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### Interview with former director of the CIA William Colby

Cecil B. Currey

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Side 1 - Interview with William E. Colby, former CIA Director, at his home -  
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CBC: This tape, which will be recorded on 24 June 1984 (1985) at 11:00 a.m., consists of an interview of Cecil Currey with former CIA Director, William E. Colby.

I appreciate very much your taking time out of your schedule to meet with me today.

First there is a real simple question, Mr. Colby. When they talk about an agent under deep cover. What does deep cover mean?

WEC: Means non-official. Essentially, it means under private cover.

CBC: Could you give me an example?

WEC: Work for the XYZ Export Corporation.

CBC: And that would be opposed to just plain cover?

WEC: Cover is any kind of thing, whether it's really serious or not. Many people in embassies are known to certain people and even to the local intelligence authorities...

CBC: Well, what kind of cover would this be? General Lansdale told me that when he went out to the Philippines as an intelligence officer, he went to the Philippines with the cover of an intelligence officer.

WEC: Well, as an official of the U.S. government.

CBC: Uhn, hunh.

WEC: Yeah. That would not be deep.

CBC: Uhn, hunh.

WEC: That would not be.

CBC: Uhn, hunh. OK.

Can you tell me when you were posted to the CIA Saigon desk?

WEC: '58. I left Italy after five years and went to the desk for a couple of months, to Vietnam. I arrived in Vietnam on TET '59. February, April, whatever it was.



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CBC: It was a little quieter than later, a more famous TET?

WEC: Yeah.

CBC: How did you meet Ed Lansdale?

WEC: Well, I think the first time I met him was when he visited Vietnam at the end of the Eisenhower regime and on behalf of the new Kennedy administration, and he arrived...I heard of him and his activities in the Philippines before, but I also knew that he was not associated with the Agency at the time. He had some job over in Defense, which had him dealing with the Agency; but as I recall, I hadn't dealt with him particularly at that stage.

CBC: Would you tell me what kinds of things you had heard about him before you met him?

WEC: Well, I heard that he had a great empathy for the Asians. His relationship with Magsaysay had <sup>been</sup> a very successful one, very close, <sup>one.</sup> supportive. ~~He had been~~ an idea man, man for bright ideas for political activities. I also knew that he was in Vietnam in the '54-55 period. I didn't know too much about him, although I knew that he had some very good relationships with Diem and had been supportive of Diem at a period when the United States government had its doubts whether it should stay with the French or go with the Nationalists. And Lansdale had been assigned the job of liaison with the Nationalists. Of course the Vietnamese, Diem...Nhu, the president's brother, was my main contact. He was a little dubious of the value of Lansdale's contributions and the specific ideas that he came up with.

CBC: When you say the president's brother, you are referring to Robert Kennedy?

WEC: No, Ngo Dinh Nhu.

CBC: Oh, ok, ok.



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WEC: President...

CBC: President Diem's brother, ok, ok.

WEC: Was a little dubious of it, but I had the feeling that he was also protecting his own position as the Counselor to President Diem, and so consequently it was never indicated while he was around, that it was marginal contribution. I don't think his contribution was marginal at all. He was very significant in bringing American support to Diem and keeping American support behind Diem at a time when he was going out, smashing the sect armies and things like that.

But when I met him on his trip in '60, '61, January '61 it was, he had been sent by the new administration...

(Telephone rings)

Sorry.

CBC: You said that when you met him in January of '61...

WEC: '61. He was over to look at the situation for the new administration because the new administration had expressed an interest in counter insurgency, was concerned about the direction of events in Vietnam, which by then it was obvious that the Communists were building up their forces and building up their attack on the government of South Vietnam. And he came over to get a look at it. He was particularly, I think, a little dubious about the CIA role, because he was a little questioning how we were going into these various rural experiments that we were going into, of organizing local defense and local activities.

CBC: CIDG was a CIA operation?

WEC: That was still a CIA operation at that time, and, you know, some other comparable experiments we were running. And I think he was curious...he was a little curious as to whether they were real. But he had some good contacts



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WEC: on the Vietnamese side; the President obviously; I think he saw Nhu;  
and he particularly took a trip down the Delta with <sup>Thuan</sup>~~Thanh (sp?)~~--Defense  
Minister at the time, was Secretary of State, <sup>Thuan</sup>~~Thanh (?)~~. I can't remember  
what he was. I'll think of it. And I think he was convinced by what the  
Vietnamese told him that we were doing, and that we seemed to be very supportive  
and that our experiments offered some very interesting potential.

CBC: Uhn, hunh.

WEC: So I think he went home with a much more positive attitude than when he  
had arrived. Of course, we were treating him a little bit with kid gloves  
because the rumor circuit had that he might become the new Ambassador. So we  
were obviously presenting ourselves as well as we could, and trying to convince  
him that some of our experiments were in the right direction. They were trying  
to build rural security rather than taking the military approach to the war.

CBC: How well do you think you actually were able to achieve that during  
those years?

WEC: Which...

CBC: Civilianized approach rather than a military one.

