watch the progression of this particular segment of public opinion. It is, of course, a conservative Catholic university, not exactly a Berkeley

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of the East Coast or anything. So, nothing ever got out of hand or anything along that line, but as I mentioned to you earlier, this was the first time I walked into the Lauinger Library because at that time it was merely a wall that kept the construction site and on that wall I can clearly recall anti-war slogans being painted.

Q: I might mention for the record that we are sitting doing this interview in the Lauinger Library at Georgetown right now.

TOLLE: So, this probably more than anything else colored the years that I was at Georgetown. By a somewhat quirk of fate I became well acquainted with Vietnam before actually leaving Georgetown because in 1966 my father was recruited by USAID as an educational advisor to go to Vietnam. He then, after training in which I was able to participate in because I was in the Washington area, was sent to Vietnam. Our family was given what was known at that time a safe haven and chose Manila. So I actually spent a little time one summer after my freshman year at Georgetown living in Manila. It just sort of seemed that Vietnam and me and my education were all coming together during this period of time.

Q: Was Bill Clinton there?

TOLLE: He was a year ahead of me. My one connection with Bill was serving as a dorm captain for his opponent, Jerry Modglin, who beat him in this election. It was a fascinating time. I have talked to a number of people about it since then remembering Bill as the ultimate Hoya at the time...the blue blazer, gray slacks, penny loafers. He was aware of me as one of his opponents. I can't claim his friendship in any way.

Q: Did Vietnam play any part in the elections of radicals or non-radicals?

TOLLE: It was a factor but a factor under the surface. It was not a factor in the election, itself, but it helped to set apart...as I mentioned this was a very tumultuous time...the old Georgetown, if you will, and the new, and I am exaggerating this, of course. But, for

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example, my first year at Georgetown we had the 8:45 curfew Monday through Thursday and had to be in our room, a coat and tie in the library, classes and cafeteria, all of the old rules. During this period of time between 1965-69, this all fell apart and we had a group, if you will, which we always referred to as the Hoyas, the classic sons and daughters of Georgetown, and those of us, who for a various collection of reasons, none of them particularly dominant, were outsiders in one way or another, who perceived ourselves as rebels and who began to revel in it.

Q: I am here at Georgetown now and policies of a Georgetown are almost non-apparent. How was it then?

TOLLE: It was extraordinarily pervasive at that time. I am not Catholic. In fact my turnoff to Georgetown, such as it was, and it was substantial for a while, was largely based on that fact. If you were not Catholic you were one of the lesser breeds without the law, and you were treated as a second class citizen. For example, as a freshman there was a required course in lieu of religious training, which was required by the Catholics, that all of us non-Catholics had to take. By some coincidence it met exactly the time that all the sports teams practiced, therefore, no sports if you were not Catholic. I perhaps am exaggerating because I didn't investigate all of the sports but certainly the ones that I was interested in that was the case. In any number of ways this was a part of this tumultuous time, a rebellion against what we referred to as 175 years of tradition unhampered by progress. So, the Catholicism very definitely played a part in this.

Q: How about your teachers? What were you getting from your professors on Vietnam?

TOLLE: We were getting a great deal and what we were getting, I think to the credit of the faculty, was a wide spectrum of opinion on this. Again, largely conservative, but one could find what we would have termed radical at the time, but was by no means radical at all. The dominant member of the faculty, of course, was Carroll Quigley, a gentleman

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who definitely shaped my life for better or worse, no question about it. My experience in his class during my freshman year was truly one of the pivotal ones in my life.

Q: Who was he?

TOLLE: Well, Carroll Quigley was the dominant personality on campus at that time. He was a professor of history associated with the School of Foreign Service. A man, who I think more through the force of his personality and his spellbinding lectures, rather than the depth or coherence of thought affected students across the board. All of those who came in contact with him were affected in one way or another. Witness of course Bill Clinton's acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention in which he referred to Carroll Quigley. I can recall sitting in White-Gravener watching him parade through his course. As a member of the Foreign Service School's freshman class you had to take his course in Western Civilizations, and that was that. I would call it an intellectually awakening experience. While I did not agree with the man a great deal and agreed with him even less as maturity approached, the impact that he had in least awakening me to a world greater than that I had previously known was substantial.

Q: Were people coming in and debating Vietnam?

TOLLE: We were beginning to see that type of thing. The policy of the university, if memory serves, was not to be particularly open to this sort of thing, but student groups were forming. We even formed the Student Power Party to contest politics on the campus. A number of anti-war groups were springing up on a very informal basis. They had some degree of support, in fact, a Jesuit priest, Father McSorley, was more or less the spiritual advisor to this group. I hooked up with him and attended the Armies of the Night vigil around the Pentagon about that time.

So, at the time, the predominant mood remained conservative, Catholic, supportive of US policy, which, I might add, during my freshman year I was. I can recall vigorous student debates into the wee hours in our dorm rooms on this subject. It was clearly the dominant

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subject as those of us were becoming 2-S, or 1-A. I would have to say that predominantly Georgetown remained on the conservative supportive side, but those who opposed the war, opposed the regulations, who opposed what they saw as constrictive Catholicism, the general deference to tradition instead of change in this time of enormous change and stress were a minority but an increasingly vocal one. I do not recall any particularly disruptive demonstrations. The graffiti on the construction wall was about the size of it. Somehow this got wrapped up in the struggle to preserve the independence of the School of the Foreign Service at that time. So one found the moral left wing, if you will, people tending to react to the perception of Georgetown's efforts to take over the School of Foreign Service. There was an odd mix that is not particularly explainable by conventional categories.

Q: Throughout this time your interest in the Foreign Service remain?

TOLLE: Again, this four years at Georgetown was a transitional period. I would say that for the first two years, the first one particularly, the second year somewhat less so, I was in the conservative wing myself, while an outsider and non-Catholic. I spent really the entire time straddling these two quite frankly. I was a registered Republican at the time, I had worked for "Youth for Goldwater" in 1964, as a matter of fact. As my four years through Georgetown progressed I moved, if you will, towards the left, and I would like to say socially towards the left, to become involved in a city with a heavy Black population, which I had not encountered in lily white south shore Long Island. To be exposed to the various cultures in a city like this was a broadening experience and it shattered many of the comfortable white suburban foundations of my childhood. The Georgetown experience was part and parcel of that all the way through.

Q: While you were in Georgetown did you make any contact with people who were in the Foreign Service?

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TOLLE: I have no specific memories of personal contact, no. It was because you are so much in contact throughout the entire warp and wolf of the university, I did not perceive any desire to make this kind of contact. It was just there from morning until night everyday.

Q: Then what happened as you approached graduation?

TOLLE: Actually I might want to step back a little bit more because what figures into this transition was an arrangement my father made when I was scheduled to return to the safe haven for my summer vacation after my sophomore year, this would have been 1967. I came back to Manila having already been in contact with my father who had sent me a letter asking if I would like to spend the summer in Vietnam. I, of course, jumped at the opportunity. My transportation, 90 percent of it, was paid by the US government and I paid the balance. Shortly after returning to Manila in the summer of 1967, I boarded a plane and landed in Saigon. I signed on, which had been previously arranged very unofficially...I don't believe my name will ever appear in any records of any organization, I was unpaid and did whatever I could. My father had made the acquaintance of a man named Peter Winacharuk, who worked for a Christian, essentially fundamentalist, evangelical organization called "World Relief Commission." He and his wife were there stationed in Da Nang at the time, as was my father. I then showed up and said, "I am here and would like to learn and help you in whatever I could do."

