Allen L. Keiswetter
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[ANDREW T.]

CAROTHERS: So this is Andrew Carothers. Today is October 30th, 2015. It is 10:45 a.m. I am in Rauner [Special Collections] Library at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. And I'm interviewing Allen Keiswetter [pronouncing it CHAISE-wetter]. Oops, sorry. I think I might have—how do you pronounced your last name, again?

KEISWETTER: KEY-sweater, like "keyed" and a sweater, KEY-sweater.

CAROTHERS: KEY-sweater. All right. So I'm in Rauner Library, and I'm interviewing Allen Keiswetter, who is in Arlington, Virginia. All right.

Good morning, Allen. How are you?

KEISWETTER: Just fine, thank you.

CAROTHERS: Great. So the plan for the interview—I'd like to start off with your—your early life. It's going to be your childhood, your upbringing, and then we can move into your time at Dartmouth, and then your experience in Vietnam, and then anything you'd like to share about your—your post-Vietnam life, your perspectives on the Vietnam War now, looking back a few years later and how that experience has shaped you.

KEISWETTER: That sounds fine.

CAROTHERS: Great. So to start off with, where—where were you born?

KEISWETTER: I was born in Hastings, Nebraska, but this was where my mother's parents lived, and I grew up and spent most of my childhood in Kansas, in small towns: first Alton, which has a population of 300 people; Woodston, also about the same size; and in Great Bend, which is a thriving metropolis of 13,000.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.] All right. All right. And what year were you born in?

KEISWETTER: In 1944, June 3rd, three days before D-Day [the Normandy landings of World War II].

CAROTHERS: Three days before D-Day. All right. In 1944. So what was that like, being born—I mean, I imagine, obviously you don't remember the end of World War II, but what was that like being born and growing up—and probably some of your first memories of your childhood was in—was during this early Cold War period. And so as—from—as a relatively young child, do you remember anything about that Cold War context, and what was that like?

KEISWETTER: Well, before we turn to the Cold War and give you some idea, when I lived in Alton, a very small town and I was—what?—four or five, six years old, I would walk every night to my grandmother's house and get a pail of milk, as it was a sort of a rural community, and then help with plucking chickens and gathering of eggs and planting a garden. Anyways, I was thinking about it. It was a very pleasant, almost idyllic time.

And as to the Cold War situation, the first recollections that I really have of the Cold War would have been of the Korean War and the election of [Dwight D.] Eisenhower in 1952, and I remember very much listening to the radio and hearing Eisenhower saying, "I will go to Korea." It was part of his election platform. And there were truces and so on and so forth.

Later on, I do remember drills in case there was a nuclear [which he pronounces NUKE-u-lar] attack, and you may ask why would anybody attack the middle of Kansas [both chuckle], which is—which is a good question. But the answer to that was there were missile silos located in Kansas, and also Wichita was and is still an aircraft manufacturing city, and [the] Boeing [Company] had their largest plant in the United States there at that time, so it wasn't completely without rationale. I suppose the thought that somehow getting under your desk in a nuclear attack doesn't make much sense [chuckles], but nonetheless it was sort of my early recollections.

I can remember a little later, when I was living in Great Bend, that a group of Russian students came and we were talking to them, and I remember agreeing that the best thing we could do was learn each other's language. Of course, the answer to that was they had learned English [chuckles], and I don't remember anybody in Great Bend who spoke Russian.

CAROTHERS: That's funny.

KEISWETTER: I don't have strong—strong recollections of that period. I do remember—and this is when I was in the second grade, I think? That when [Soviet Union leader Joseph V.] Stalin died—and I was always—I was an international relations major, and a diplomat later, but I remember—probably my earliest memory was coming to my second grade class and telling my teacher that Stalin had died, and she wondered why I would know that. [Both chuckle.]

Those are very early recollections. And there were some more stories, but they relate to other parts of my history I know you'll be asking about, so those are the early childhood stories.

CAROTHERS: Nice. Well, that's funny. I remember hearing about those—the nuclear weapons shelter drills from my parents, and both of us mentioning, "Hey, you know, we feel like hiding under your desk in the event of a nuclear attack is probably not going to be that helpful," but I guess it provides sort of a sense of security.

KEISWETTER: Well, I think it raises sensitivity. It made people aware that there was an enemy. I think that was probably the major purpose of it all, because [chuckles] I can't imagine that it has much real effect.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.] No, I—I doubt it. So we'll definitely circle back to more—more about the Cold War and your experiences. There's a lot that I'd like to get into. But before we get back to sort of the political side, can you tell me a little bit about your—your family and your parents? What did you do? Did you have any siblings?

KEISWETTER: Yes. Both of my parents grew up on farms. They were children of the Great Depression. My father was one of nine children, and my grandmother would tell stories of wetting down gunny sacks to plug under the doors and windows to keep the dust from blowing in as Kansas was in the middle of the Dust Bowl. And to this day, there is a family recipe called—what's called "Depression raisin cake" because foodstuffs are made available, and flour and butter and raisins, and so my grandmother made—came up with a recipe called Depression raisin cake, which still lives on in the family as a great favorite.

My father only graduated from the eighth grade because he was needed to work on the farm. He was always proud of his report card, which he saved. He had gotten all A's. And I think one of the regrets of his life is he could not go on to high school.

My mother also grew up in a small town, but her father was a farmer. This was in Nebraska. And she *did* graduate from high school. Neither of my parents went to college. But I think both of them had very much esteemed higher education. I remember when I was four or five, when people would ask, "What are you going to do?" and I would proudly tell them, "I'm going to college." And it was a different era, I suppose.

I don't want to jump too far ahead, but when I went to Dartmouth—this was a time in which diversity and outreach meant bringing in poor boys, poor scholarship kids from Kansas. [Both chuckle.] It had little to do with ethnicity or racial characteristics, so it was back in a different time.

I do have one brother, Doug. He's five years younger. He still lives in Kansas. My father worked in the oil field industry. He was an oil field chemical salesman. In those days, Kansas was the largest—third largest oil-producing state in the United States, after I believe California and Texas. But oil has now, of course, depleted, and that's no longer true. And my brother, who still lives in Kansas and does the same thing: He works in the oil field industry as a chemical salesman.

CAROTHERS: Interesting. I had no idea that Kansas used to be one of the biggest oil-producing states in the country.

KEISWETTER: Yeah. Well, Great Bend was the center of the industry, which is why we lived there.

CAROTHERS: Interesting. So it sounds like growing up there was really no question that you were—you were planning on going to college, that your parents really valued that. How—how else were your parents involved in your education, growing up? And were there other attitudes or perspectives that your parents had that you thought particularly influential in—in your upbringing?

KEISWETTER: Yes. Yeah. You mentioned the valuing of education. That's certainly true. I think both of them had a strong curiosity, and that's something that I certainly have, a curiosity about the outside world, just about life in general. They certainly work hard working, and that was passed on. And I suppose the most important is it was a loving and generous family, and we all liked each other, got along with each other and still do. I talk to my brother two or three times a week, even now. So I think those are the most important things.

CAROTHERS: Great. And as you—what were you involved with besides—obviously, academics were important to you. What else were you involved with, growing up in elementary, middle, high school? Were you an athlete, involved with debate or some sort of other, more sort of international relations sort of activity? What did—what did you do outside of the classroom?

KEISWETTER: Yes. Well, I was very much interested in the outdoors. I liked fishing. Not so much into hunting. One of my best friends was the same age I am, but he was greatly interested in herpetology, and so we collected snakes and other things. And a humorous tale: He and I went out and caught a jar full of small water snakes that we brought to his home, and his mother was the president of the Kansas State Presbyterian Women's Association, and we had put the snakes into—I think in the guest bathroom.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: And then we took them out and put them in an aquarium, but that afternoon, when his mother was entertaining, a woman came screaming out of the guest bathroom because a snake had poked its head up out of the drain [chuckles]. Anyway, so small things like that.

I was not an athlete. I did play golf, but it was to learn the game, and I was never very good at it. And I did play tennis, but it also was to learn the game. I've never been very good at tennis—either. [Chuckles.]

I was, in high school, the captain of the debate squad, and we went on to play seconds in the state of Kansas, and I remember one of the debate topics was whether there should be federal funding of education. And another one was should there be a world government.

I was, in high school, the president of something called Hi-Y, which was a boys—the high school boys' organization, and organized charity project. Our family did go to church, but we weren't, I would say—what do I want to say?—devotional about it. [Chuckles] We didn't visit every week. We went from time to time.

And over all, I graduated from Great Bend [High School] in a class of 212, and I don't know whether I was valedictorian or salutatorian or whatever it was, because they just honored the top ten, and I was among the top ten, so I—I did well academically.

And I was always particularly interested in history, politics, government, international affairs. I date my interest in international affairs back to Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, which was about the same time Stalin died in 1952 or '3. And this sparked an interest in the British crown jewels, and I remember preparing a report at that time about the British crown jewels. So maybe that was my first foray into international affairs.

CAROTHERS: And did you—did you often talk about international affairs and politics and history with—with your parents or your brother or friends?

KEISWETTER: Well, not with my parents but—well, I had two good friends, Chuck [Davis] and Bob, and Chuck's father in particular was an intellectual mentor to me. He was the mayor of our small town. He established our library. He established a local NPR [National Public Radio] station and radio and TV, and was a prominent Republican figure. And he, I think in many ways, was my intellectual mentor, guide star at this part of my life.