WEC: Well, I think the major contribution that we made was that our experi-  
ments began to interest Ngo Dinh Nhu, that with some alteration of some of the  
details, he essentially took it as the strategy for the strategic hamlets.  
And turned it into a nationwide program which, I think, worked quite well during  
'62 until the Buddhists trouble arose in '63. At that time, the whole thing  
fell apart. But they were on the proper strategy and both Diem and Nhu had  
selected strategic hamlets as the right way to fight the peoples war; to build  
up the local level, to build security and community identification and participa-  
tion.



CBC: Well, it sounds like the sort of thing that Lansdale had not only urged earlier on when he was there full time, but that he had worked on in the Philippines also.

WEC: Yeah, well in the Philippines he was more...he was dealing with an established electoral system, and the question there was how to get President Macsaysay elected and then how to get some of these politically oriented programs going in the countryside to face up to the Huks. In Vietnam you did not have much of a political structure; you had a much more direct confrontation in the villages, and it needed rural organization from the bottom up, rather than programs from the top down. And that's what we were trying to develop out of these strategic hamlet programs. Ngo Dinh Nhu got a little overpressurized on it, wanting to achieve very rapid results very quickly and that created a little...he used to rail against the bureaucrats all the time, that they would lie to him about the progress and so forth. He knew they were lying to him, that, you know, like a good strategy, once you have the right idea, then push it hard, and accept the fact that there are going to be failings in it. You correct those, but you don't abandon the strategy. You don't pussy foot the strategy just because you have failings in it, but you push it harder. And that was his concept, and I think he was right.

CBC: You spoke about Nhu being concerned about the bureaucracy that wasn't pushing his program well enough. Well, Lansdale told me once that he feels that <sup>perhaps</sup> one of the most essential things to have been done in Vietnam was actually to create a bureaucracy.

WEC: Uhn hunh.

CBC: That under the French....

WEC: Yeah.

CBC: ...they had such low level positions...



WEC: Yeah. Well, you see, the problem was when the Communists took over in North Vietnam, they drove into exile or murdered most of the previous bureaucracy. They had a very bad time for three or four years. They finally created their own bureaucracy, their own management structure. When Diem took over, he was so weak, literally; he only controlled the space of his palace grounds, that he wasn't about to be able to eliminate bureaucracy, and what he did was absorb it with all its French failings. And then in a gradual process, set up a national administration on the model of the one that was set up in France, immediate post-war era from which people like Giscard D'Estaing came, and his thought then was to use the American educational system, put there in the American Civil Service concept, to develop a new bureaucracy and gradually replace the old one and not destabilize the situation totally while he was trying to put a new one in. Nhu's concept in the strategic hamlet was quite different, and I think, very interesting in that he was complaining about the class structure in the bureaucrats, and the establishment, the colonial establishment, that ran the country. Of course, he was a part of it, but he was still complaining, you see. And I thought, very well. His concept of strategic hamlet was less a security matter than a generating factor for a new base for a new Vietnam. He felt that the new leadership of Vietnam would come out of these role communities if you could just get them functioning and organized, then the new leaders would come up with real Vietnamese ideas rather than French colonial ideas on how the country should be run. And it's a very interesting social experiment. It was conducted during a war and obviously had obstacles to it greater than we could handle. But this is not an abnormal thing. Of course, other countries have tried this same kind of regeneration...to try to generate a new fundamental national base for their country.



CBC: Well, when Lansdale came over on this mission, how long did he visit the country at that point?

WEC: About two weeks. Something like that.

CBC: And did you have pretty much day-by-day contact with him?

WEC: No, we had one session and then a couple more, maybe. One or two more. And he would see some of our officers out in the field; that sort of thing. I deliberately didn't try to take hold of him, because I wanted to just present our case and then let him make up his own mind. Actually the thing that supported our case more than anything were the Vietnamese. They felt that it was working.

CBC: Would you say that as a result of your work and his, that you are friends or speaking acquaintances or...

WEC: We're...we're colleagues who agree on a great number of things about how the nature of the war out there was more a political war than a soldier's war. We don't see each other that often, but we are quite friendly when we see each other. I have great respect for him and I think he thinks my programs made a certain amount of sense.

CBC: He likes you.

WEC: Well...

CBC: I was with him yesterday and...

WEC: Well, I think we both like each other, but we don't ever see each other that much. I feel very warm and friendly and very supportive of him. I'm sure that he has things that I did that he kind of questions, and I am sure that there are things that he did, that I kind of question. But, you know, that's incidental, from a friendship. The main line, total agreement.

CBC: He said that you had written a piece called "The Ten Great Spies" or



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CBC: something like that.

WEC: Oh, yeah, yeah. I put him in it.

CBC: Yeah, that's what he was saying. Do you happen to have a copy of that around? I wouldn't want you to jump up at this instant, but if you have a copy I would very much enjoy borrowing it long enough to get a Xerox.

(Pause as looks for paper)

WEC: The name of this Vietnamese I<sup>mentioned before</sup> was Nguyen (sp?) Thuan, T H U A N.