So, I spent the summer of 1967 in Vietnam. My primary function was to serve as an escort officer for the distribution of relief commodities. The World Relief Commission would obtain some of them from USAID. They would obtain more from various assorted congregations of an organization that was known as the "Christian and Missionary Alliance," the C&MA, which is a collection of Protestant, fundamentalist, evangelical individual churches. It is not one denomination but individual churches who put an enormous emphasis on overseas service, both in relief and in proselyting, of course. So, they would get in many cases rather useless commodities brought over there. I can recall going through bags of shoes, for example, and having to discard the hundreds of pairs of women's high heel shoes that

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didn't really have a great deal of usefulness over there. Because of this I found myself flying or driving all over the northern part of the country.

Q: That was known as I Corps.

TOLLE: I Corps and II Corps. Da Nang, of course, was in I Corps. Most of my travel was in I Corps but some of it was down in II Corps. I flew commodities down to Da Lat at one point and stayed with the Christian Missionary Alliance group there. It was truly one of the most fascinating evenings I have ever spent in my life, to sit with these primarily elderly people who had been there in some cases since the thirties, telling stories about Vietnam. Although little of the details remain with me, the impression has remained with me all these years.

Q: Of course, it is considered like an Alpine village.

TOLLE: Absolutely, Da Lat is one of the most beautiful places on the face of the earth. In fact, the central highlands of Vietnam are absolutely beautiful.

So, primarily I was in I Corps and my father was able to take me to a few places. We went driving up to Quang Tri and out to Cam Lo. We hitched any number of rides on military airplanes. It was quite an easy thing to do.

Q: What was the military situation in the summer of 1967?

TOLLE: At that point, while perhaps not the high point in numbers, there was intense activity, a considerable amount of fighting. Yet, at the time there was the feeling of progress. It was reasonably close to war with the massive American presence in the north, the American military had a sense of its own unity and purpose that it lacked as it began to get more spread out through the south. Communications on the roads were somewhat shaky, but I don't like to fly, I never have, and much prefer to drive. So, we would drive around a considerable amount at that time. The military presence was overwhelming,

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particularly in Da Nang and all the way up to Quang Tri. I managed at one point...perhaps the high point, if you will, of the summer, was a distribution of several bags of cement to a couple who were living just outside of Khe Sanh at the time.

Q: Khe Sanh being what?

TOLLE: The marine base up in the north.

Q: Yes, later it was under siege.

TOLLE: Yes, the siege, itself, had not firmly set in but the NVA were around and it was coming. At that time there was this couple who worked for the Wycliffe Bible Translators who were attempting to translate the bible into a Montagnard dialect. There was this very nice, fairly young couple living in a little house out there among the Montagnards, a few miles outside the Khe Sanh base. Of course, there was no communication with them. So, I showed up in a C-47 one day, from Air America, dropped in on the Khe Sanh airstrip and the marines looked at me. They had no idea what this young civilian was doing there. I said I was there to deliver some cement and could I get some transportation? The major there was not particularly pleased with this because the area was insecure enough that he had to roundup essentially a full squad and a couple of trucks in order to make the journey. So, I sat out on the tarmac at Khe Sanh for quite a while and at one point a truck drove up with a US green beret and some Montagnard CIDG people who spotted my cement and wanted it. They kept trying to make a bargain. What did I want, an AK-47? What kind of souvenir did I want in exchange for some of this cement? I, of course, declined, it was not my place to trade away any of these sort of things. As a postscript, when I returned, it was not long thereafter when I read in the paper where this camp had been overrun by the NVA with the first recorded use of tanks in the war. And, of course, I got to thinking I should have given them some of this cement.

Eventually I did get the transportation and we drove out with a group of young marines, basically my age or younger, who were just literally amazed. They had no idea that this

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couple were out there, of course. So, we drove out and delivered the cement at this little building. The wife, who was about seven months pregnant at that time, cooked for us. I can remember the little dumplings she cooked up for us as very tasty things. She pointed out the bullet holes in the building and explained that periodically she and her husband had to lie on the floor while the bullets went through. Another postscript to that, she had the baby in the Vietnamese hospital in Da Nang which occasioned a no small amount of comment among the Americans at this time.

We returned to the camp at Khe Sanh and, of course, there was a curfew fairly early in the afternoon so we had to get back. Then, I had to figure out how to get back. My journeys out were always planned, but the journeys back were whatever I could arrange. I managed to get on a CH-54 helicopter, a marine chopper, headed for Dong Ha. As we took off, because these things don't rise straight up in the air, particularly the big ones go out at an angle, we took fire from the NVA. A man sitting about three seats away from me took a bullet in his leg. The indication was that something was developing. I recall flying back to Dong Ha and being dumped off the plane for a pallet of toilet paper and eventually making my way back to Da Nang. It was almost a matter of hoboing, catching rides not on trains but on airplanes. It was a fascinating day.

Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese at that time? What were you picking up from people you were working with and all?

TOLLE: Here began the process of change from support to opposition. Perhaps it did not begin, but I had previously in arguing with Americans, the basis of my argument was that we really didn't know anything about the place, and here I was learning. And, as I learned, the situation began to crystallize in my mind where it became readily obvious that their side, if you will, wanted this more than our side. There began to be a quite obvious thing in that when one looked at the numbers that we supposedly were fighting for and their equipment, but their inability to get things done, such personal contact with them (which was not a great deal at that time) began to eat away at the feeling that I had had that we

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were doing the right thing. Another thing that impressed me at that time was the enormous impact that we were having on them simply by our presence. That the infusion of the American people, American dollars, American material culture, was having an enormous and not particularly beneficial effect on the people. Part of this I think I was preprogrammed for because my father had been there for a little while and had already formed a very negative view of the Vietnamese. In fact, the extent surprised me and he continued it all this time. I am not sure why he continued.

Q: When you say negative view, do you mean as a government, a culture or what?

TOLLE: Pretty much across the board. He referred to them as curiously benighted people and he had nothing but contempt for the GVN, the government. His problem with the Vietnamese people was what he referred to as their infinite corruptibility. He placed the blame on them. I recall at that time thinking there was more to it than just these funny little people are not as open as they should be to the American way of doing things, and I began to see because, while I don't think I had been particularly culturally sensitive or anything along that line...when you grow up in a white suburban upper middle class without even encountering Blacks, you are hardly culturally sensitive...However, after two years in Georgetown I had begun that process. So, at that time I began to look not so much as why they weren't doing what we said, but why we were saying it to them.

Q: Then, when you came back did you say, "Fellas, this is really how it is out there?"