And I remember watching the [John F.] Kennedy-[Richard M.] Nixon debate at their house, because they had the largest TV screen. And Bob and I were ardent Kennedy fans, and Chuck and his family were ardent Nixon fans. And at the end of the debate, we came out at the same place we started. [Chuckles.] Bob and I thought Kennedy had clearly won. The Davises (that was their name)—they all thought that, well, Nixon had won on the points; he just needed a shave. [Both chuckle.]

CAROTHERS: That's funny. And what was—what was Chuck dad's name?

KEISWETTER: His name was [Horace C.] H. C. Davis, called "Dave" Davis, and he owned a small oil drilling company, Davis Drilling.

CAROTHERS: And he was—he was the one who was your intellectual mentor, right? Or was that Bob's dad?

KEISWETTER: Right. No, that's H. C. And Bob's dad was a public servant, and he was in charge of the welfare program and welfare system for Barton County, where we lived, which had about—I don't know— 20,000 people.

CAROTHERS: Gotcha. And so the—the Kennedy election would have been when you were a sophomore or a junior in high school? Correct?

KEISWETTER: Mmm, junior, I think.

CAROTHERS: Junior in high school. Okay. And what—what was—what was that election like? I know I'm talking with a number of people. That's a memory that has stood out for a lot of people, you know, the Kennedy election. And so as, you know, someone who's fifteen or sixteen at that time and a Kennedy fan, what was it like seeing Kennedy elected, and

sort of what were your thoughts about what the Kennedy election would mean for the country moving forward?

KEISWETTER: Well, of course, there was the youth factor, and that was greatly appealing. And Kansas then was a Republican state, perhaps not quite as fanatically Republican as it is today, but it was always a Republican state, and so Bob and I were frequently the sole defenders or supporters of Kennedy in most discussion groups.

I remember after the election, Kennedy had given some press conferences and had acquitted himself especially well, and I remember several of the family friends saying, "Well, Allen, you might be right after all." [Both chuckle.]

It was a hopeful time, the New Frontier and all of that. It was an exciting time.

CAROTHERS: Gotcha. Gotcha. And before we kind of move—move on a little bit, there's one more element of your childhood that I was interested in. You touched on how you moved around a lot—well, not necessarily a lot, but lived in—lived in a few different small towns and then ended up moving to Great Bend and graduating from high school. What was moving your family around?

KEISWETTER: Well, my father's employment, I guess. We lived in Alton and Woodston, where he ran filling stations. We moved to Oklahoma City, where we lived for a couple of years, and again he ran a filling station. But then, while there, he made the acquaintance of another intellectual mentor, Ed Hammond, who owned an oil fill chemical business headquartered in Oklahoma City, and he needed someone to open up a business in Kansas. And so we then moved to Kansas when I was about, I don't know, seventh grade, whatever that is, 12? And then I spent the rest of my—my high school years there.

CAROTHERS: And so in—in seventh grade, when you moved to Kansas, that was when you moved to Great Bend, right?

KEISWETTER: That's right.

CAROTHERS: Okay. And what was that experience like, moving around to a number of different cities, a number of different states, living in some very small towns, living in some bigger cities like Oklahoma City? What was that experience like?

KEISWETTER: Well, the small towns, I liked very much, and Oklahoma City, I did too. And I do remember, however, going to high school or to first in middle school—the last part of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh grade. And, you know, it's much different when you're in a school that has 1,000 or 2,000 students than one, the entire school has at most 40 or 50. [Chuckles.] So that was a bit of an adjustment.

But I would say that I thrived in this atmosphere. It wasn't a problem. If you asked me where my home is in my childhood, I would tell you Great Bend because Great Bend was certainly bigger than Woodston and Alton, and it wasn't quite the thriving city of several hundred thousand that Oklahoma City was. And Great Bend—it's called Great Bend because it's on that great bend in the Arkansas River, although there it's called the Ar-KAN-sas River.

CAROTHERS: [Laughs.]

KEISWETTER: So, it well, it had extremely good schools. It provided opportunities to go out fishing on the Ar-KAN-sas River. It's a six- to eight-hour drive to the mountains in Colorado, where I spent most of my childhood vacations during this period. We still as the family go back there. So all in all, I guess it came with an appreciation that if you were willing to drive six or eight hours, you can have a very good life.

I have to tell you, turning to the diversity question in Great Bend, there was one Jewish family in town, the Wolfs, and in high school I dated Barbara Wolf, and her brother, Louis [pronounced LOU-ee], was a friend of mine, and we've been in touch recently. There were one or two black families and one or two Hispanic families, but otherwise it was very much northern European, largely German in ethnicity.

CAROTHERS: And once you—

KEISWETTER: That's not true, by the way.

CAROTHERS: Okay.

KEISWETTER: Today that's *not* true, because of the large Hispanic population.

CAROTHERS: Okay. Okay. And so once you left Great Bend and came to Dartmouth and then after Dartmouth, what was that experience like, going from a place with—I mean, granted, I believe you said earlier that Dartmouth wasn't particularly diverse when you were there, but moving out of Great Bend, did you—did you find a lot more diversity in the other places that you were, and what was that experience like?

KEISWETTER: Well, let's start with why I went to Dartmouth.

CAROTHERS: Sure.

KEISWETTER: I decided that I did want to go "back east" to school, as the expression was. I ended up applying to Dartmouth, Brown [University] and Princeton [University], and you say, "Why these three?" Well, the answer is they're all located in relatively small towns. I didn't think I was up to Cambridge and Boston or Columbia [University] and New York City, and these seemed to be relatively small towns, with which I thought I could cope.

And Princeton and Brown, I chose basically by the information in their catalogs. Dartmouth I chose because I actually knew someone who had graduated from there. There was a person in our church who was—had graduated a couple years before—before I was applying, so he was about six or eight years older than I was. And I think that was probably most important.

I also applied to the University of Kansas, which was my backup school, if you will. And I had a full scholarship there, and I had been there two or three times and stayed overnight, courted by the University of Kansas.

I remember when I got my envelope—it was in the days of the thick envelope—thin envelope—

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: And I got a thick envelope from Dartmouth, along with a large scholarship, and it was a question of what I would do. I remember talking to my parents and saying, "I want to go to Dartmouth." And they basically said, "But why don't you just go to the University of Kansas? That's three hours from here, not sort of a three-days' drive from here." And at the end of the conversation, they said, "Sure, fine. You'll go to Dartmouth. We're glad to support you." And so they did.

I received the assignment of my roommate, a man—a boy at that time—a young man named Landon [B.] Jeffers [Class of 1966] that lived in Long Island [New York], and so the plan was that I would fly from Kansas City to New York City, and then—it wasn't JFK [John F. Kennedy International Airport] but Idlewild [Airport], and he would meet me there.

And part of the problem was that there was a typo. When they sent me his name, it said "Landon Heffers." So, anyway, we did meet up. You talk about cultural shock, I guess. Well, his background was much different than mine. His father was a senior vice president of then First National City Bank [of New York], which has just become Citibank in several reincoronations [sic] or reincarnations since then, and I remember staying at his home.

And we were at the dinner table, and I made some grammatical error. I don't even remember what it was. And Landon's father looked at me, and he says, "Allen, are you gonna talk like that when you get to Dartmouth?" And I thought, "Well, I guess." You know. [Chuckles.]

I remember my—the plan was that the family, Landon's family, his grandmother and his mother, would drive the two of us to Dartmouth from Long Island. They lived in Plandome. And we would stop along the way in a meal—for a meal. And my parents had given me money so that I could pay for the meal. And we stopped at some very nice New England inn. I don't know. But I realized I didn't have enough money to pay for my *own* meal, let alone for four. In Kansas it would cost, you know, a couple of dollars for a meal. Well, even in those times, you're talking about some multiple of that.

Anyway, Landon and I were—I wouldn't say we were close, but we liked each other, and we were roommates for a year and a half, until he dropped out in the middle of his sophomore year. He had gone to [Northfield] Mount Herman [School], so he was sort of the antithesis of me.

CAROTHERS: You said he had gone to Mount Sherman?

KEISWETTER: To Mount Herman.

CAROTHERS: To Mount Herman. Is that a prep school?

KEISWETTER: Yes. It's I believe in Massachusetts or Connecticut. I've forgotten.

Anyway, I don't know whether you'd like to move on to the Dartmouth experience?

CAROTHERS: Sure. Yeah. Let's—let's move on to—Let's move on to Dartmouth. So you arrived at Dartmouth in the fall of 1962.

KEISWETTER: Right.

CAROTHERS: And what—what was the experience like of coming from—from Kansas and coming from small-town Kansas but then arriving in small-town New Hampshire? Were there a lot of parallels between small-town Kansas and small-town New Hampshire, or was it really a totally new experience?

KEISWETTER: It was a totally new experience. Dartmouth was diverse, and certainly I went from being the top or one of the top students to struggling for my first year at least, my first term, in part because of the adjustment, I think, from being away from home. But it was certainly a much stronger academic challenge than I had ever had before that.

I would call Dartmouth the game changer in my life, and as I come up on my 50th anniversary here—next year in June is the 50th reunion—I think that's—to reflect—it's probably the one thing in my life that changed everything else.

And so at this point in my life, I am very grateful. There were certain very formative experiences. One of them is freshman English. And I don't know what the system is now, but we

had relatively small seminars. I had—my first one was with Professor [Arthur] Dewing, and Dewing was a specialist on [the poet Robert L.] Frost. And he was also a very much a Strunk & White man, the book about writing and editing and believed in a very simple approach. And I remember the first essay that I wrote for him, I got it back with a D on it, with the comment, "Henceforth less." And to this day, I don't know what he meant.

CAROTHERS: [Laughs.]