He was Secretary of State at that time; he later became Minister of Defense.

CBC: Ok, shifting subjects. I managed to get from the Air Force Lansdale's service record. The thing, as you can imagine, is about that thick. And having gone through it, I am puzzled, because...

WEC: How did he become a Major General?

CBC: Well, that's part of it. He doesn't pilot an airplane; he is not a maintenance officer; he's gone to only one Air Force Stats School, although he was asked to teach at the National War College and places like that; he's never commanded a Wing or any of the other Air Force normal things; yet, he is the very model of a modern Major General.

(Laughter)

WEC: He...now the military do throw up people like this. They are a little off the beat, the normal line, but I can think of a number of them. George Benson, actually Vern Walters, our new Ambassador to the United Nations, is a specific example. He never commanded a squad, and yet he ended as a Lt. Genral. He was one of two graduates of the Officers Candidate School who got to be stars.

CBC: Well.

WEC: And he did it by his magnificent command of languages, his ability to be in exactly the right place at the right time, to be a very

WEC: loyal and effective officer, dealing with foreigners, Brazilians, Italians, French, whatever, and a very good deputy to me in the CIA. Just a fine intelligence officer, but not what you would call a regular Army soldier. George Benson was very prominent in Indonesian affairs as military attache there, got to know everybody in Indonesia. Came up, he got his star in Vietnam where he had a brigade for awhile in order to punch his tickets, but he's retired now; but there are a number of others of that sort that come up through the machine. And Lansdale obviously, he had a very unique contribution to be made to our country, not just to the Air Force, and he found his really most fruitful contributions in the Magsaysay period, the Diem period, and later on Lodge was very high on him, you know, when he was over in Vietnam with Lodge...

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: And when he worked in the Pentagon in various of those staff jobs, wherever they all are, he, of course, was highly regarded by the Kennedys and so forth.

CBC: It's very interesting. Well, I know how military promotion boards work. When they pull out his OER's to look at to determine whether to promote him, and it says, work classified under national security.

WEC: Well, yeah, but then something will come in from the top.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: ...says, come on now...

CBC: Well, particularly given the fact that I think he's totally frank with me when he says he never really cared about rank...

WEC: No, I don't think he cared about it at all. That was the least of his problems. No, he was very much interested in the work to be done.



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CBC: It's also obvious from looking at the service record and seeing who signs the periodic fitness reports that he was working for the CIA.

WEC: For certain parts of the time.

CBC: Except...I don't think Lansdale's a liar.

WEC: Oh, no.

CBC: Yet, he says he never...this is probably technical...he was never a member...I think he says a member...I was never a member of the CIA.

WEC: Well, that's true. He was like Dick Stillwell <sup>who was seconded</sup> /to CIA for awhile when we badly needed some officers. And he worked there a couple of years and worked there, but not a member of...in other words, he still retained his Army rank, his Army identification. Lansdell certainly was <sup>assigned</sup> / to work with CIA which was a period in '54 and a period in Magsaysay time, those two...

CBC: Uhn hunh  
...were

WEC: /the only time I think he worked for CIA directly and he was on detail. Like a...officer...attached...

CBC: to the Army War College. Uhn huhn.

WEC: Yeah. Yeah. But that wouldn't make him a member of the CIA, no.

CBC: Well, he was also a member of a thing called the Office of Policy Coordination. That's what sent him out to Asia in the first place. Which is a part of CIA.

WEC: It became a part of CIA. When it was set up in, that would have been 40'---

CBC: I think it was '48.

WEC: It was one of these things that we do...it was under the joint management of CIA and the State Department.

CBC: Uhn hunh.



WEC: Well, it used CIA financing, financial help. And when Beedle ~~(X?)~~ Smith became head of CIA in '52, he said he wasn't going to have the thing around unless he commanded it. ....(unintelligible) where Beedle ~~(X?)~~ Smith spoke about things like that, and so they transferred it to CIA. They spent a long time integrating it with the more traditional intelligence side, intelligence collection side of CIA. And that, you know; it was a bureaucratic team over <sup>side</sup> many years depending on whether you came out of the action / or the collection.

CBC: Now, there was OPC and there was OSO; Office of Special Operations, Office of Politic Coordination

WEC: The names don't mean anything.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: But when he was in...working for Lodge in '54-5, I think it was, he was not working for CIA.

CBC: Right. Yeah.

I guess if anything, he was working for State Department. He had the rank of Minister.

WEC: He probably...yeah, he probably was assumed by the State just the way, when I want sent out there I was turned over and began to work for AID.

CB: He says that was a very uncomfortable period in his life, because the military no longer trusted him because he was now State, and the State didn't trust him because he was past military with just kind of a courtesy rank of Minister.