TOLLE: To an extent I did because at the time, particularly by the time of my junior year, I would make more or less a two-year change. The two years conservatism really dominated and the voices against it were voices crying in the wilderness, whereas in the beginning of the third year and certainly by the fourth year, that changed entirely. But at that time student power was developing and we established something called the Alternative University, or something along that line. It was an attempt by students to teach students at Georgetown in areas that you felt you had knowledge, getting out of the rigid,

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professor-student arrangement, etc. So, I hooked up with one of the other students, who was one of the more left wing students, who wanted to talk about Vietnam. I said you know we could make a good team here because I have been there. We team-taught "Vietnam Studies," made it up ourselves. His was the polemical approach at the time. Mine was an attempt to fill in the details of fact. I actually started with geography and population and began to talk to people about the Viets and Montagnards and Khmers and some of the different aspects of it. We had something of a fairly vigorous and healthy exchange of views on this. I would like to think that I contributed something. I am actually not all together certain that I did, because as was the case then and as I am sure is the case now, people tend to make up their minds on these emotional issues without too much regard to the facts, and you merely confused them if you put facts in front of them and asked them to consider them.

Q: When you talk about your team mate teaching the ideology, where was he coming from?

TOLLE: He was coming from a pacifistic approach essentially and a cultural approach that looked upon America as being spelled with a "k". This idea of fascism, that Johnson at this time but soon to be Nixon, the white conservatives and tied in with the civil rights movement every time there was this fear of oppression by the government canceling out free speech, etc. So, again there were many different things mixed up in this. I had not previously mentioned the civil rights movement, but it was definitely a major element in awakening student consciousness and it all tended to merge.

Q: Did you have any feeling because of the draft and all that Georgetown had changed its marking habit, the professors, to keep people in?

TOLLE: I saw no evidence of that. I don't recall there being any particular discussion of it. However, I suppose it had to be mentioned somewhere because quite literally if you were a student the draft was your major preoccupation. We discussed this problem from

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virtually every angle. I don't recall seeing anything along this line, with the exception of Father McSorley who was the only one with whom I was personally acquainted, who made it perfectly clear that if you returned him what he wanted to hear then indeed you got your grade. Whether or not this had any broader impact or whether it was part of an attempt to keep students out of the army, I have no evidence or had none at that time.

Q: Well you graduated when?

TOLLE: In 1969.

Q: What was the draft situation at that time?

TOLLE: At that time I had a 2-S deferment, a student deferment, which would have ended at the end of my studies. Again, you have to remember that the draft situation consisted of a group of local board decisions. What was the case at one place was not the case for somewhere else. I do recall sending a letter to the draft board notifying them of a change of address, because I was expecting to get my 1-A and I made this change of address to Vietnam, hoping that they would get the point that there wouldn't be any reason to bring me back and then send me back. However, I knew that deferments for this type of thing were not available any more and that I did not choose to go to graduate school, that was much too risky a thing.

I thought that I had a connection to get into USAID because of my Vietnam experience and I played that connection. To jump ahead a little bit, I ended up in the first draft lottery which, if memory serves, was 1970, the same lottery that Bill Clinton was in for which he has received all of this trouble, but my draft number ended up being 365, so I figured we had to be at war with half of the world before I got drafted. So, from that point on, the draft was not a factor. I was reasonably certain it would not be a factor prior to that, in other words, I had already applied and been accepted by USAID and was in the training course when the draft lottery took place.

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Q: You were sort of in opposition to the government when you graduated. How did USAID look at you, did they ask questions and what sort of questions were you asking yourself about this?

TOLLE: Probably the latter part of your questions is more significant here. USAID to my knowledge didn't look into this one way or another because again this was Georgetown not Berkeley. Things were not happening here that people needed to pay attention to, for whatever I would call radical probably was more conservative than in a great many other universities. It is all a question of the local situation again. But, I do recall, certainly by the time of my senior year, having to wrestle with this question. Is there a place for me? Do I by my participation condone this? How do I work this out? So, to make a fairly complex story short, I decided to go, for a combination of practical and ideological reasons. The practical reason being that by the time of my graduation they were not giving the Foreign Service exam. In fact, I believe they did not give it for another two years after that. Apparently the Foreign Service was an alternative to military service. So simply joining the Foreign Service was not an option. I then looked to USAID, specifically Vietnam. Vietnam was what was happening. It was the center of everything.

Q: Yes, and people were wanting to get out and see the elephant.

TOLLE: Essentially that was it, but I had already seen it and didn't feel that I had to go back for that reason, but because my work that summer had been in taking care of the people affected by the war I began also to realize just the enormous impact we were having on the population of Vietnam and the need for help. I was thus able to rationalize participation in an organization like USAID, where I would be the man who would bring the relief commodities, help people, rather than go there in a uniform to shoot people. I felt this would work, that I could do this without any great deal of difficulty. Thus, I applied to USAID prior to getting out of Georgetown and was almost immediately accepted. There was a large push on recruiting people at that time. I received an appointment as an FSR/

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L-8, which was the lowest grade at the magnificent rate of \$6,900 a year, or something along that line, which at the time was considered to be pretty good money.

It was essentially a seamless transition. I didn't have to move because I had already moved off campus after my sophomore year anyway and, although we had to leave the house I was in at graduation because we all split to the four winds, I simply moved to another house and remained in Georgetown.

Q: What was the training like before you went out?

TOLLE: I spent a full year in training in the garage there.

Q: We are talking about Arlington apartments where many of us spent a year. I took Serbo-Croatian there eight years earlier or so.

TOLLE: It was a parking garage all partitioned off. Windows were few and far between as I recall in that building. I went through what was known as the Language Officers course. Everyone at that time assigned to Vietnam went through a six week course. The shortest course would be served by the PSA, the province senior advisors. Then there was a longer course of a few months which was for the district senior advisors. So, you gradually lost people. Our class—I was in CORDS 20, the twentieth class to go through—was almost entirely military officers, most of them majors. There was one colonel slated for a PSA, the vast majority were slated for DSAs. There were any number of others in the course, from USIA and some Foreign Service officers who were there by and large because they were coerced into going for one reason or another. Young Foreign Service officers were given essentially no choice.

Q: Yes, I had an interview with John Burns who was Director General of the Foreign Service at that time. He was under instructions from the very top that those who didn't go to Vietnam probably just didn't go.

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TOLLE: The other element in it that I found really fascinating was a number, a very small number compared to the total class, of people just a few years older than myself who had been Peace Corps volunteers and who were attempting to translate that kind of experience in Vietnam in an attempt to do something along the line of what they did in the Peace Corps. Now, I think none of them were under any illusion that they were redoing the Peace Corps experience, but they were young men who were quite idealistic but yet pragmatic as a Peace Corps individual tended to be.

I recall very vividly the very first day of training, which was not at that building but somewhere down near Dupont Circle for initial processing...I by that time was wearing shoulder length hair and riding a motorcycle and that sort of thing and I finally said to myself that it was finally time to start blending in if I were going to work for the government. So I had my hair cut and I bought a suit, the first time I can recall ever buying a suit, and I showed up this very first day at orientation and in walked a guy with shoulder length hair and sandals. It was one of my classmates. He and I eventually became close friends. I tended to become closer friends, of course, with those closer to my age and with that type of experience, but at the same time I had a respect for the military because I was with the military over there...I was not anti-military by any means. At that time I had respect for the military and I still do. I think the experience is a truly valid one and I feel that many of the military officers that I worked with, trained with, were some of the truly finest people I have ever encountered.

That, having been said, during the course of our training there developed a great many problems. My memory of training at the Vietnam Training Center is not good, despite the people that I met; the quality of the training I think was rather poor. That is a generalization and does not apply to everyone. One found some excellent people, but one also found people teaching there who had experience there but you got the impression they were given this opportunity or nothing else.