KEISWETTER: Anyway, I went to see him, a regular counseling session almost, and I would credit him with giving me one of my most important life skills, which is the ability to write well, quickly and clearly. And this has been a skill that has been very important first in my foreign service career and now, since I retired from the foreign service, in my role as a scholar at the Middle East Institute and as a professor at the National War College and the National Defense Intelligence College [now National Intelligence University] and the University of Maryland. So big kudos to him, although I suffered mightily.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: I remember I wrote some essay on the Frost poem, "Apple Pickings" [sic; "After Apple-Picking"]. And I got it back, and he called it an original sort of interpretation, but it was not in a good sense.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: He said he had thought that this was in no way what Frost had intended, but he would ask Frost the next time he saw him. Whether this meaning—this meaning is a good—a good interpretation. And my reaction to that is, *I don't care what Frost intended.* I thought that the action was valid no matter what. Anyway, Frost was important, and my class was the last class that he addressed before he died, so my favorite poet remains Frost.

CAROTHERS: Very nice.

KEISWETTER: Otherwise—go ahead.

CAROTHERS: Oh, no, no, go ahead.

KEISWETTER: Well, to capture the spirit of the times, if you will, I would say that campus life was jokingly—what summarized by a rivalry between the Green Weenies and the Big Greeners. The Green Weenies were the intellectuals, and the Big Greeners were the athletes and the frat boys, the fraternity boys in particular. And *The Dartmouth*—there would be chiding letters and stories.

And one time, the clocks—the hands on the clock at Dartmouth Hall disappeared, and so there as a big dispute as to whether it was the Green Weenies or the Big Greeners. And, of course, the Green Weenies, which I associated with more than the Big Greeners, said, "It couldn't be us. We're not that strong. We couldn't do it." [Both chuckle.] But they were recovered. Political—

CAROTHERS: Did they ever—did they ever find out who—who was the culprit, which side?

KEISWETTER: Well, it was some fraternity, although I don't remember the name. It was a fraternity prank of some sort.

CAROTHERS: Okay.

KEISWETTER: Anyway, the political environment? I guess two comments there. In the election of 1964, Nelson [A.] Rockefeller was running, and his sort of labor base, recruiting base was Dartmouth College, because he was a graduate from there. And I and another friend—[phone rings]—let me move here—I and another friend, who—and my friend was—his name was Gene [B.] Marshall [Class of 1964]—was from Littleton, New Hampshire. So we were assigned Littleton, New Hampshire, for the Republican primary. And he and I went out every weekend for weeks and weeks before the primary to talk to everybody in this town. And when the election came, guess what: Henry Cabot Lodge [Jr.] won the state by a landslide as a write-in. So—

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: But I did participate in the Young Republicans at that stage. This is not my current political views, but nonetheless, it was then.

As to campus, my year was probably the last year of sort of a peaceful campus, because after that, the Vietnam demonstrators and movement became very strong, and campus life at Dartmouth and, well, across the United States became much more strident.

But it was the era before that. It as the end of the era before that, and it was before the era of drugs. Drugs were not a problem. The big issue in regard to college life was girls in the dorm, because then, of course, Dartmouth was a men-only school, and so those campus rules were important. We had adopted the honor code, so what are you supposed to do when your good friend in your—in the room next to you has his girlfriend for overnight? These sorts of issues. A different set than three or four years later, when Dartmouth, like many campuses, had problems with drugs. I don't know about the stay-over policy, but certainly the attitudes toward sex [chuckles] were much more liberal. And there were demonstrations on political issues, especially Vietnam.

CAROTHERS: Gotcha. And while—while you were there, and especially before the Vietnam War really—really escalated, was there a lot of talk about Vietnam or American involvement overseas, on campus? Or was it really not much of a contested topic?

KEISWETTER: Well, it was certainly a topic of a great deal of interest. It wasn't a movement topic. But I do remember going to lectures about Vietnam at that time—and maybe it still exists; I don't know. Seniors had to take something called the Great Issues course. And I believe it was evry night—excuse me, every Monday evening. We would have some outside lecturer, who—a diplomat, a politician, you know, a well-known academic or commentator or journalist, people who were nationally-known names.

And I remember in the Great Issues course that we had a debate about Vietnam with someone who represented the administration, plus an academic critic. Bottom line here is I remember talking about it. I remember reading about it in *Time* and *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*, but there

wasn't the fervor. It wasn't heated discussions. There were not people who were parading with big signs and having mass rallies.

CAROTHERS: Gotcha. And speaking of—of politics, one thing that I noticed was that you were a big Kennedy fan back at home, and then at Dartmouth you were involved with the Young Republicans and were—were campaigning for Rockefeller. Did your—did your political beliefs change at some point in there? Had you previously identified more as a Democrat and then moved over to more of—of a Republican? What was the evolution of your political beliefs like in high school and college?

KEISWETTER: Well, the difference between Kennedy and Nelson Rockefeller—not all that much [both chuckle] because there was a liberal wing of the Republican Party. I think when I was in Kansas, you know, there was a little bit of the spirit of rebellion, but I knew for sure that I didn't share the beliefs of, say, my uncle, who told me that he would vote for Fidel Castro if he ran on the Republican ticket, so—[Both chuckle.]

And I did not really learn about what might be called the liberal wing of the Republican Party, represented by Nelson Rockefeller, until I turned up at Dartmouth. And it seemed at that time a nice fit for me, so I think that's the answer to your question.

CAROTHERS: That makes sense.

And then while you were at Dartmouth—Dartmouth from 1962 to 1966—

KEISWETTER: Correct.

CAROTHERS: And there were a few—a few major political events that—that happened in there, so one—one event that I want to touch on is the—the Kennedy assassination.

KEISWETTER: Right.

CAROTHERS: People that—people that I've talked to who lived through that event have compared it almost to 9/11 in terms of people remembering where they were—

KEISWETTER: Sure.

CAROTHERS: —when it happened. And what—what was that—what was your reaction to that, and what was the general campus reaction to the Kennedy assassination?

KEISWETTER: Well shock was the reaction, of course. The country's reaction as well. As to how I heard about it, I was coming back from class to Cohen Hall, and there was someone—one of my suite mates in Cohen came running out, and he was on the way to class, and he shouted at me as he ran by and stuck out his fist. "Kennedy has been killed!" And what I did is—he hit me in the stomach—is collapsed on the sidewalk. [Chuckles.] Anyway, I do remember it because of the pain as well as the psychological shock. And I can't remember exactly what happened on campus after that, but I'm sure it was sort of the standard grieving process.

Just another point that relates to Kennedy and to the Cold War that I remember quite well: It was—it was in October of 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was in a class on early west European history, taught by a man, a professor named John [R.] Williams, and in the middle of class, at sort of the height of the tension over the Cuban Missile Crisis, the sirens went off. And no one was sure what the sirens were about. Why did they go off?

And after a few moments of befuddlement, Professor Williams dismissed class, and [chuckles] we all rushed out to I guess take refuge under our beds or something. [Both chuckle.] I don't know. It raises the question much like Kansas: Why would Hanover, New Hampshire, be a target for the Russians?

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: But, nonetheless, there was a great sensitivity on campus to the Cuban missile episode, something which we all followed closely. And that particular memory lives—lives on.

CAROTHERS: And another—another important event, and particularly one that relates to Vietnam that occurred while you were at Dartmouth, was the Tonkin Gulf incident [sic; Gulf of Tonkin

incident] and then, a few days later, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution [sic; Gulf of Tonkin Resolution]. And what were—what were your thoughts on that, and what was the general campus attitude towards really the start of—not the start of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War but really the start of the Vietnam War?

KEISWETTER: Well, by this time, these resolutions and these events have been so impressive and on my part with other memories and study and so on and so forth that I can't really sort of isolate out exactly what it was at that time. However, the—the campus was clearly anti war, clearly anti [President Lyndon B.] Johnson. And I'm sure that the reaction was critical.

CAROTHERS: That makes sense.

And one other experience that you noted that you had was that you interned for [now U.S. Senator Robert J.] "Bob" Dole while you—while you were in college.

KEISWETTER: Yes.

CAROTHERS: Tell me a little bit about that. How did you end up working for Bob Dole, and what was that experience like, being in the heart of politics in [Washington,] D.C.?

KEISWETTER: Well, this is indeed a long time ago. Bob Dole was from Russell, Kansas, which is not far from Great Bend, where I grew up, and my friend, H. C. Davis, was friends with Bob Dole, and my father had also met him. So I applied for an internship there and was accepted. It was outside the college auspices, but I did participate in the college programs in Washington for the interns from Dartmouth who were there for the summer.

It was—well, this was when Bob Dole was Congressman Dole. That gives some idea. I answered correspondence. Bob Dole was asked to give a presentation to a student group at George Washington University here in D.C., and the topic is "What Is a Conservative?" And so I spent a week writing him a speech, explaining what a conservative is, and then I accompanied him to the presentation. And he began, "What is a conservative? Well, I don't know." [Laughs.]

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: And so the only part of my speech that survived is the question in the beginning. [Chuckles.] I think that was very important, that you have to know your person that you're writing for if you're writing a speech, and the context of the audience. [Chuckles.] It was a learning experience for me.

I did get to know Dole reasonably well, and I remember his wife—he's now divorced from his wife, but was the nurse who had taken care of him from his World War II injury, and she was from New Hampshire. And she had been at Lake Winnipesauke, I guess—I can't remember the name of lake—where there was a family home. And she had bought a lot of furniture.

And so it was my mission to go with another intern, to drive the family station wagon to New Hampshire and pull back a trailer full of antique furniture. And when we came back, we arrived, I don't know, 10, 11 at night, and dropped off furniture, the car, et cetera, at the Dole home, and then I think we probably left and took a taxi.