WEC: Well, you have to realize that; I mean, we had at that period between two and....and the bureaucracies were really intense on their perogatives and their...and Lansdale kind of cut across them. He was assigned as kind of a personal adviser to Lodge and then he stayed there for awhile. But he didn't have a program to run, and so he wasn't a program manager. Everybody



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WEC: else was running programs, and he was an idea man and a critic. And the ~~people~~ people running programs would be very jealous of their relationship with their Vietnamese counterparts, and when another American would come in from the side, would confuse both the Vietnamese and the Americans as to just who was running the railroad.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: And that's why that mission-I think it did some very useful thinking, had some interesting ideas, it never got off the ground in terms of producing what he produced for Magsaysay. <sup>Because</sup> ~~xx~~ he didn't have that kind of structure when he was with Magsaysay or he had the CIA to use as his program; as his program, <sup>But</sup> and he could reach in and get some money and use it for that. /in the period in Saigon he didn't really have a program...(pause) related to the Ambassador and the Vietnamese were a little confused as to where he fit into the scheme of it.

CBC: It bothers me a little bit, I guess, unless I totally misunderstand him, he was a man with a good track record, who comes into Vietnam at this point to try to figure out some way to try to help the situation get better rather than just stutter along from bad to worse. Yet almost everybody resented him, and you're talking to me about...

WEC: Did you ever see Bob Komer's piece about "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing"?

CBC: Yes, I have. Yeah.

WEC: It's all there.

CBC: Bob Komer is one of those who despised Lansdale.

WEC: Well, he saw him as competitive. For obvious reasons, he...

CBC: Phil Habil, you know...

WEC: They had very comparable obligations.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: ...and yet Bob was running a major program and he couldn't see just how Lansdale fit into it and...

CBC: But did he want to see how Lansdale fit into it? I think that's what bothers me a little bit. I see a kind of protective jealousy here that...

WEC: Well, you have bureaucratic...the turf wars that exist anywhere...

CBC: Oh, we have them at the University...

WEC: Yeah, I realize that...Universities have as many as anybody... corporations...it isn't just a government problem.

But the problem is that Lansdale's assignment at that period was fairly fuzzy; he didn't have a clear-cut mission, and it was sort of, go over and find something useful. Well, everybody was busily engaged in Program A, Program B, Program C, Program D and each thought that those programs were terribly useful... and to find him sort of on the outside, you know, wandering around it, made them very uncomfortable.

CBC: Well, Lodge even tells him at one point, stop going out in the countryside. Don't talk directly with Vietnamese. But that was his genius.

WEC: Yeah. Sure.

CBC: Uh...

WEC: Well, what should have been done was, he should have been brought into one of the programs. I mean by the time the program got sufficiently articulated, he was gone...when did he leave... '68 sometime wasn't it?

CBC: Was he there during...he was there during TET. That's right, he was.

WEC: I think he left...

CBC: So it must have been '69.

WEC: I think he left not long after that.

CBC: Uhn hunh.



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WEC: He left...pacification program was getting going...

CBC: He was telling me about some Lt. Col., Army commander sometime during TET, who was trying to find some Viet Cong in some of the areas of town and he was using artillery to blast apart these cheap little shanties, and Lansdale said that he remonstrated with the Col. that those people have spent months and months building those shanties, and you are just blowing them apart in a matter of minutes, and there are Viet Cong in only one of those houses anyway. So he felt very frustrated with that kind of military response.

WEC: And you can understand what the military would then say.

CBC: Oh, yes.

WEC: I mean, this Lt. Col., battery...battalion commander, and here comes an Air Force Major General--which he was by then...

CBC: He would have been by that time, yes.

WEC: ...in on him and talking about don't knock those buildings down, and he's got his orders from his division commander to move through that area, you know...it's fairly typical of the problems he would get into.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: ...because he really wasn't part of it, you know. If a staff officer of the division came down, could say, oh, come on...he would be fitting in with the organizational events. But when Lansdale came in from the outside, you know...like having a newsman criticize you.

CBC: Unh hunh.

WEC: I mean, I'm not justifying it but it is a fact of life.

CBC: I understand.

Lansdale said that after that particular incident, the Vietnamese with whom he had worked for years said, we don't want any American to come

CBC: in saying anything to us. It had really disappointed them. And of course, he carries that same kind of disappointment even now.

Well, I was talking about a nameless Army Lt. Col. battalion commander-- for a long time Lansdale was just an Air Force Lt. Col., and I'm not sure just how such things work. Maybe you can help me out on this. He talks about coming back from the Philippines as a Lt. Col. He hadn't seen his wife Helen with for awhile, so/ her and the boys, they went off on a Florida vacation, and only a day or so after they had gotten to Florida, he says he was interrupted by a telephone call from John Foster Dulles. Now, he won't explain that, but, you see, I'm also a Lt. Col. in the Army Reserves so I had some idea of the lack of worth of somebody of that rank--what is the Secretary of State, whose brother is against CIA, doing calling directly a Lt. Col.?

WEC: Well, I can envisage that. John would have been proud of what he did in the Philippines and he possibly... we thought to listen <sup>to</sup> this guy; he's got some very interesting ideas and experience. I know...I had an incident that I just casually mentioned in the book, specifically nameless, where I was given a very secret agent to run who had been in the country for quite awhile, and I didn't know anything about him...and I discovered in his background, he used to wander in the country and make his inquiries and go back. On one occasion he was picked up on a street corner by a limousine with Allen and Foster in it...