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Q: There was a tendency for people to go there, this happens during any war. For some people this may be the last chance, or they want to get away from their family, or it is either this or out, or it may be a way to get a leg up in a career that may be floundering. This happens in every war, this is their big chance.

TOLLE: In the training course itself, I found few people who were a combination of enthusiasm and teaching ability. All of them lacked one or the other. Many of them were also very doctrinaire in their approach. When you have a group that is perhaps one third under the age of 30 with largely Peace Corps experience, imbued with that vision and faced with very doctrinaire, pedantic type of teaching, you began to have conflict. The history of CORDS 20 was largely one of conflict. We had a couple of group meetings at which time the administration of the school tried to explain to us that our problems were due to the split between the military and the civilian members of the class. Now, this was actually shown to be incorrect by the fact that the civilians and the military were united in this opposition to the course, the way it was taught. Not entirely, of course. We had a number of police officers, also, who as far as specialists go were certainly the most predictable individuals who would be there.

But, I don't want to make the entire experience negative, it was not that. I learned a great deal, not the least of which was the Vietnamese language to a fairly good extent. But again, the language portion dominated the majority of the time, but by which time we began that we had lost all of our PSAs, all of our DSAs, all of our police advisors, only the language officers remained in training. They were almost all the young people. A group that felt simpatico with each other. So, this also tended to increase our isolation.

Q: Did you find that some of the presentation tended to be rather simplistic? I know I took part of that course the year before and I remember at that point they were saying, "Oh, as soon as we get M16s down at the village level then, of course, the whole thing will change

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around." It was almost a gimmick. I always had the feeling that we were always looking for an American-type fix.

TOLLE: Absolutely. If anything succinctly summarizes our approach to the war, it is that phrase, that we were always looking for that quick fix, that gimmick of American technology that would get us through this very difficult process. I can recall one of the people giving us a course about relationships with your counterpart. And I think of all the individuals who might have given that course, he would have been the worse selection. He was probably back here because he couldn't get along with his counterpart. He had no cultural sensitivity, no regard for the Vietnamese. His advise to us was if they won't do what you want, cut off their water. That was his expression. And you also found those who would come in periodically as guest lecturers and give you the set speech one way or the other. To me, however, the problem was more that the staff of the school were the tired, the bedraggled, the connected, that just simply weren't worth it.

Now, I want to make a very clear distinction between these individuals who were Americans and the Vietnamese who taught Vietnamese. This was an entirely different thing. I much more enjoyed the language course up to a point, although quite frankly in a full year of language training you reach the top of your learning curve and I certainly did a few months beforehand. If I had taken that test, the speaking and writing test, maybe three months earlier I may have done better on it than I did.

Q: Yes, there is this plateau. Everyone had gone through this.

TOLLE: It was unfortunate in terms of timing that this happened.

The other problem extraneous to this but involved in it, this was the year, 1969-70, when it seemed that things really came to a head, particularly in Washington. This was marches. I got tear gassed, I was married by then and my wife and I got tear gassed together, which was quite an experience. We were living out by Dupont Circle and I recall walking out of a class one day to attend a march against the war. It was a time when the stress placed

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upon you was enormous. At that time I drove a Volkswagen bus which I had carpeted in the back and had the speakers, etc. I had grown my hair back to shoulder length while in training. I remember very well one other individual and I, an ex-Peace Corps guy, picking up a hitchhiker on P Street, the old hitchhiking route between Dupont Circle and Georgetown. He pulled out his little dope and started doing his rap and asked us what we were doing. There we were both with shoulder length hair driving this VW bus. I looked over at my friend and said, "Do we dare tell him?" He said, "I guess we have to." So, I said, "We work for the government." The guy, of course, freaked out at this. But we explained we weren't going to bust him or anything. But it was a feeling of "What am I doing here?" Am I really doing the right thing? It was a feeling that everyone felt in one way or another at that time, I'm sure.

Q: There is no other time that I can think of that there was such an emphasis placed on generations. If you were under 30 you were special. It was the time original sin was annulled and all. This was the generation that knew the answers and everybody over 30 was obviously doomed.

TOLLE: At the same time in this course one found those people considerably over 30 who took the exact opposite viewpoint. This was indeed a source of some conflict. Not as much as it was made out to be within our group, but I think perhaps in others it might very well have been.

This was interestingly brought out because we spent a few days down at Fort Bragg in the Kennedy School for Counterinsurgency Warfare. It was one of those truly fascinating experiences which I will never forget. I think I learned about six different ways to kill myself if I attempted to do any of these things. You would get an hour on claymores, and mines, and various weapons. We were brought out on the range and I was given two M79 grenades and loaded them in. There was an old Russian tank sitting out there and I managed to put my second shell right on the turret of the tank. This old E-8 looks over at me and I am standing there with shoulder length hair and levis and he, of course, was

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army to the core. It was just a fascinating experience. I began to really wonder exactly what was going on here in terms of whether we were training for anything worthwhile or not. I believe in self defense and was perfectly willing to take a gun and defend myself, but I certainly was not going to go out and participate in any attacks one way or the other. But, just so many experiences were juxtaposed at that time. I could march against the war and go to Fort Bragg and train to fight it within the space of a few weeks.

Q: You went out to Vietnam from when to when?

TOLLE: I left in June, 1970. We took a fairly circuitous route including a week in Taipei in which we were ferried around and shown a number of agricultural projects and things. It was an orientation for the type of work we were expected to try to transplant into Vietnam. I spent some time in Hong Kong and fell in love with that city, of course. I brought my wife out to a safe haven. There is a long story involved in that which we can get to later if you think it is relevant. She was technically not supposed to go. Let me step back here. I graduated in 1969 at which point the woman with whom I was going out and in love with, who was a student at the language institute here, dropped out after her sophomore year. We got married. She then went to a local business school to learn to type and take dictation because her goal was to go to Vietnam with me. This, by the way didn't make my in-laws very happy...their honor student daughter dropping out of school to marry somebody and go half way around the world to a war zone. She accompanied me on the trip out in June, 1970. She stayed with my mother who had been living in Manila since 1966 and I went on to Taipei, Hong Kong and then Saigon. So I would have been there approximately from June, 1970 for a full two year tour.

Originally my tour was to be 18 months as they had thought that my wife would remain in the States. At that time there was a freeze on dependents going to Manila. I managed to circumvent that with great difficulty because there was no additional quarters, my wife moving in with my mother. At this point my tour was extended to a full two years. If you

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kept your wife in the States it was 18 months, if you brought her to safe haven it became two years. So I spent a full two years in Vietnam.

Q: When you arrived in Saigon did you know what you were going to do?

TOLLE: In a sense, not exactly, because unlike most of the young people who were to be DSAs, the civilians, I was not hired as a CDO, community development officer. I was hired from the beginning as an assistant relief/rehabilitation officer, refugees. From the very start I was in a different category and I was the only refuge officer in CORDS 20. So, I knew I would work with refugees. This was part of the deal in my own mind that allowed me to go there. Of all the people who needed help, clearly the vast number of refugees needed it the most and I felt I could work in this program without any particular problem. So, I knew I would be in refugees, I knew I would be assigned to what was known at the time as the War Victims Directorate in Saigon. However, as to my exact position, no, I did not know prior to my arrival. Immediately upon my arrival, and I emphasize immediately, I was rushed through two days in Saigon and then sent up to the central highlands to Nha Trang, the II CORPS headquarters at the time, specifically to be sent out to Lam Dong province for an anticipated refugee movement that they knew was coming and they needed someone there. Lam Dong is a beautiful place and one of the backwaters of the war. In fact, even in TET of 1968, I think it was one of the few province capitals that wasn't attacked. It was an out of the way place.