But the next morning, Congressman Dole said, "Well, did you have a good trip? Did my wife get back okay?" And I thought, *Hmm, this says something about <u>this</u> relationship.* [Both chuckle.]

CAROTHERS: Yes.

KEISWETTER: I was not particularly surprised when they divorced.

CAROTHERS: All right. Wow! [Chuckles.] And so it sounds like you had—judging from what I've heard from friends who have interned in D.C., it sounds like you had a lot more contact with Congressman Dole than certainly interns do now. And then was that internship that you had—was that unusual amount of contact with Dole, or was that fairly par for the course?

KEISWETTER: Well, I think I probably had more contact than the other interns, but still, you know, there may have been three or four interns. There were not tens and dozens as there are now sometimes. And besides, it's just like if we're from Virginia and we want to see the Capitol and we wanna get a

special pass, it's very hard to get one from our congressman or senator. But if it's my brother visiting from Kansas, he can contact *his* senator or congressman, and [chuckles] there are not so many Kansans that request them. You know, the demand is much less, and he can arrange it right away. So it's partly just the laws of supply and demand.

CAROTHERS: And did working for Dole and spending the summer in D.C.—did that have an impact on your—your political beliefs and particularly your—your sentiments about Vietnam?

KEISWETTER: I don't remember having any particular affect on my sentiments about Vietnam. I can't even recall at this point what Dole believed about Vietnam. But it had a larger impact. It was my first chance to see D.C. I sort of—I liked it immediately. It sort of set the stage for where I live now and for much of my career. And in that way, it—it was sort of a tidbit, a tasting of a life that I like very much.

CAROTHERS: Got it. Got it. And so after that internship, you—you came back, and you returned to Dartmouth and graduated in '66.

KEISWETTER: That's right.

CAROTHERS: And what did you do after you graduated? What was your first job?

KEISWETTER: Well, let me finish up my college career, if I could, please, Andrew.

CAROTHERS: Sure.

KEISWETTER: The last year, I wrote my senior thesis. As an international relations major. We had to write a senior thesis. Normally, seniors didn't do that. I don't know what the practice is now. But I wrote it on European relations. It was particularly about the prospects of the British entry into the EU [European Union], and the point about this was that I was at Dartmouth, and my course collective centered on European affairs.

I particularly liked Professor John Quincy—John C. Adams. I'm never sure what the C stands for—who was one of the great legends at the time that I was there and afterwards, and he was a European historian.

And so I left Dartmouth thinking that I would want to teach, and I applied to several graduate schools, but including Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Relations [sic; Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies]—or International Studies, SAIS (pronounced SICE; School of Advanced International Studies), here in Washington. And I was accepted, but offered the opportunity to go to Bologna, Italy, to the European Studies Center.

I remember also when I graduated, and I did win a scholarship for postgraduate work, in the interview I was asked what I wanted to do with my life, and I said I wanted to be an academic, to teach, but I thought it was useful to have some practical experience in diplomacy because this is the area that I was in, so I would like to have some time in the Foreign Service or at least serving in the [U.S.] State Department, to have some idea of what the world is like, the diplomatic world is like.

And the person who was interviewed me, or one of the people on the panel, said, "Well, this makes no sense. If you want an academic career, this allows you—this allows your competitors to get ahead of you. What you should do is go directly for your Ph.D."

Well, I chose SAIS because it was a nice compromise. I could, one, live abroad for the first time, because I had never done that; two, it preserved the option of going either way, either academic or what might be called applied diplomacy—that is, the real practice of diplomacy And so I accepted to go to SAIS.

Went to Bologna, which was not quite as large a shock to my life as going from Kansas to Hanover. But, on the other hand, if you go to Bologna not speaking Italian (and I didn't), and—that, too, is a shock to the system, a new experience. Generally, I liked it a lot. I arrived in—flew from—from Kansas City to New York, New York to Milan, and I arrived in Milan, and I took a train from Milan to Bologna. And I had—I was in a compartment, and I had a great big bag with me. And I woke up. I had no idea where I was. And I said, "Bologna? Bologna?" And finally the Italian family who had come in, said, "Ah, yes, Bologna!" And so they motioned for

me to run outside, and they pushed my luggage out the window.

CAROTHERS: Ho-ho!

KEISWETTER: Anyway, this shows the type of experience it was there. I lived with an Italian—a German and a Brit, an Englishman for a year. And Richard [A.] Hitchman, the Englishman and I, have remained in close touch since and see each other every few years, and they come here, or we go there.

I didn't ever learn good Italian, but I learned some. And I suppose the importance of the Bologna year, besides the foreign exposure, the friendships—I had certainly as many good friends out of Bologna as I do out of Dartmouth, even though I was only there for one year.

And secondly, it resolved for me whether I wanted to go into academics or whether I wanted to go into the Foreign Service. It was not quite my choice. I received, at about the same time, acceptance into the Foreign Service as I did a notice from my draft board that I would no longer be deferred.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: I realized that even if I joined the Foreign Service, which is what I did, I would be going to Vietnam because all entering Foreign Service officers—and even more true for single male Foreign Service officers—went to Vietnam. So I decided if I went to Vietnam, I would prefer to go as a diplomat than as a draftee.

And so I came back after a year in Bologna. I joined the Foreign Service, and for a year, nearly a year, from roughly June of '67 till April of '68 I was in training in the Forest Service. The first course is about Vietnam. And they included me in a two-week trial course to learn Vietnamese. I told them I didn't think I could do it because I'm partially tone deaf and it's a tonal language, and I remember at the end of the course the panel of linguists looked at me sort of sadly and said that "we have some bad news for you. We don't think you can learn a tonal language." And I said, "Yes, I agree." [Chuckles.]

So I was sent to brush up on my French so that I could pass the proficiency exam. I had studied French in college. It was the bane of my sopho- —excuse me, of my freshman year, but I did spend several months working on French. And it was so long because I was supposed to go to Vietnam at the time of the Tet Offensive, which broke out in early February of '67. And so I had an extra two-month delay because of the events in Vietnam.

And that's how I became a diplomat rather than a scholar, but as you know from my history, it was just—the diplomatic career was just a big chunk of meat in my sandwich as an academic career on either side.

CAROTHERS: Got it. Got it.

And before we—before we move on to your role in the Foreign Service—and I'd love to hear about the year of training and then—and then getting into Vietnam—what was the—the international exposure like in Bologna? Had you spent any substantial amount of time outside the United States before that, and what was it like to be living, you know, with a—with a German, an Englishman and, sorry, I forget the third nationality.

KEISWETTER: Italian.

CAROTHERS: Italian. What was that experience like, and how did that affect you?

KEISWETTER: Okay. Well, Bologna was in many ways a wonderful experience because we took the opportunity to travel. There were school-sponsored trips. There were two of them, each one about I think a week to two weeks long, where we hit the major European capitals. The first time I saw Paris was on a European trip. We went to Paris and Brussels and Luxembourg. And then privately we managed to see much of Italy: Rome and so on.

And we—I had a good friend who was from Vienna, so several of us traveled together in a black Volkswagen to Vienna. I remember that our Austrian friend showing us around the city—you have to keep in mind this was now 20

years, a little more, 22 or ’3 after World War II, but he was showing us around the city and said, with some derision, “This is the opera house. The Americans bombed it. They thought it was the train station.” [Chuckles.]

CAROTHERS: Wow

KEISWETTER: While there, I did get to know well Richard Hitchman, and his father was a senior official in the British government, a senior civil servant. He first headed the National Public Health Service [sic; National Health Service], and then he headed the British Atomic Energy Commission [sic; United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority]. And I remember that one time—I guess it was on the way home to Bologna—I stayed with Richard and his family, and his mother was America, and his father was obviously British. And both of them Oxbridgians.

Anyway, he had just been knighted a few days before, so the family running joke at the table was, “Sir Allen, would you pass me the salt?” And, “I would be glad to, Lady Hitchman.” [Both chuckle.] It was sort of—sort of—it was fun in this regard. My experience in Europe was deepened, and the ties to Europe stay deep to this day, even though I’m a Middle East specialist.

So maybe that’s enough of a detour? What was the question again? [Laughs.]

CAROTHERS: Sure. And did—did being in Europe in that international exposure and being in close proximity to people who were coming from political systems all over the world—did that—did that change your—your political beliefs at all? Like, did that—I know you mentioned that you eventually, you know, came to oppose the war in Vietnam. Did that experience in Italy factor into that?

KEISWETTER: Well, I think it did because by this time the Europeans were largely against Vietnam. I guess I would say that I was—I think as I recall it, I was at the beginning sort of had an academic approach to it; that is, of Vietnam. Wanted to know more about it, wanted to read, wanted to learn. Maybe because the academic world was almost solidly anti

Vietnam, I was opposed to Vietnam. I just wasn't fervently so.

And I think Europe—my Europe connections certainly played into that. I know—I can't remember anybody who argued that it was a good idea. I think most of us realized it was in our future in one way or another.

CAROTHERS: Got it.

And, now, moving back to the—or I guess moving forward, to the Foreign Service training. So you were in Italy for a year, and then come back for the Foreign Service training. Was that in D.C.?

KEISWETTER: Yes, it was. It actually was in Rosslyn [Virginia], which is just across the Potomac [River], but was in the D.C. area. And we were the largest Foreign Service class ever admitted, the 79th class, and I can't remember how many there were, but in the nature of 40 or 50. And it was because they were—the State Department was hiring Foreign Service officers to go to Vietnam, frankly.