CBC: Oh, my.

WEC: And he briefed them both. Now I about lost my mind. That's the wrong way to run the intelligence service.

CBC: Unh hunh.

WEC: Raw material and raw opinion going smack in at the policy level. But with that background, I can understand easily how Foster might have called him.



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CBC: And said, we have this crisis...

WEC: Because frequently, you know, the people at the policy level, they get so much refined stuff that they are dying to get a straight account from somebody. President Kennedy used to rip open the cables from the field and read them before they went through the refining. I think we are a little more sophisticated now, but...but, there is that hunger at the top level to get a real feel of what's happening.

CBC: Well, we've talked several times about his role in the Philippines. Are you able to talk about what help CIA offered him in the Philippines?

WEC: I just don't know. I was in Europe at that time. All I know is sort of the aurora of it. He helped Magsaysay. He may have been substantially responsible for identifying him as a comer, and then establish his electoral campaign.

CBC: Well, I picked this up very...

WEC: But I don't know. I don't know that of direct knowledge. It's all hearsay.

CBC: I picked this up spottily that printing plants that were printing ballots for the opposition suddenly found themselves having mechanical problems, with the occasional fire; he had people with some money...

WEC: Well, now, now, Lansdale, his real contribution was his positive thinking where he thinks, you know, why don't you make the appeal along the following lines. Why don't you develop a song that the cadre can sing to identify them. There he's a genius.

CBC: I think that's true.

WEC: Where he really puts his foot in it is some of these fun and games dirty tricks, which is part of what comes out in the Pentagon papers about...

CBC: ...the Saigon military regime?

WEC: No...

CBC: Lou Conein up there destroying the buses of Hanoi?

WEC: No, no...I mean that, you know...that isn't going to do anything.

Those of us who have been in that kind of operation know that those things really are...once in awhile they kind of work, but usually are a bloody nuisance. But the really positive action can be of enormous....

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: And that's where Lansdale's real contribution is, that he can think of something like this.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: He got interested in some poet in Vietnam; singer and poet and, you know, brought him up; made a thing out of him. People began to identify with him. Well, that's good, because it gets somebody thinking positive. Rallying strength, gathering strength. Psychologically, politically, whatever. But going out and blowing up streetcars...doesn't help at all.

CBC: I've been a little amused about that. According to several sources that I have talked with, prior to migration from north to the South Vietnam, the west was thinking that maybe 10 - 15,000 might move south.

WEC: Uhn hunh.

CBC: And Lansdale said, hey, let's really encourage these people. They got almost a million.

WEC: Yeah.

CBC: And the same man who helps them think about large numbers and <sup>then</sup> turns around and tries to sabotage the gas tanks of city buses...

WEC: Yeah.

CBC: It's a strange...disjuncture...



WEC: Well, because...there was that period when we got into it where we think, well, by God, do something to them. And I ran the parachute operations into North Vietnam for awhile, and I came to the conclusions that they were effectless. We weren't getting anywhere. And I recommended they be dropped. It was just when we turned that whole project over to the military, and the military were out there going, well, by God, we'll do it the right way; we'll do a lot of it and it will have an impact...

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: There is this: we have to do to them what they've done to us kind of philosophy, instead of picking a positive strategy and then going with it.

CBC: Well, he helped convince some of the hot brands (?) in the Philippines that the best way to work with the Huks was to take their program away from them.

WEC: Yeah, sure. Better revolution than...

CBC: That's right. That's right.

You know he helped...

WEC: The way to stop guerrillas is not to shoot 'em; it's to recruit 'em. That's how you eliminated guerrillas.

CBC: Would you shake hands with a college professor?

(Laughter)

WEC: That's my line. Been that way forever...

CBC: I really am very much in support of that position.

WEC: Absolutely; no doubt about it. You know we talked about, I'm responsible of course, for the Phoenix program, but it wasn't any program of killing men. What it was trying to do was identify who they were so that they could be captured...

CBC: ...interrogated...

convinced to rally or  
WEC: ...and if necessary, shot out...but the deaths were deaths primarily  
in fights outside the village and which our people used to complain about.  
They said, look, you are crediting all these people killed, and they were just  
killed in regular military action; they weren't killed in anything that Phoenix  
did. Our officers used to be sort of ? about it; they figured they  
were gone but we had their names earlier and they hadn't rallied and they  
hadn't been captured and they were killed. That's what happened to them. After  
we found one, that's what happened to them. But the real thing that happened  
was the North Vietnamese, rather strange thing now, credited the Phoenix program  
with enormous effectiveness...In Tarnow's (Carnow's) book...let me think...  
(pause). But I still think that they have confused the pacification program  
with Phoenix; that the pacification program was a larger program...

CBC: Uhn hunh...