At this time we had at least acquiesced in Lon Nol's coup in Cambodia against Sihanouk. In the resulting turmoil, the Cambodians took advantage of the opportunity to expel ethnic Vietnamese who at that time were largely urban dwellers and constituted the petit bourgeois, if you will, and perhaps higher, the middle class, in Phnom Penh. It was these people who became known as the Vietnamese Repatriots from Cambodia who were to be brought to Lam Dong province for resettlement. I was told that we would be getting approximately 5,000, that they would arrive at about 200 a week, that it was going to be a fairly leisurely move. I was to be there for a little while, it wasn't to be that big a thing.

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Within a very few days after arriving I was informed that instead of getting 5,000 we would get 10,000 and they would arrive in the space of three or four days. They were just literally going to descend upon us. So, I hit the ground running. There was simply no other choice. Within a week after my arrival the planes started arriving at the airport and the people started getting off. Now, as refugees go, these were a unique group because, as I say, they were not peasants, rural farmers rounded up, they were the urban middle class of Phnom Penh. They came well equipped. It was remarkable what they brought with them. An entire restaurant came with all the tables and chairs, for example. The waitresses came as a group. I remember an individual showing up with a motorcycle that I desperately desired. Rumor had it, although I never personally confirmed it, that a madam and her stable came with them. In other words, it was a truly remarkably well equipped group of refugees although by and large ill suited to rural living. Whether this was oversight, I don't know. I have no idea what happened here. But, the people arrived and it was a time of...it was probably the most fulfilling time, when you have an immediate crisis things...I live well in that environment, I don't have any problems when I am busy.

Q: What was the government structure of the area that you were plugged into?

TOLLE: In Lam Dong province..the province consisted of two districts. On the government side there was the GVN government, the province government, headed by a province chief, an ARVN colonel.

Q: ARVN being army of Vietnam.

TOLLE: Yes. His staff, both military and civilians who were representatives of the various ministries in Saigon. There were two districts. They were quite large. Much, much larger than you found in your average Vietnam situation because of the low population density in the highlands. In fact, the population of the province was grouped entirely along the QL20, which was the national route from Saigon to Da Lat. Not too far off that route there wasn't

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anything at all but various assorted animals and VC, etc. Administratively it was divided into these two districts.

We had on the American side attempted to duplicate the structure of the GVN. In other words, the provincial GVN officials were advised in many cases on a one to one basis by a provincial team. I was assigned to the province team, I was not assigned to a district. I was located in Bao Loc, which is the capital of the province. My assignment was to be counterpart to the director of social welfare for Lam Dong who was an employee of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Saigon, a civilian. So each of us in this team, we were advisory team 38, stationed at Bao Loc. The military lived in a compound outside of town. The civilians, and it varied from three or four of us, lived in the standard USAID compound with all the standard USAID billets and furniture in the middle of town. I very quickly got out of that compound and actually got into a house that USAID owned.

At that time our province senior advisor was a colonel by the name of John Thompson, an outstanding individual. Our deputy province senior advisor was a civilian, a man by the name of John Ford. After that it was all military. When I arrived there were no other civilians in the province with the exception of the police advisor, who was technically a civilian but certainly more warlike than any of the military there. I, in effect, became the third civilian in the team. Because the province was low priority, because it was low population and not central to what was happening, we did not duplicate to the extent that many CORDS teams did. We had our district team. The district senior advisor would be a major, of course, and the advisor to the district chief who was an ARVN officer, usually a captain. We had two of them. Now, keep in mind that one of the districts was located in Bao Loc, so we had three compounds. The American provincial compound military, the American civilian compound and the district compound. So, all of our district level people were military, there were no civilians, nor were there ever any district civilians that I was aware of in Lam Dong.

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My work, although consumed with refugees, once the initial rush was over and things began to slow down, I asked for and very gratefully received the opportunity to expand my work into many of the other areas, what was known as the New Life Development officer at the time. We had not had one. All of the many other development projects were either not being monitored or being monitored by military individuals as much as they could. But, the team itself was your standard mixture. Some of the military were truly committed, sensitive people and some of them were stereotypical, quite frankly. We had a MILPHAP team which is a military public health advisory program. The MILPHAP team had their own little compound set up in there. Truly the navy lives well regardless where it goes, by the way. They really lived well.

So, the structure and advisory relationships varied on an individual basis. If you were the type of individual who could get along with the Vietnamese or who made an attempt to, then you tended to do so. However, if you came in with the attitude, then, of course, you didn't. One could find any number of examples of both of these.

My ace in the hole was the Vietnamese language, of course. No one else on the American team had anything more than what you might call a smattering of market Vietnamese. Now, this was not initially as much of a benefit as I thought it was going to be because my training at VTC had been by Vietnamese women, almost all of them from the Delta/Saigon area. So, I was trained to speak southern Vietnamese. I ended up in the central highlands where the dialect is different. But this particular community was dominated by northern refugees and northern Vietnamese is very different. It has very harsh tones in it. I recall being considerably shocked to show up at a meeting and not understand what they were saying. I had not expected that. Had I been sent down to the Delta, I would have, I think, fit in more quickly in terms of language capability. I actually had to bring an interpreter along in many of my discussions, which I did not anticipate doing. This was particularly a problem because Vietnamese interpreters were in short supply and I frequently had to use a Montagnard interpreter who would interpret from Vietnamese to English, and both

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were learned languages for him. So, that clearly didn't work. After a few tries I tended to use them as assistants and bodyguards, guides, etc. I, then, regardless of communication problems, attempted to do it myself.

Q: What were you doing when you were resettling this initial group of refugees?

TOLLE: Just about anything that needed doing. In other words I was an expediter. The function really of the advisory effort was to plug into the various levels of the GVN and to have your own chain of command. Now, the Vietnamese government was characterized by a number of things, not the least of which was the influence of the French system upon which it was patterned, which we would joke was simply designed to do nothing. Let's say the social welfare ministry chief, my counterpart, would not go to the province chief. He wouldn't go to any of the other service chiefs. There was simply no communication. He would communicate up to his boss in Saigon and he would receive his directions. In other words, vertical communications in the GVN worked quite well, although somewhat one sided with everything coming down and very little going up, but at least it functioned. Lateral communications, let's say at the province level, which was my personal experience, was essentially non-existent. But the situation with the refugees was one that required enormous lateral communication. Each of the service chiefs, agriculture, etc., all had a part to play in this and initially in the reception of the refugees, they played an excellent part. However, if the province chief was interested the job got done, if he wasn't interested it stopped getting done. He was interested particularly because these were Vietnamese and weren't just refugees from the VC area. These were people that they expected to meld into the society and become supportive.

Q: It must have helped some that they had a bourgeois background, too.