And so there were many of us sort of fresh out of college. I was the second-youngest in the class. There was one person a few months younger than I was. And I think about it. Much of it was training about what is a Foreign Service officer and visits to various departments of the Department of State. But the highlight was Secretary [David Dean] Rusk. The secretary of state normally did not address an entering class. Well, he came and he spent an hour with us. And the instructions were, "You could ask the secretary anything you want, but you can't ask about Vietnam."

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: And so, you know, this struck some of us that here—you know, it's sort of like, "Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play?" You know, why exclude the most important issue? But this was well respected. I mean, nobody asked him about Vietnam. I remember being impressed by him but being disappointed that the Foreign Service would exclude that.

I have to say, not long after that there was something created in the Department of State called the Dissent Channel, which—Foreign Service officers could dissent on policy or anything, in fact. It could be an administrative issue. And it would go to the secretary's desk. And some of my friends in my entering class did exercise that a little bit later.

CAROTHERS: And do you know if—if they found that an effective mechanism to—to communicate their dissent and if that dissent had—had any impact, or was it—did it seem more of a way to give people an outlet to express that dissent without, say, going to the media?

KEISWETTER: Well, the answer is both, because it certainly provided a means of venting, and each year, there is an award for dissent in the Foreign Service, and there are many good examples over the decades since then to where policy has been changed as a result of dissent. So, yes, it has been effective, but it was, I suspect, initially an idea meant to allow venting.

CAROTHERS: Got it.

And when you—you were arou- —you were in the Foreign Service training with—with 40 to 50 other—all—all young men?

KEISWETTER: No, there were a few women, but not—

CAROTHERS: Okay.

KEISWETTER: —not too many. I—I—I can't give you any specific numbers, but, you know, maybe there were four or five women.

CAROTHERS: Okay. And did all of you have a sense that you would be going to Vietnam?

KEISWETTER: No, I think only the single young men or the young men married without children. I think we all went to Vietnam.

CAROTHERS: Got it. And what was—what was the background of the other Foreign Service officers in your class? Were they largely, you know, people like you who—you know, East Coast

educated, had some graduate school experience, or was there—or was it a diverse group?

KEISWETTER: Well, I would have to reflect on this for a moment. First of all, we came from all over the United States. I think it's true to say that they were all well educated, maybe not at the Ivy League or at Stanford [University] or [the University of California,] Berkeley, although many were. But, you know, I would say the—the best schools across the United States: Wisconsin and Chicago and so on and so forth.

Almost everybody, with the exception of one person, was older than I was, so many of them had already had a job or maybe two jobs or had been to law school or had some other experience. And if you came in, as I did, without much experience, I was the lowest rank an FSO 8 [Foreign Service Officer] and almost everyone else was an FSO 7, because they had at least two years of experience somewhere in the work world, or a master's degree.

CAROTHERS: And in terms of people's political attitudes and particularly their thoughts on Vietnam, was there a lot of continuity within the class or was there some legitimate disagreement among FSO among what the American role in—in Vietnam should be?

KEISWETTER: I don't recall any strong, highly opinionated discussions at this point. I do a bit later, but not in the Foreign Service class. I think for many of us it was an acceptance, a learning experience, the idea that whatever opinions we have now, we were about to have a real experience to find out what it's all about. At least that was my attitude, and I think that was a common one.

CAROTHERS: Got it.

So let's dive—let's dive into Vietnam. And—

KEISWETTER: What? I'm sorry. What? Go ahead please. I didn't understand the question.

CAROTHERS: Okay. I was just saying let's move—let's move into Vietnam.

KEISWETTER: Mm-hm.

CAROTHERS: And you arrived—you arrived in Vietnam shortly after the Tet Offensive. I believe you—you arrived in April? Is that correct?

KEISWETTER: Right. Correct. For me—

CAROTHERS: Go ahead.

KEISWETTER: Well, for me it was a very traumatic arrival because I had left Washington and flown to Kansas to see my family and then flown to Hawaii, and while I was in Hawaii, I learned that President Johnson was withdrawing from the election or the candidacy to be reelected, principally because it seemed certain that he couldn't get the nomination. And I had this feeling that, well, things are changing at home, and I haven't even left the borders of the country yet.

And then I arrived in Vietnam, in Ton Son Nhut Airport [sic; Tan Son Nhut Air Base, now Tân Sơn Nhất International Airport] in Saigon. And I was not met there. Nobody met me at the airport. I made a friend on the airplane, who said he had a ride that would take us to his house and then he would take me to where I was supposed to go. He worked for USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development].

So I was seated in his carry-all and while he went inside to leave his luggage and change his clothes, and there was—there were two boys, Vietnamese boys, on a motor scooter, motorcycle, sorry, that pulled up beside me. And the one in back pointed a gun, and I duck. He didn't fire. But it traumatized me, needless to say.

So I was—I was dropped off at the place for in-processing, and the girl who was supposed to have met me was apologetic, but she had a luncheon date or something. It seemed to me like an insufficient excuse. But I was, after that, taken to a small hotel in the center of Saigon and shown to my room.

Part of the training in Saigon, or before we went to Saigon, here in Washington—part of the training was what would be called now a counterterrorism course. But one of the things on display was a pair of shears that was attached to the

bottom of a toilet seat for the purpose of castrating unsuspecting muses. But I remember [chuckles] when I arrived there, I expect- —I inspected every, every part of my room, including the underside of the toilet seat. [Both chuckle.]

So I remember in the night there was a knock on the door, and I was, *Ah, ah, maybe this is it!* You know? Well, it turned out to be a lady of the night, and I explained I was not interested and slammed the door. But that was my beginning in Vietnam.

And shortly thereafterwards [sic], of course, the riots in Washington broke out. Much of the city was burned, and [the Rev. Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.] was killed, and [Robert F.] "Bobby" Kennedy not too long thereafter. All of this left me with the impression, when I arrived in Vietnam, that somehow the world I had left in Washington a few months before was just not the same world. [Chuckles.] You know, home was going to hell in a hand basket. So I felt a real sense of insecurity as a result of that.

CAROTHERS: And you—you noted earlier that you realized that you were probably going to go to Vietnam and decided you'd—okay, you'd rather go as a diplomat than in the military. And then you arrive in Vietnam and encounter a real sense of danger as a Foreign Service officer there.

KEISWETTER: Yes. Right.

CAROTHERS: Did you expect to feel that threatened and that—that in danger in Vietnam when you were thinking about being a diplomat and especially as you were going through your—your training, or did it feel much more dangerous than you imagined it would?

KEISWETTER: I would say I did feel a sense of danger, but it wasn't a constant feeling of danger. They were isolated incidents when I felt in danger. Certainly, the entry was one of them. I as in the Chiêu Hồi Program [a large, expensive psychological (PSYOP) campaign of the Vietnam War]. And we can come back to that in some detail. But in this capacity, I traveled quite a bit, and I remember going to a place called Ninh Binh Province, which is in the [Red River] Delta, and I

went out with a group called Armed Propaganda Teams, which are defectors that had left the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese Army, but usually the Viet Cong. And they would go out to recruit other defectors.

Well, I was along with them. We hiked several miles into the jungle. I remember we came on a village where people had obviously just fled in a hurry. Half-eaten meals were in evidence and things like that. And then we got to near a rice field and a waterway, and one of the Vietnamese was showing me lychee nuts, and I was picking a lychee nut off a tree when the Viet Cong opened fire. And we jumped down behind a dike. I lost one of my shoes in the mud of the rice paddy.

The Vietnamese and there was another American along—the people in charge radioed for help. We had two choices: We could stay where we are and in two to three hours somebody could come to help us, or we can march out the same way that we came in.

The choice was made to march out as we had come in. And I remember walking along, trying to be totally circumspect, totally circumspect: the nearest indication, to hit the ground. I did not have a gun. It's just as well. I probably would have only—I probably would have been killed by friendly fire rather than the enemy.

I remember also—I still have a picture of this. There was a desecrated bridge that only had the concrete girders left. And at the other side of these concrete girders there was the advance guard or the advance party of the rescue force. And it was one of the most welcome sights of my life. [Chuckles.] So it was that.

I was several times out in the field when the post where I was being mortared, or there was an attack, and this just usually meant a sleepless night in a bunker, rather than anything serious. I once arrived at an air place—at an air strip at [Can Tho? Kon Tum 1:23:22], which is in the sort of west-central part of Vietnam. And as the plane was discharging passengers, there were mortar rounds, so the plane took off, and the rest of us sort of sprawled out in a gully until the mortaring subsided.

I remember at another place, Nha Trang, I arrived—arrivals don't seem so good for me. [Laughs.] I arrived there, and overhead there were airplanes that were broadcasting in English. They were American military. "Code red! Code red!" Which meant eminent [sic] attack. And so we went to a villa, where I ended up staying and living for about a year, as there was an attack on—on Nha Trang. It was not serious. Nothing happened. But let's say Vietnam had its moments, which, as I wrote my parents at the time, that caused me to think about the larger issues: life and death. [Chuckles.]

CAROTHERS: And what was it like being as a—now, you were in your mid-20s at this point, right?

KEISWETTER: Yes, yes.

CAROTHERS: Being someone—you know, a young man in his mid-20s and having to confront these very real issues of life and death and knowing that a lot of people who went to Vietnam weren't going to come back and knowing that there was a possibility that that could be you as well?

KEISWETTER: Well, you know, I didn't have sort of existential paralysis. That didn't happen to me. It was a fairly intellectual question to me, meaning I always realized it could happen, and certainly there had been brushes with danger. But it led me to read books like *Is God Dead?* And to sort of think about these things.

And I guess the other intellectual thing was a curiosity about the effectiveness of what we would now call the policy instrument of military power because it was fascinating to me. I find it culturally very interesting too.