WEC: ...involved local elections and getting local government going and  
the refugee resettlement program; all those were part of the pacification  
program, and there is absolutely no doubt about it, between '6---oh, must be  
early '69 and the end of, about '72, you pretty well stripped the country of  
guerrillas, but you didn't shoot 'em; you recruited 'em.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: Well, we set up a self defense corp, peoples self defense force,  
and the idea was that people contribute to guarding their home town, home  
village. And they spend one night a week, two nights a week on guard.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: ...the kids in the neighborhood, keep a batch of rifles and hand  
them out in the evening and pick them up in the morning. Pass them around the  
next night. They don't pay them and they are not soldiers; they don't fight



WEC: very well; you don't expect them to. But what you did, I mean, I personally have driven through the countryside at midnight, outside of Hue on Christmas of '70...

CBC: By yourself...

WEC: With the province chief, the British Ambassador and me in one jeep. One other jeep with a couple of other officers behind, and we went for a ride at midnight way out in the country...and you drive along and in the headlights (unintelligible)...fellows up there with guns, which they would have shot your head off two years before...

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: Because you have given them guns. We had a big argument about that, whether to arm the local communities like that. The argument was, weapons will go to the enemy. They have got all the weapons they need, they don't need your weapons. The other was that we would lose the weapons. Well, we'll lose some, but every man holding one of our guns is on our side. And that's... I said, you may lose 20 per cent of the guns; we actually lost about 3 or 4 per cent. Well, they won't fight very well. That's right; we don't expect them to. All we want is to take communities that used to be vulnerable to five men with five pistols walking in and dominating the village, it could no longer be entered by five men with five pistols; they will be shot at. And their unit will come and they will run away. Fine, it's all right with me.

CBC: It's sort of a civilian self protection program that Father Wah ran...

WEC: Yeah, yeah, but that was the basis of the strategic hamlet program. We handed out a million guns; no, 500,000, excuse me. 500,000 guns. The one rule, I said, was no pistols. I knew that in the Philippines, thanks to World War II, where we dropped the damn ? all over the country, that was one of the problems with elections and crime and everything else. A rifle



WEC: is a good self defense gun, but it's not a very good murder weapon or crime weapon.

CBC: Not in a crowd.

WEC: No, it isn't. So I said all the rifles you want. You know, we have got 500,000 of them--hand them out. But no pistols. And we didn't have... but the result was we recruited these large numbers of young people to protect their communities, which some of them thought they were doing when they were working for the Communists.

CBC: That's right.

Lansdale said, it's a very simplified way of looking at it, but I think it's important. He says, in a peoples war, you take the people away from the war...

WEC: Sure.

CBC: And then all you have left are bandits you kill.

WEC: Get the people on your side; get the people on your side. Then you have to know what the structure of the enemy is, the real apparatus that runs... that's what Phoenix was about. To identify who those are and pick them out, and put them in the hoosegow or get them to change. And, you know, it doesn't do any good to, as you say, to shoot up a whole lot of shanties. That's a job, too. Get some evidence as to who reports, of who is the local tax collector, then get two or three of them, now where, how often does he come, where does he come; grab him.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: The Mafia type. Trace him.

CBC: Well, that's over simplified.

WEC: A Mafia can dominate a community.

CBC: What do you mean can; they do.

WEC: They do, unless you aid a community against them and (b) you can focus



Side 1 - Interview with William E. Colby, former CIA Director, at his home -  
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WEC: on those Mafia members, not the community as a whole.

CBC: Yeah, the recent court trials in Naples, for instance. Mafia figures...

WEC: Yeah.

CBC: ...It's actually a very brave thing being done, because the...

WEC: ...enormously courageous...they lost a few generals on that...

CBC: Uhn hunh and a few judges...

WEC: Yeah. But you still have to fight them.

CBC: Just two more things.

WEC: Sure.

CBC: Why do you think Lansdale fell under such disfavor during the Kennedy regime and even up into the Johnson regime; perhaps more so in the Johnson regime, after under Eisenhower and early-Kennedy he had been so well thought of?

WEC: Well, he was...he is a bit of an unguided missile from the point of view of the bureaucracy, be it military or civilian. His favor lay at the irregular area when he worked for CIA, or when he was a presidential adviser with ideas. But when the bureaucracy took over to run their programs, that was when they were very suspicious of him and the Pentagon was the one that said, no thanks, they didn't want him to be Ambassador.

CBC: I heard it was George Ball.

WEC: Well, I don't know who it was, but anyway, somebody like that... to put into that job. He's not an organizer. Well, they put Cabot Lodge in, who also was not an organizer. But he had a different political background; he was a senior Republican. Now, I think the bureaucracy couldn't handle Ed. That they just...he made them very uncomfortable and he sort of cut across their lines of command. (Unintelligible) And they just didn't want

WEC: him involved. Under the..then Cabot Lodge, who was an equal maverick, I mean, and certainly no organizational genius. I mean Cabot couldn't have been less interested in running a mission; he was looking around for things that needed ...articulate them and Lansdale and he were a good team in that regard. But of course, Lodge drove everybody crazy.

CBC: Including Lansdale.