TOLLE: To an extent I think that it did. I wasn't able to determine really the extent of this because being largely bourgeois the camp emptied fairly quickly and went to Saigon. They weren't interested in becoming farmers in the central highlands, which was a good

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thing because we never provided them with any land. But initially the effort was superb. Of course the Vietnamese are very good when they wanted to be at making a good show. When that first plane arrived we had the delegations and the students were there and the banners were there, the whole nine yards. My counterpart, with whom I established I think a fairly good solid working relationship because he spoke essentially no English and the fact that I spoke Vietnamese and he spoke southern Vietnamese, helped, did his job and the province chief made sure that the others did their jobs. I can still recall meetings that he laid it out in no uncertain terms, very much for show, of course.

So, for the first few months the initial resettlement period was handled quite well. My job tended to be filling in those little gaps in one way or another. When something didn't work, something wasn't ordered, something ordered but wasn't received, you could always go to your American counterpart and he would use his vertical channels to get it done. So, I was an expediter. I can recall, for example, having one of the girls rush up to me about the first day of the arrival exclaiming that there were no can openers for the canned food to be handed out to the refugees. Not a single can opener had been provided. So, of course, the way you found can openers was to go out to the local market in Bao Loc where the American P-38s were always available by the hundreds, so I peeled off a few of those piaster funds we had and she went out and came back with a big bag of can openers. That is a small example, but an example.

I could get through to Saigon, but it was very difficult, so we had to work through Nha Trang and I have very little good to say about the efforts of the region in this American structure.

By and large, it was get done what has to be done. If I have to go somewhere to get it, do it. At the same time, I from the very beginning, because I had seen this earlier in my trip, tried to shy away from the classic American reaction to people in need, which is to just take care of them. That was not our job. The job was to get the Vietnamese government to take care of them. So, I would not, unless it was absolutely necessary and a matter

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close to life or death, intercede and do something for someone, myself. We had a couple of engineer battalions, for example, in the province. It would have been fairly easy to go down and get them to do the road clearing instead of going over to the public works chief and get him to do the road clearing. There are countless examples of this kind of approach. As long as people weren't starving or dying of disease or open to exposure, my policy was to stand in the background, talk to various people and get them to do it. I took this very, very seriously to the point where I tended to stay away from these constant public events. Everything involved in the process was always a big event and they always wanted their American up front. I never did that, I absolutely refused. We would have the "receiving of the rock" ceremony and they would want me to pick out which pile to measure to see if the contractor delivered it, and I consistently refused to do those kinds of things.

I was as self effacing as possible. When you are the big tall white American standing around you don't exactly blend into the scenery. But in terms of the work that I attempted to do, I was very, very careful to do that. It endeared me to the members of the team who understood what we were supposed to be doing, primarily Colonel Thompson, our PSA, but not to others because most of the other members of the team were lieutenants and captains, many not planning on making the military a career and had the attitude of let's spend a year there and get the hell out of there...

Q: This was typical of the military who said going back to the States was going back to the world.

TOLLE: Yes, they referred to it as the world, no question about it. And, if you were short, you were dying to go. I do recall a running conflict with one of the officers in the engineer battalion, which is course...now this is USARV, not MACV, building the main road here. Several times this colonel in charge of that saw all of these refugees coming and he said, "Ah, ha! Labor! I can get work for my projects." So he would come thundering down in a truck and wanted to drive into the camp and start hiring people. I said, "No, you will not do that. We will go to the various and assorted service chiefs and you will follow the process,

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so it will be the Vietnamese government hiring Vietnamese refugees, not the Americans.” We went round and round on this any number of times. Once he ignored me and went down and I went to the colonel and had the boom laid on him. So, I was continuously involved in this type of thing.

Q: Where you in that area the whole two years?

TOLLE: No, I was only there for about nine months. The project got off to an excellent start. The reception was well done. Two things then became apparent that were going to hamper the long run. One is that the vast majority of the people had no background and no intentions of being farmers, so they left, and thus the numbers dropped fairly steadily. And secondly, as was common with the GVN, initial reception was good, long term follow up was poor. We could not get any useful land for these people and without that there was no viability to what had been planned as a rural farming village. So with the precipitant reduction in refugees and the slipping of the program into doldrums, I attempted to be appointed the New Life Development advisor in Bao Loc. I intended to spend my entire two years there. This, however, did not come about. Apparently I was not high enough ranking to become a new life development officer and I was also hired as an assistant relief /rehabilitation officer. So, this was short circuited... There was a labor day event where wives were allowed to come into the country that September, 1970. My wife came in, had had previous correspondence and landed a job while there with Control Data Corporation in Saigon. She stayed to work for Control Data, which caused no end of troubles because she was supposed to have left and I began to run afoul of the government bureaucracy there.

Q: Whose government?

TOLLE: Our government. So by about eight or so months into my time in Lam Dong, it became apparent that as refugee advisor I was not being employed. Since my desire to

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become a development officer was thwarted, I was reassigned to Saigon and I ended up remaining in Saigon with the War Victims Directorate for the balance of my two years.

Q: Before we leave this area, could you tell a bit about your problems with Nha Trang?

TOLLE: Nha Trang's problems were two fold. One of them being strictly communication. It was very, very difficult to communicate. The telephone was truly an adventure to try and one found that you began to question the need for these people. There was a fairly large number of Americans located there. They were ostensibly backstopping the individual province people, for example, but they had a very difficult task because the central highlands, II CORPS, comprised the largest single area of Vietnam. It was extraordinarily under populated, mountainous, and communication was a problem. But, the function of the region was never really made clear to me. I communicated directly with Saigon, because I was closer to Saigon, and the people at the region level seemed to be people who largely came in to visit so that they could write their reports and ask me for information. I spent an enormous amount of my time giving dog and pony show tours to Americans. In fact, our particular refugee settlement because it was Vietnamese being repatriated by Cambodia, was a fairly high priority event. General Collins showed up, any number of one and two star generals, the names of whom I forget. Colby showed up and I briefed him. Everyone showed up. So, for a while it was a very intense thing. I increasingly found myself fighting, if you will, two wars. One was my job with the Vietnamese with the government, which was fraught with frustrations and delays, etc, but was rewarding because you could get things done, could see physical results of your efforts in the betterment of people. However, the other war, was the war behind my back. It was fought entirely with Americans and almost entirely with the personnel branch. This was when I began to discover...this really dates back to my arrival in the country and my wife accompanying me...I try not to over state this, I appear to be one of those individuals who (and I concluded this by 1972), could not function in a government bureaucracy.

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Q: I think that is a very important point to make. I had thirty years in the government and I found towards the end I would break out in what I call my bureaucratic sweat, when all of a sudden I would find I was running across a personnel problem. This gets to you after a while.

TOLLE: In the long and short of it, that is exactly what happened to me. It happened to me in a two-year span of time. Personnel lives by rules, everything is in this AID book as far as they are concerned. But, rules can never cover reality. Reality is infinitely complex. If you experience reality that lies in the gray margins between the rules, you are in trouble and I seem to be one of those who continually found myself in this grey area.

Q: Also, there is the tolerance level which if you don't have, you really should get out. Now Saigon. This was not the Saigon that I know, I was consul general in Saigon and had minor responsibility for Da Nang's consulate from 1969-70. But you are 1970-71 in Saigon. There had been a major troop withdrawal. What was the atmosphere, both American and Vietnamese, that you found. Coming from a small province all of a sudden to Saigon is something I would like to capture.