One of the—I should explain that in the organization with [sic] which I was part, the overall organization, is called CORDS [Civil Operations and Rural Development Support], which was the Civil Operations for, first, Revolutionary Development Support, but then it was decided that "Revolutionary" was too revolutionary, so the R became Rural. So Civil Operation for Rural Development Support, called CORDS.

And under CORDS, there were lots and lots of various organizations. There was something called the Phoenix Program, which was in fact an assassination squad but run by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. There was the community development, which is sort of [an] AID type thing. And there were six or seven groups, but I belonged to Chiêu Hồi.

Chiêu Hồi means to recruit or to cause a person to defect. And a person who does this is called a Hoi Chanh, one who rallies. And we had a program that had three parts. One was sort of the defections; then there was retraining and resettlement, and those are the three major parts to it.

People would defect, as you might think, under one of three circumstances, usually. One is an impending battle, and so there would be a lot of defectors before a battle. The second one was a family crisis. The people wanted to go home to see their sick mother or the birth of their first child or whatever it is. And the third one were major holidays, such as Tet.

So people, some people defective, I suppose, out of political beliefs, but 99 percent of them had some strong personal motive. And one of the functions of the Armed Propaganda Team was to go out and talk to their friends and encourage their friends to defect.

Resettlement. The Hoi Chanh lived in villages, and their families. They could be integrated into the Vietnamese society, but you can imagine that if they were truly defectors, they would be targets for the Viet Cong, and so they lived in villages specially constructed and which they guarded.

The also had a retraining program that had two parts. One was sort of political indoctrination or re-indoctrination, and the second one was to teach a life skill in some way.

So my role in all of this was to be back in the home office. We had four corps. And I was first in IV Corps, which is in Can Tho, and later in II Corps, which was headquartered in Nha Trang. And basically I was second-ranking person in these corps operations, and we had province teams. And on

the province teams there would be a person who would run the Chiêu Hồi program.

So I would write reports. I would travel around to try to fix problems. I would sort of—I would say I spent probably a quarter of my time traveling and three-quarters of the time back in the office, while my boss traveled.

It was very much of an integrated civil-military organization. My boss was a major, first an American major and then an Australian major who was [sound] [one of the most] extraordinary people I'd ever met in my life. And my subordinates were lieutenants and enlisted people in the military.

I have to say, interestingly here, at this point I received my draft notice. I wrote back saying, "I'm here." [Chuckles.] "If you want to recycle me, you can, but, you know, I work for a major and my subordinates are military men as well, so what about leaving me here?" Well, they gave me a professional deferment, and I stayed [chuckles] in Vietnam as part of CORDS.

CAROTHERS: And—go ahead.

KEISWETTER: Well, why don't you ask me another question? I lost my spontaneous stories at this point.

CAROTHERS: Sure, sure. So within CORDS there was a variety of different programs, and how did you end up working specifically for Chiêu Hồi? Were you assigned? Were you able to preference this specific program?

KEISWETTER: Well, the answer was when I got there, we were sort of—we were assigned—but there was an interview process, and there was a man named Ogden Williams, who headed the Chiêu Hồi program, and I had an interview with him. We immediately liked each other, so I didn't go on to the second choice; I just accepted and I was on my way.

CAROTHERS: And what was—so you—you arrive in—outside of Saigon, and then you—you're first stationed in Can Tho. Correct?

KEISWETTER: That's right. Correct.

CAROTHERS: So Can Tho is down—down in the Delta,—

KEISWETTER: Right.

CAROTHERS: —an area that—at some point it had had a lot of Viet Cong activity. I know that there was a lot in the Delta. I don't—I don't know particularly about Can Tho.

KEISWETTER: Well, yes, it was not prime—most of the fighting happened north—around Saigon and through the north, but there were, in the IV Corps, considerable activity, as evidenced by my experience in Ninh Binh when I was there. But it was—it was more like asymmetric activity—you know, snipers, this sort of thing, rather than mass assault forces. That being said, I lived in a hotel there, and any given night you could go up on the roof and you could see the airplanes firing the tracer fire all around, on all sides, so there *was* quite a bit of action.

There were whole provinces which were pacified, principally because of the ethnicity of some of the tribes. It was unusual and we had Phú Quốc, which is an island off the west coast that was—is world-famous for nước mắm [pronounced nook mom]. This is fish sauce.

Anyway, it had its—it had its moments. I was pulled out of there because—I mentioned writing and that skill set. Well, It was quickly discovered by a person nicknamed "Coal Bin Willie"—his name is Wilbur Wilson. He was a former Army officer, a colonel, I think, who was head of the corps in Can Tho. And he needed a special assistant. So as I was good at writing, I was chosen to become that special assistant.

Well, this irritated my friend, Ogden Williams, who had hired me for his Chiêu Hồi program, so he transferred me to Nha Trang. I did the same job but in a different corps, II Corps.

CAROTHERS: And you mentioned that on any given night you would go up to the roof of the hotel and see tracer fire. So in your—your daily life in Can Tho, did it feel like you were in a combat environment, or did it feel like you were largely removed from a lot of the violence that was going on?

KEISWETTER: It seemed more removed, and I did not move around the city wondering whether I was going to get home. So it—there was not—there was during Tet, fighting in Can Tho, and certainly in Nha Trang, but the city had been pacified.

CAROTHERS: And what was that environment like? You know, the leaders would talk a lot about pacification and about South Vietnamese villages being pacified. It sounds like that was not the experience that you necessarily had, where you were in an area where, okay, the major city is pacified, but a couple of times that you'd go out of Can Tho, it sounds like you ran into situations that suggest that the area was *not* pacified.

KEISWETTER: Well, I think that's exactly true. And since—there had been publications of a lot of documents to suggest that even the pacification was a false sense because the Viet Cong had so heavily penetrated the Vietnamese Army, the South Vietnamese Army, the South Vietnamese security forces generally, the government. So while I did have a sense of security in my daily life, and, you're right, when I traveled out of the city, there was a greater exposure to danger, I think probably the reality is that there was just a lot, that I didn't know, couldn't appreciate—no American knew, and probably much—many of the people I knew had Viet Cong sympathies.

CAROTHERS: And did coming to Vietnam and despite the rhetoric coming from leaders about pacification, discovering that a lot of that was not true, did that have any impact on morale of American both Foreign Service officers and enlisted men and other—other people in the military? Did that impact American morale in the region? Did you—did you see any of that?

KEISWETTER: Well, not during my time. It did a little later, in '74, when the evacuations occurred and all of that, when it became—when all of this infiltration became apparent, and many Foreign Service officers who were there at that time really did heroic deeds to get out Vietnamese who were their friends and with whom they had worked. And I knew some of those. My friend Ogden Williams was among them. And he went back, and he was what I would describe "a man of many ladies"—[both chuckle]—so he sort of brought back to the United

States the families with whom he had been closely associated.

So this was not true in my time. What did happen is there was a big buildup of force. And then we had the elections, and Nixon was elected. The elections were fought roughly on the issue of Vietnam. [Hubert H.] Humphrey lost because he could never get out from under the shadow of Johnson. Nixon won, and he won on a vague promise that he would get us out of Vietnam in some way.

And so we—when I was there—which would have, he would have taken office in January, and I would have left the following October—you could see a real change because when I arrived in the first year, the resources were plentiful. And that wasn't necessarily good for me, basically a bureaucrat who traveled. It meant more reports and charts and so on and so forth that I had to get done, many of which I thought were fairly useless. But all that changed because there was the beginning of the draw-down, and so people were drawn back, and there was not nearly as much paperwork.

I wanted to comment a little bit, too, about what might be called the sociology of Vietnam. And there were many—there were people, military men from Australia—I mentioned there were Koreans, Filipinos, a large, broad cross-section. And then there were the Americans who were there. They fell into sort of, I would say, two or three groups. There were sort of young people or people like me that were part of the Foreign Service and were assigned there.

And then there were people who were specially hired for Vietnam. And you have to think: What would be the motivation of people to go to Vietnam. Well, number one was money because you would earn two or three or four times what you would in the States with a similar duty, because of danger pay and because of payment of travel and so on and so forth. So there were a lot of people there who [had] financial problems, were being divorced and so on and so forth.

And then there were others that were there because—should we say they had interests and taste that if they

indulged them at home, it would be frowned upon by legal authorities. [Both chuckle.] Yeah.

It was a real mix. It was a real mix. There was a lot of sort of special opportunities in some ways, too.

One of the people who worked for me was a Vietnamese man who was twice my age. He was in his 50s somewhere. And he wanted to do my horoscope, and he requested the exact time and location of where I was born. I provided that to him. And then he wrote me my horoscope for the rest of my life. And I still have it, and I still read it from time to time to see how accurate it is. He wrote half of it in English, but then it says, “Since life changed, I’m writing the rest in French.” So half of it is in French.

But he predicted that I would have—I would never be rich but always have enough money. Largely true. At least so far. He predicted that I would die at age 69 or 84, in the presence of a woman that I love that is not my wife. And he’s wrong about 69, and 84, we don’t know that yet, and I’ve always interpreted the presence of a woman I love who’s not my wife as being my daughter, so [both chuckle] there were. That’s just to make the point that there were cultural experiences, too.

CAROTHERS: And I would love to hear about some of those, and especially some of the characters that you were around, too. You mentioned—[A tone sounds again; there are missing words here; 1:44:42] who sounds like a [tone; missing words; 1:44:47]—who sounds like a very—a very interesting man. And what—what was it like working for him, and just—was—was that sort of a common figure, like the foreigner who had come to Vietnam and do a little bit more than just interact on a professional level with people

KEISWETTER: Yes. Well, [tone; missing words; 1:45:16] was the son of a British diplomat, and when World War II broke out, his family was assigned to Russia, and they couldn’t get—to Moscow, and they couldn't get out via Europe, so they took a train across Russia, Vladivostok and a boat to Australia, and that’s how he became an Australian.