(Laughter)

WEC: Well, probably. He drove everybody crazy. He wasn't an organizational man, and as I say, this was a huge organizational structure that was at work out there. And non-organizational men get ground up in huge organizational structures.

CBC: You are suggesting really that he would need another very top level, powerful protector to have remained effective during those years ?

WEC: What he really needed was to be put under somebody and...like myself, the pacification thing, and used as a member of the team, but used for his talents there, I guess. You know, Bob Thompson had the same problem. The British adviser.

CBC: Yes.

WEC: He had exactly the same problem. He was outside the procedure. I got along extremely well with Bob, even though we disagreed on some things, it didn't matter. I thought he was an absolute genius in the contribution he made to our efforts there. But military just couldn't stand him; the police program was up the wall everytime he opened his mouth. He would go in and brief the President or Henry and half the bureaucracy would quiver. I thought he was great.

But that's what he needed, was to be brought into a system somewhere, so that he could be used as a senior staff officer, a senior idea man...

(SIDE 1 ENDS)



WEC: But the idea being that you have to get those ideas and then bring them into a program or into a structure so that they then could come down through the proper staff...

CBC: I think that's very insightful because when he was in the Philippines, he was an idea man for Magsaysay who had the staff, who had the program who could expedite it...

WEC: Yeah. Who could put it together.

CBC: And it worked very well.

WEC: Yeah.

CBC: In Vietnam...

WEC: We have had a lot of lone operators, CIA types, who have established that kind of a very good personal relationship with a chief of government or foreign political figure. And by an enormous empathy of the kind that Lansdale has and basic support, been able...and don't read 'em official U.S. policy every morning; you know, just be out there, be obviously, I'm not speaking for the official U.S. government; here is just an idea for you. Now, then the trick of the trade is to make sure that he is not displacing the Ambassador. And the way we finally worked out to do that was separately we coordinated the Ambassador, so that Ambassador knows that he is in charge. And this is the tool. Now a good Ambassador can use something like that with enormous effect and say things that he as Ambassador can't say and hear things that he as Ambassador shouldn't hear. And it's a wonderful one-two relationship, depending on convincing the Ambassador that he is in charge. And we have had a number of those work very successfully, and we've had some where the CIA guy thought that he was the Ambassador and then you get an enormous fight right away. Or the Ambassador is so insecure that he is afraid to let anybody



WEC: else talk to the Chief of State. Then it doesn't work.

CBC: Lansdale was so much on his own in the Philippines and early on in Vietnam, so much on his own, that, you know, people like Iron Mike just sort of threw up their hands and let him do whatever he wanted to.

WEC: Yeah, yeah.

CBC: Could...

WEC: But when you get into the heart of a program, of a major program, then you are going to have resistance to that kind of free-wheeling.

CBC: Could you have controlled Lansdale, if he had been assigned to work for you?

WEC: Definitely. Yeah.

CBC: Do you think he would have worked happily?

WEC: I got along extremely well with John Paul Vann (sp?) and he was an equal maverick...

CBC: Oh, yes, yes.

WEC: Vann finally came to me at one point and said, you know, I believe so much in this program that I'm actually going to keep my mouth shut about it.

(Laughter)

WEC: I said, oh, come on, John...

(Laughter)

CBC: That's very interesting.

WEC: But...you think he'd listen to them. (unintelligible)

Don't get hangups. Some people do get hangups. But what it takes is the role of an artist, the role of a genius. It's a tough business and not always gets the recognition it should have and frequently gets the



WEC: opposition. You know great artists are like this. The  
establishments move against them when they come up with new ideas. The art  
world is accustomed to waiting fifty years for them to prove out.

CBC: By that time, of course, the artist is dead.

WEC: Yeah, he's dead. But nonetheless his art...

CBC: I think the artist would like the recognition during his life...

WEC: I think so.

CBC: Oh, yeah.

WEC: Sure. But the good artist is going to produce good art and count  
on it showing some day. And Ed is one of those.

CBC: I have heard that during the Eisenhower administration, Allen Dulles  
and John Foster suggested to Eisenhower that Lansdale be sent...be made  
Ambassador in Vietnam. Have you ever heard that story?

WEC: Well, only that his visit in the end of the Eisenhower thing was that  
he might become an Ambassador. I don't know. You mean during the '50's?

CBC: Yes.

WEC: 50's period.

CBC: The middle '50's.

WEC: I heard that story...I just don't know.

CBC: I've heard it from two different sources and I thought I'd try it out  
on you.

WEC: I just wouldn't know.

CBC: OK, lastly, Mr. Colby. See I haven't confused you once today.

(Laughter)

I felt like such a fool! Such a total fool!

WEC: Oh, no, don't be silly.

CBC: I thought maybe you smiled in your letter.

(Laughter)

If he had become Ambassador, do you think things in Vietnam might have taken a different course because of his support for the Diem regime? Another way to ask that, could the Diem regime have managed to improve with proper tutelage?