TOLLE: Almost total difference in atmosphere. It must be kept in mind, it can not be emphasized too much, that this was the heyday of pacification, the time of our success. TET of 1968 had wiped out largely the indigenous insurgency. At no time was security better. For example, as I said earlier, I hate to fly, but if you were leaving Bao Loc you had to fly to Nha Trang and then you had to fly to Saigon. You had to overnight. Well, we had just built this beautiful new road from Da Lat to Saigon and I could get to Saigon driving and I was the first and only American civilian ever to do that from that area and it was a shocking thing when it first happened.

I had heard talk about the high life that was going on in terms of the military at that time. When you arrived in Saigon you then discovered a climate that had several different interwoven aspects to it. But to this day I refuse to refer to Saigon as the field. Someone

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in Washington may talk about field officers out there in Saigon, but believe me Saigon was not the field. Saigon was a collection of some of the most fascinating personalities I have ever known in my life. It was the frontier. It was Dodge City. As you made the comment earlier, the people who came out there either couldn't make a living in the regular work-a-day world, didn't want to any more, wanted adventure, maybe the shady ones...we had crooks, we had the idealists, we had...

Q: This was my clientele because part of the job of being consul general is being in charge of American prisoners and I had ones who had earned their first brush with the law in 1944 in the black market in Paris.

TOLLE: It was just a self-contained world. I don't think I have ever lived as well since I lived there. You couldn't spend any money. Your quarters were paid for. I had a vehicle from the GVN, a jeep, but I had it. I had a motorcycle and I lived in a beautiful apartment with my wife. Food was cheap. I could buy bourbon for about \$2 a quart. We used to have champagne parties. It was absolutely unbelievable.

Now, within the War Victims Directorate, I enjoyed that work to a large degree because we by and large had the dedicated people in there. Within that Directorate I found some of the most worthy Americans who served there. I think I was happier there than I would have been anywhere else. To an extent I could spend my working day thinking I had accomplished something. Now mine you, I was essentially a paper expeditor. I think I had been promoted to R-7 by that time, but up until that time I was told by personnel that I was both the youngest and lowest ranking American in Vietnam for a number of months. My job ended up entailing a lot of field work and I ended up flying to all 44 provinces of Vietnam one time or other, spending various amounts of time. I literally covered the entire country, most of it while I was in Saigon. So, I would get out of the city often enough to make it worthwhile, but the atmosphere you found among the large number of Foreign Service officers there was one of just serving their time until they could get out.

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We had an increasing number of USAID individuals being sent there because USAID was being cut back worldwide. These people would show up without a clue and without an interest and because they ranked higher, they got their jobs. This began to be an increasingly large problem. I was youngest and lowest ranking and within a few months after arrival I became deputy chief of the operations division of the War Victims Directorate, which in effect was 90 percent of it. Through the remaining year we kept getting people in and some of them were excellent people, but by and large they were people in the wrong place. They were invariably older than I was and higher ranking. I was given an FSO-3 as my assistant and I was a 7. I think to our mutual credit this was not a problem. I was very conscious of this and made it a very careful point to work this out. So, I was given the responsibility, and I think I demonstrated ability, to, in effect, run the division, because my superior, Ray Fontaine, who was the head of the Victims Directorate at that time, was also given the additional responsibility of working with Dr. Phan Quang Dan, the minister of state, who was quite an energetic individual and was in many cases working on very different projects.

So, the balance between the two wars I was fighting began to shift very heavily against me. In Saigon, in a bureaucratic isolated world where we lived well, we partied among people who didn't seem by and large to give a great deal of a damn, and the increasing dissatisfaction with this in the first place...what am I doing here, what am I accomplishing? I like to live well, I have no problem with that, but I would much rather be out doing something and accomplishing something good. Gradually the good that I felt I was accomplishing was taken away from me and I just kept getting into these bureaucratic scrapes, primarily over my wife. To bring a wife to Saigon, when all the dependents had been evacuated in 1963, was an extraordinarily difficult thing to do. I took the advice of a vice consul, "Noran Ivanchukov," a Mongolian.

Q: Oh, yes. He worked for me. He was part of the agency.

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TOLLE: I rather assumed he was being a Mongolian. I hooked up with him, I think it was in Hong Kong, and explained my situation. He said he was going to be a vice consul and I asked how I could get my wife over to Saigon. He told me he would take care of it, but he didn't, and I ended up in unknowing violation of all sorts of regulations. Cables flew back and forth. It is a long painful story. I have kept all the documentation on this and last night I looked over a journal that I kept. There was an official reprimand, for example, in my file for bringing my wife over. Every one of these things I did on the advice of those people who told me what to do and within my understanding of the rules, I just didn't do it the right way. I fell into one of those grey areas that is not covered by the regulations and I was very intolerant of that. I am not that type person, and I still am not, that can get along in that world.

Q: You left there when?

TOLLE: I left in 1972. Another one of those odd things. I debated a great deal of time as to what I wanted to do. Did I want to stay? It is a long, complex process that eventually resolved itself down to my saying that I could no longer continue to work in a cause in which I did not believe, for an agency which I despised. I think had I remained out in the field my decision might have been very, very different. I don't want to guarantee that, because it was very frustrating to work in the field also and have to fill out these reports and send in a voucher for expenses and have it come back two months later because I sent in three copies instead of four copies and this sort of thing. Be that as it may, I was recruited to stay. Jacobson wrote me a letter asking me to stay. Colby, who had taken a personal interest in me because he was a friend of my father's and I had met him when he visited my refugee projects urged me to sign on for another tour.

This was a major decision because for all of my life from puberty on I had aimed towards a career in the Foreign Service. Although the option of joining it was still there, this was about the time I could have taken the exam again, it began to be apparent to me that this was not for me. What I had prepared all my life to do, if you will, I was good at: on the front

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war. I never had a problem with the Vietnamese in the sense that I worked with the corrupt and the lazy and everything else but managed to work with them. I had a great deal of tolerance for other cultures, but almost none for my own.

So, I made the decision to leave and ran into another one of those personnel regulations. If you were terminated, you got better travel arrangements than if you resigned. So, instead of resigning I applied for a position in Latin America, knowing full well that I would never get it. Thus I am terminated instead of resigning and I got better terms, etc.

So, in the summer of 1972, my wife and I departed, never to return.

Q: Could you very quickly give me the genesis of why we are doing this? You now, 20 odd years later, are doing a dissertation. Could you explain this?

TOLLE: I probably need to go back a little bit more than that. At the time I did not fully appreciate what Vietnam was doing to me. I knew it was a major change. For example, I bought a Winnebago motor home through the overseas purchase program and my wife and I lived in Mexico. Six months later I came out of hibernation and I went to work as a carpenter's apprentice for \$3 an hour. I completely changed my life style. For about the next decade or so I attempted to make a living in a field for which I quite frankly was not particularly well suited to. My body began to give out, back problems, etc. I developed a number of emotional problems. This was nothing like flashbacks or anything like that. But, it was only slowly that I began to become aware of this and I decided that I needed to work through my past. So, at about age 40 I went back to graduate school to study history.

Q: Where?

TOLLE: At Villanova.

Q: You couldn't stay out of the Catholic orbit.