And he, I guess the best way to put it, was a ladies' man. He traveled all the time. He had a girlfriend in each one of the provinces [chuckles], I believe. And they sometimes turned up in his life, to his embarrassment. But that being said, he was very competent in his professional duties, and he was particularly good at ferreting out and seeing corruption and trying to do something about it.

And so my relationship to him was—I didn't travel very often—was in II Corps, because he traveled most of the time, and I sort of—I stayed behind and ran the office and made sure that the reports were written and provided support to him while he was traveling.

I had another Vietnamese person that was my counterpart in Nha Trang, and he had written a book in Vietnamese that showed why Vietnam was the center of the world. [Laughs.] He later, it turns out, to be probably among the more corrupt officials that I dealt with in the course of all of this

I have to say that I did receive two medals from the Vietnam government, but after the war they were confiscated or I guess—what shall I say? I got a note from the Department of State that suggested [chuckles] that these are not particularly honors that we should attach much importance to because of corruption.

Go ahead.

CAROTHERS: Wow. And what were those medals—what were those awards for?

KEISWETTER: Oh, it was just for heroic service to the Vietnamese people and the cause of saving Vietnam from, you know, the communists.

CAROTHERS: Got it. Were they awarded for particular instances, or was it more just—

KEISWETTER: No.

CAROTHERS: —as a commentary on your career there?

KEISWETTER: Yes, I think it was a commentary on my career.

CAROTHERS: Got it. And what—it sounds like you had a lot of interactions with the Vietnamese and others—others did, too, you know, with some people. All of you interacted with them professionally; some people, on a romantic level; some, on a personal level. What were—were largely the interactions like between the Americans and the other—the other Westerners there and the Vietnamese people, both your Vietnam counterparts and also just Vietnamese civilians in general?

KEISWETTER: Well, I think my interactions were all I think quite positive except for those who were trying to shoot me, I guess. [Both chuckle.] For example, in Nha Trang I lived in an estate—that's not the word I want, but I can't think of it at the moment—but in a large house with about a half a dozen other Americans. And all around the outside were small Vietnamese shops. And so I could walk out the door in the morning, and there would-at the pho I could have breakfast, if I wanted to, and I frequently did that.

And I moved around largely without fear. I mean, I did not have a problem with that. And many people really grew to love Vietnam. I just witnessed a number of Americans who married and have now Vietnamese families, so I saw it quite positively.

As for the romantic side, I remember that I went to a conference in Baghdad [Iraq]—not Baghdad, excuse me, slipping gears here—in Saigon, and the planning for it—somebody asked if "flowers of the Delta" would be allowed to attend. The answer was, "Night-blooming flowers are not welcome." [Both chuckle.]

CAROTHERS: All right! And what do you think the—the Vietnamese attitudes were towards the Americans? Were they equally positive?

KEISWETTER: Well, the appeared to be positive, but you got to keep in mind we lost the war, and evidence suggests heavy infiltration, but I know—I can jump ahead. I went to Vietnam—when was it? I guess seven years ago. And, you know, there's no rancor. Part of that is generational change, but there is no rancor. People were extremely welcome—

welcom*ing*, I should say. And generally Vietnamese and Americans like each other.

CAROTHERS: That's—that's—that's interesting to me, seeing—you know, given the history.

KEISWETTER: Yeah.

CAROTHERS: Is that—is that surprising to you as—as well, or—or is—or has there always been sort of a positive relationship? You know, you'd think that a number of people in Vietnam would not look favorably upon the United States.

KEISWETTER: Look, I have several explanations. One is when I was in Vietnam in the Foreign Service, the people were in essence paid to like me, and when I was there as a tourist, I was paying *them* to like me. [Both chuckle.] So there is that difference of context. But if you go back historically, you go to Hồ Chí Minh. He tried hard to develop relations with the Americans. He wrote several letters to various presidents. But the decision was made we had to support the French; we couldn't support the independence movement. And so there was a certain admiration, underlying admiration for America and the principles for which we have stood, and I think this carries over, to some extent.

One of the most affecting visits that we made in Vietnam was to Hồ Chí Minh—excuse me—was to Hanoi and to Hồ Chí Minh's house, and to see how simply he lived and to read about what he believed in. And you wonder how we could get this so wrong! How did we end up on the wrong side of this? And the answer to that is—I think goes back to—and the training in Washington—because we had—most of the training was unclassified. Once in a while there would be a session that was classified confidential or something.

But one time we were having a lecture by an official, and it was about why we were in Vietnam, the political rationale. And there was this—we were alerted: "The next slide is Top Secret!" And guess what it said. "Containment of China." [Chuckles.] From this point of view—[Some very loud, high-pitched sounds begin]—it seems a little ludicrous, and it did at the time, too, but it hadn't played out, so it was sort of self apparent at that time. [The loud sounds end]

So maybe this shows my takeaways from this after many years. Do you want to go there now?

CAROTHERS: I would love to circle back to that. I have a couple more questions about—

KEISWETTER: Sure.

CAROTHERS: —Chiêu Hồi. So what was the dynamic like between the military people and the Foreign Service people, the USAID people, from—well, I'm not sure, actually, how—how much the USAID was involved in Chiêu Hồi, but I've heard it more broadly about CORDS. It was kind of this jumble of people from—from all over various government posts. So what was the dynamic like within Chiêu Hồi?

KEISWETTER: Well, first of all, we did have, Foreign Service people. We did have AID [U.S. Agency for International Development] people, and we had Filipinos, obviously Australians and some others. We all got along quite well. There was not a problem there. And I think there may have been some problems in Saigon, where there were larger gatherings and, you know, there were factions that feel that they weren't getting their just treatment or something like that. But out in the corps and in the provinces, no problem. At least, I didn't find a problem.

CAROTHERS: Got it. And now—that was the—the relationship was cooperative and productive, both within various people from the American side and then also with—with your South Vietnamese counterparts and—and other—other groups as well?

KEISWETTER: Yeah. Yes. It was—it was cooperative, and I guess it was dysfunctional—it may have been dysfunctional cooperation [chuckles], I guess.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: But the different question is to whether it was effective.

CAROTHERS: That's actually my—my next—my next question, is: Do you believe that the Chiêu Hồi program was successful? And

kind of especially this—this policy of sending defectors who—the majority of whom did not defect, because they were big believers in sort of the South Vietnamese cause—sending them back to go to try to recruit more defectors. Did this program seem successful or—or no?

KEISWETTER: Well, it certainly was successful statistically because it took fighters off the battlefield, and I don't know what the statistic was or how many thousands it took off the battlefield, but it did do so. But how permanent, is another question, because it was fairly easy to re-defect.

And then back to the infiltration problem. I can't help but wonder how many of the people that were in fact just being trained—using the Chiêu Hồi program as a way of infiltration. It seems like a good—a good way to do that.

So I think it had some effectiveness. It didn't turn the war, and there's now way of really knowing at this point. Or at least for me to know.

CAROTHERS: Yeah. Yeah. And you briefly touched on Nixon earlier, and Nixon was obviously elected while you were in Vietnam. And at the time, what—what was your—your thought on Nixon's election? Earlier, you had said that you weren't a big fan of LBJ earlier, so was—was that a—in your mind, was that—was that a good change? You know, looking at it at the time, were you pleased to see that change, and also just in Vietnam what was the sentiment around LBJ going out and Nixon coming in?

KEISWETTER: Okay. Well, personally I voted for Humphrey. And as I reflect on it, there were not many others who supported Humphrey among my colleagues. [Chuckles.] Most of them were for Nixon.

I'm not quite—it may be strange to say this, but I did not quite connect the election to my personal fate in Vietnam when it obviously was quite related. But at this juncture, some 50 years later, I don't remember thinking, *Hmm, if I vote for Humphrey, this is what it means for me, or I vote for Nixon, this is what it means for me.* So I think I probably felt, as I reflect on it, that things were going to change, whichever was elected in regard to Vietnam and because Humphrey

distanced himself, too, from Johnson. And so I voted on sort of more U.S. domestic, ideological issues.

CAROTHERS: And you were in Vietnam for almost year after Nixon was inaugurated in January of 1969. Did you see the impact of Nixon's policy on your experience in Vietnam?

KEISWETTER: Yes, absolutely, because suddenly it was no longer how [unintelligible], but the question was, "We're cutting, and so here's the support you're not going to get." So yes, I did.

CAROTHERS: And in terms of your ability in Chiêu Hồi to go out and effectively run your program and continue to take fighters off of the battlefield, did Nixon's policy of starting to, you know, try to decrease involvement and removing a lot of funding and support—did that—was that detrimental to your—to your program?

KEISWETTER: Well, yeah. I think for me personally—just a minute. [Talking to someone else] Goodbye.

For me personally, I already mentioned that I had fewer reports to do. That was good. But then when I would request, say, funds for a new resettlement village or something, the answer was, "Sorry, we're doing more with less, so no more money."

CAROTHERS: Got it. And looking back now, what are—what are your thoughts on Nixon's Vietnam policy?

KEISWETTER: Hmm. Well, I think he did a decent job. He got us out of there, since I think it was a mistake to go in there in the first place, at least in this very large, overwhelming way, and so I guess I always admired his policy and the negotiations that Kissinger did to get us out of there.