WEC: No, I don't think so. I think the Diem regime... I think the Diem regime was doing about as well as it would and actually it was better than most regimes that followed. That indeed when Thieu finally put his regime together, he made no secret of the fact that he essentially ran the country in the same way that Diem did.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: He thought that was the way it ought to be run. And I agree. I... you know, the thing that destroyed the Diem regime was the rather intense political attack on Diem, and the simplistic concept that only by being a real democrat could he fight off the Communists.

CBC: Uhn hunh.

WEC: Which really is irrelevant. I mean, that's not the way to fight off the Communists. The way to fight off the Communists is through strategic hamlets, some form of pacification program. Now if you say that if Lansdale had been there and had put our maximum support behind strategic hamlets in '62 and carried it on, he would not have been able to withstand the upheaval of the days (?). That picture of the Bonze on the front page of Life Magazine did it. Nothing could withstand it. Kennedy couldn't do it. Now, now we think of those Bonze that ran that as essentially doing to Diem what the Ayotollah Kohmeini did to the Shah.

CBC: Uhn hunh, uhn, hunh.



WEC: He took a reasonably good regime...

CBC: ...and he...

WEC: ...destroyed it and then replaced it with a much worse one. I mean, that's essentially what happened there. Now, you're not saying it's a perfect regime by a long shot, but the Diem regime...if we had focused on the war and the peoples' war nature of it, then it's my belief that it could have possibly been stopped about '65--'64...vigorous push of these strategic hamlets and putting them together and correcting the errors. But we had the right strategy. The Communists knew that. They have said so. They knew...  
Wilfred  
you know Burchett's comment that 1962 belonged to the government, Belonged to the government. They picked up the program and pushing and had the initiative in the battle.

CBC: That's really telling. That's a year before the assassination.

WEC: Yeah. Yeah.

CBC: Lansdale keeps saying that the worst problem wasn't the assassination on Diem and the coup but the fact that after Diem was assassinated, the duly elected constitutional vice president wasn't allowed to step into the office.

WEC: But he was hopeless.

CBC: But when you move away from the Constitution ...

WEC: He didn't, he couldn't...even fact reality. Tho.

CBC: I don't even remember who the guy was. What's his name?

WEC: Tho. T H O

CBC: Oh.

WEC: He was a nice gentleman. He actually turned up in one of the later governments.

CBC: Ok, I guess those are all the questions I have.

WEC: Well, you have got a very interesting subject and I am sure you will do it very well. He is a very interesting fellow, <sup>I think,</sup> If you look on it as to how do you...how do you deal with a maverick-artist in a large institutional bureaucracy; that's the problem. And there aren't any easy answers.

CBC: No, there aren't. And yet we need them both. <sup>Yes, we do.</sup>

WEC: Yes, we do. We need the large institutions, we need the discipline that they have. We also need the geniuses. How do you patch them together?

CBC: I probably won't come up with an eternal answer.

WEC: Well, I'm trying to...one thing I'm doing with my book is to say that Bob Komer, I think, had a glimmer of how you do it, which is, you ad hoc it. You see, instead of using the institutions as they are set, you ad hoc a structure for the project, and then you draw the support from the other agencies, involve them in some ad hoc management, that's what people don't understand about these things.

CBC: That's very much like Franklin Delano Roosevelt...

WEC: Yeah.

CBC: ...approach the New Deal.

WEC: Oh, yeah, whenever he had something that wasn't working he would form a new agency.

CBC: That's right.

WEC: And he didn't care if it contradicted four times with things that were already going on... He just, you know...

CBC: One of his biographers said that Roosevelt had no long-term vision. On any given six-month problem, he had a six-month answer.



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WEC: Well, I think, once you have formed a bureaucracy, you have got all the ills of it, and maybe you do well not to...I mean, people say why couldn't we institutionalize the (unintelligible). No way. It would become a dull bureaucracy, too. Form a new one.

CBC: How do I get into Vietnam? I have been writing to those miserable people for a year.

WEC: Speak to Karnow . He got there.

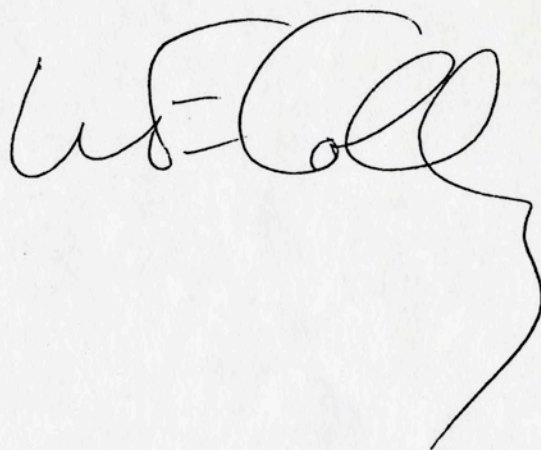
CBC: Yeah, he did.

END OF TAPE



In view of the historical value of  
this interview, I Wm E Colby  
knowingly & voluntarily permit  
Cecil B. Curvey the full use of this  
information for whatever uses it may  
have, including eventual deposit of this  
interview in a suitable, research library.

#5

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wm E Colby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards and to the right.