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TOLLE: Well, I happened to live very close to Villanova and it was the best option as it turned out. So, I gradually found myself focusing in on Vietnam. Prior to that time I had shut Vietnam out of my life. The collapse of 1975 is an extraordinarily personal experience for me. As soon as the marine division broke at Hue, I started telling my friends that it was all over, even though at this time in the press we were hearing about fall back scenarios, etc. I said that is it, we are out of here. My father was province senior advisor in Kontum, the second province to fall, and he got an hour's notice. He got a call saying that a plane was coming in for him in an hour and he was to load everything he could on that plane and then he was out of there. The NVA walked in just after he left. Again, a very emotional time.[change of tape]

From the time I left Vietnam I began to shut it out of my mind, and with the collapse in 1975 it became just literally buried. It became an emotional thing with me and I almost denied it. I would not see Vietnam war movies, for example. I wouldn't talk about it, I could not deal with it. At the same time it became apparent that I could not continue to make a living in the construction field and I decided it was time, and this was almost an unconscious decision, this wasn't "I must go back and deal with my past." I went back and in spite of looking for other areas of history to interest myself, I kept coming back to Asia. I kept coming back to Southeast Asia and eventually Vietnam. It became to be significant to me that I had to work through this problem.

So, really the dissertation, if you will, is the culmination of an effort to put my life back together after Vietnam. I have deliberately chosen to focus on the aspects of the pacification program in Vietnam, programs that I was not personally involved with; I am not dealing with refugees. Names were coming back to me as I shifted from participant to historian, which is a very different mind set. In other words I have been professionally trained for the past several years to conduct historical surveys and now I am attempting to conduct one on a subject in which I was a participant. This is a quagmire for historians in many, many ways and is something I have to work on. It is something that I think only

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now, 20 some years later, am I competent to do because I have gradually mastered the emotional elements and now can go back. Up until last night I had never looked at my personnel file after leaving Vietnam.

So, the dissertation is an attempt to analyze what for lack of a better term, although I don't like the term, I call nation building, an academic trend at the time, not pacification. I separate the two in an attempt not so much to go in and make the initial quick security pacification survey, but the programs that we attempted to put in and urged upon the GVN to establish long term relationships and a long term bonding between the people and the government. Now, that was the surface. Below that is an American attempt to direct both the pace and the nature of change in underdeveloped societies. We brought to a rural Oriental (although I hate that term), society, a Western technology in an enormous amount, Western attitudes, Western assumptions, Western beliefs in the proper form of government, the proper structure of government, the proper role, and attempted to guide Vietnam. It has been said that we tried to build a nation in South Vietnam. I contend that what we attempted was succession and not nation building.

This is an example I think that we can learn from, because although it represents the most significant example, in terms of money, expenditure, individuals, the extent to which we penetrated the subject society, etc., it is the greatest example of America's giving a path to modernity to the other peoples of the world. At the time it was built within this Marxist/ Western dichotomy which were the two choices for the world. Well, that is over. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Marxism as an alternative, the Western way, epitomized by the United States is the only route, we seem to implicitly say, open for people to "develop".

So the dissertation itself is on the surface a study of our efforts in Vietnam but it is really aimed at discerning the existence of...again I put this in conditional terms because I haven't arrived at any conclusions yet...this American attitude toward what I broadly call the underdeveloped world. Our assumptions of how they should live their lives, how they

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should organize, in effect to emulate us. One finds it in a great many different ways and I think that Vietnam is a rich source of information for this, but that the studies that have been done, and there haven't been very many, on the civilian efforts have almost entirely neglected this aspect of it, for a large number of reasons, not the least of which is that most of the sources for study are military sources. One does find books. There was one published not too long ago called "Pacification", ostensibly a survey of pacification, which it was. I found it to be informative in many ways, but I found it to be very, very much the example of this approach...Let's take a look at the programs themselves and see whether they "worked" or "not worked," and unfortunately to derive our information from military sources.

So, when you look at this book, for example, and I don't mean to pick on it but it is the one comprehensive attempt, there is almost nothing about civilians in Vietnam. I think this is something that we have to deal with in the short term because it is an incomplete aspect of our history and as America comes to deal with Vietnam, which we are still in the process of doing, I think it is significant. I think in the larger sense it is significant because the attitudes that we demonstrated there and the things that we attempted to do to change the social, economic and political structure of Vietnamese life, are useful and lessons can be extracted from them that will help us in our future relationships as a nation with the vast majority of the world, as the East/West dichotomy gives way to the North/South, to greatly simplify, I think this is where the work needs to be done.

Q: Just one final question before we wrap this up. Something that I watch with a certain amount of bemusement and that is many of the historians dealing with World War II...should we have dropped the atomic bomb, etc...I am 68 years old now and I was just a kid but I was following this rather closely because I was coming up to draft age. How often the historians to my mind just plain get it wrong. I mean, they are judging it essentially by Vietnam standards and how there is a government plot to do this when really it is just getting on with the job. You are of the professors' age now, but the point is you have field experience where so many of the people who did it were essentially the guys who got draft

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deferments often and stayed back and didn't think the world would stay that way and have sort of brought their rage against the government. Have you found this a problem?

TOLLE: I don't know if it is a problem so much as in effect an opportunity, the way I look at it. But, indeed, the attitude that you talk about I think is very real. My supervising professor, for example, for my dissertation, a man for whom I have profound professional respect and personal respect, is a year younger than I am. He was indeed anti-war at that time and you can see not only in him but in almost everybody of that era historians were shaped by the Vietnam experience. And, as you mention, when they study even older events, they take their intellectual capital that they invested as Kissinger would put it before they were 21, and have applied that across the board. Not only does this create problems, I think it is very significant, as you mention, in this question on whether or not to drop the bomb, this post facto kind of discussion.

Q: It is so idiotic in my mind that somehow this was done to stop the Soviets. There really wasn't any choice.

TOLLE: Not perceived to be. Your choice is well taken in the sense that people who come from purely an academic or did not have experience in it, in many cases not so much as get it wrong but really don't quite get it right either. They are professionals, and I think, although I mentioned their attitudes and their shaping, trained historians can to a degree get through this. But that, which I am noticing in my study of Vietnam, is undertaken by people who were never there. Having been there is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is a disadvantage in an emotional sense and is one you have to be very, very careful of. But, I can begin my work and base my work on an understanding of what it was like because I was there. And many of them because they never really got the opportunity, and the records are not available for them to learn about it, we lost most of them in Saigon in 1975, anything that didn't get cabled back is gone, are in many cases building their castles on lack of a firm foundation. So, I think in that regard my ability to remember how it was and to remember not just the physical and many of the attitudes,

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the just get your work done, get on with the job. Historians have a tendency to write like, using the President as an example, he has all of these incredible options and sits down and makes these decisions. In fact, it is not like that at all. As Kennedy said, "When do I have time to think? You just live on a day to day basis."

So that kind of understanding I think is important in presenting a more rounded picture of this. At the same time it cannot be allowed to emotionally influence the work. This is a work of history that I am engaged in now. While my past hour or so with you I have attempted to stay in a participant's mode, when I shift into my historian mode I attempt to take a different approach. But, I think that my experiences there are of great value, on balance much greater than the disadvantage of having been there and that it is a unique opportunity, I think, to enrich not just a particular area of subject but a way to write about American diplomatic history that those who write about it strictly from the outside simply can never get.

Q: Great. We will stop here.

End of interview