There are certain personal regrets, I guess. No Vietnamese that I knew—since I wasn't there in 1974—so no one that I knew well was somehow left behind or something. But for many—but there is a fact that many, many Americans today and Vietnamese-Americans today came out of there, and many of them didn't, because of the collapse of it all and sort of quickly.

For example, a good friend of ours in our church was one of the "boat people" that came out during this period. And she's now gone on to work for the U.N. refugee organization, so—[Chuckles.]

Anyway, there was human tragedy there, and there were the 40[,000] or 50,000 Americans who were killed for unclear reasons.

CAROTHERS: And so speaking of—speaking of getting out of Vietnam, you leave Vietnam in October of 1969, correct?

KEISWETTER: Yeah, October 3rd, to be exact.

CAROTHERS: October 3rd, 1969. And—

KEISWETTER: I was there for 18 months and three days

CAROTHERS: Eighteen months and three days. And after those 18 months and three days, what came next? What did you do after Vietnam?

KEISWETTER: Well, I came back, and at this time I still thought I wanted to be a Europeanist, so I came back, and I went to work in the Department of State, on European affairs in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. And I followed French and Belgian affairs, sort of from something that was a hot topic to something that wasn't.

CAROTHERS: And I know you were—you mentioned that you were still opposed to the war, and actually wrote—what was it a letter along with a couple of other Foreign Service officers in opposition to certain elements of Nixon's policy?

KEISWETTER: Well, yes. This regards the incursion into Cambodia. And I thought this was a mistake. I had just been back in the United States, I don't know, a few months, a few weeks, and I went out on a lunch break to walk around the building, where I was accosted by someone who asked me to sign a petition saying that the incursion into Cambodia was a mistake. And I did so, and before the end of the day, there were headlines that said, "Foreign Service Officers Oppose Nixon's Cambodia Policy."

And the next day, I was home sick with a cold, and I got a phone call saying, “You have to come immediately to the Department of State.” I explained that I was sick, and they said, “If you value your career, you’ll be here.” And so I turned up, and [Ural] U. Alexis Johnson, who was then the third-ranking person in the Department of State, the Undersecretary [of State] for Political Affairs—he made clear to us and his many years of working with the White House in various capacities, there had never been such breach of confidence between the Department of the State and the president.

And I remember well that one of my colleagues from my Foreign Service class, who had also signed this petition—and, again, there were probably 40 or 50 of us—he was obviously a little nervous. He wanted to say something about “one fell swoop,” but he got his consonants mixed up, and he said, “one fell whoop” [chuckles] and went on to make the point that never in his study of history had there been such a breach of confidence between the people and the president.

Anyway, the bottom line is I think U. Alexis Johnson—I should be very grateful to him because apparently Nixon wanted to fire us all instantly, and he intervened to say, “These are good people. You know, let me take care of this problem,” and so we weren’t fired.

This relates to the overall stance on Nixon. I think he’s right to have gotten us out of Vietnam. For me personally, there were at least incidents which didn’t seem to work very much, and much of Nixon’s policies, such as the Cambodian incursion, I think even at this point is quite questionable, as well as the various bombing raids of Hanoi.

CAROTHERS: Yeah. And while, you know, you didn’t get fired from your job for signing this petition, were there repercussions?

KEISWETTER: I don’t think so. You never know for sure. And sometime later, a good friend of mine was in personnel, and he found these materials in my file, and he said, “I’ll fix the problem for you.” I think he just took them out.

CAROTHERS: All right! [Chuckles.]

And you—you mentioned that—in some of your material that I was reading—that you at one point got tear gassed when you were back in Washington.

KEISWETTER: Oh, yes.

CAROTHERS: So what is the story there?

KEISWETTER: Well, I had been back from Vietnam, and I was living with some friends near Dupont Circle in Washington, and Dupont Circle at that time was the rallying point for the protests. And I remember going there on two occasions in particular: once, thinking, as you hear very broad slogans, "No, no, I won't go" and so on and so forth," thinking, *You know, the situation is much more complex than that* and thinking, you know, there are many more shades of gray and so on and so forth.

And then the other time that I was there that you spoke about, I was there, and the demonstration got out of hand. There were rioters who were breaking the shop windows along Connecticut Avenue. Tear gas was used. And, you know, it really [chuckles] is suffocating. It's not a good experience to be tear gassed. So we sought refuge in my friend's apartment, which was a few blocks away, but even then, the tear gas wafted in that direction.

So I guess I came back from Vietnam thinking, it was a *Mistake.* And thinking that part of the problem was the implementation and that later, when we were out of Vietnam, I can judge that Nixon was moving, I think, in the right direction and trying to create what Kissinger has called the decent interval. But for me personally, I was almost caught up in a way that would have ended my career.

CAROTHERS: That's wild. [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: I wanted to sort of say that when I was flying back from Vietnam and I was thinking about, *What does all this mean?*—I mentioned Robert Frost earlier. And he has written a poem called "Into My Own," and one of the lines, a couple of lines are that "They would not find me changed from him they knew— Only more sure of all I thought was true." It seems a little arrogant to say that this stage (or maybe at that stage), but I did feel that. I fell into Vietnam. I

had had a chance to observe it first hand. I still thought it was a mistake, but it was a much more complicated mistake than I thought it was. [Chuckles.]

CAROTHERS: Yes, I can imagine.

And so you were—going back to some of the—you weren't necessarily involved in the—the antiwar movement but had a little bit of exposure to it, living near Dupont Circle. What are your thoughts on how the government responded to antiwar protesters?

KEISWETTER: Well, I guess I identified as part of the government, and I—to some extent, as well as having some sympathy with the protesters, and well, I guess I drew personal lessons. I would not want to join protesters who were inclined to violence or to attract attack, and I have to say, later in my life I've been involved with other social movements. We have a GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender] son, a transgender son, so I've been very active in gay rights things. So it's not social movements in general but certainly those that have a violent tinge—it has a whole different set of issues that you have to think very carefully about them.

CAROTHERS: And so it sounds like you're a little bit—I don't want to put words in your mouth, but are you—are you conflicted on the---the antiwar movement? Because obviously it's—it's a—you know, just like the experience in Vietnam, the antiwar movement is—is complicated, and it sounds like you sympathized with some but with others, you know, when it comes to sort of the more violent elements of it, you're in opposition.

KEISWETTER: I think basically Vietnam was a mistake, and I—I guess I intellectually appreciate that it was the antiwar movement that produced, in large part, the changes. But, on the other hand, I'm not quite a law-and-order person, but I have an appreciation that these are very complex problems. I'm sort of rambling here because I'm not quite sure what I'm saying. But the point is, I personally did not feel comfortable being involved with violent and riotous behavior.

CAROTHERS: That certainly makes sense. I don't think I would be, either.

And, again, just kind of coming—coming full circle here a little bit, I just have a couple more questions.

KEISWETTER: Sure.

CAROTHERS: So you spent your career in international relations.

KEISWETTER: Right.

CAROTHERS: And what experience or what impact do you think the Vietnam War had on—on you? What lasting impact?

KEISWETTER: Well, first, I learned first hand about war. And secondly, I learned first hand about the military. And it engendered certain ideas also about the whole concept of the use of force.

And another sort of professional attribute is at the tender age of 23, 24, a first-tour officer, I had greater responsibility than I would have had if I had had ten years in the service in other circumstances, and there was a lot of experience at an early age that led to early promotions. So that was another aspect of it.

While Dartmouth was the most formative experience in my life, certainly the Vietnam War was another one, not nearly as important but did inculcate these attitudes and did give these opportunities for early promotion.

It's interesting, because we've talked about my European specialty, which is academic and at the beginning of my career, and we've talked about Vietnam, but of my 36-year career, 25 of it has been in the Middle East [chuckles], so all of it is sort of pre-history to the main—the main course that happened later.

CAROTHERS: Oh, speaking of the Middle East, do you see lessons from Vietnam as being relevant to current Middle East policy?

KEISWETTER: That's a good question, and it's something that I'm now thinking about, not exactly in those terms, but what *is* the utility of the so-called military [phone rings] instrument. Just a moment, please.

CAROTHERS: Sure. It's probably somebody asking me, giving me a free trip to Caribbean or something or other. Anyway.

The whole idea of the use of military force and the military instrument I think is out for academic and policy reconsideration. One of Obama's advisers at the White, a person named Philip [H.] Gordon, is now out of the government and is teaching—I think he's a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. But he has written from his time in office, that in Iraq we invaded and we occupied, and it was a costly disaster. In Syria—excuse me, in Libya we invaded, didn't occupy, and it was a costly disaster.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: And in Syria we neither invaded nor occupied, and it was a costly disaster.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: Maybe that's just circumstances. A prudent policy is to be on the sidelines and try to nudge things in the right direction. So—I've just written a piece called "The Middle East and the 2016 [Presidential] Elections," and what I hope will happen is we will have sort of a grand strategy discussion of the use of the military instrument in U.S. foreign policy but particularly the Middle East.

So that's a long-winded answer to say I think Vietnam is relevant because I believe it falls in the Iraq category. We invaded, we occupied, and it was a costly disaster. [Both chuckle.]

CAROTHERS: Yes, it was.

The last thing that I—I wanted to touch on was your trip back to Vietnam in 2008. What was it like to return to Vietnam?

KEISWETTER: Well, first of all, my wife and I—we both felt sincerely welcomed. We visited schools, and children would sing songs to welcome us. And Vietnamese cuisine has already, of course, intruded deeply into American table, and so that, of course, was good. But most—there were two—really three startling things, or observations.

One of them was Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, which seemed to me in many ways just unchanged; it's just much more crowded.

And then there was going to Nha Trang, where there is a big Buddha on a mountain above the city which sort of looks over the city, but you couldn't see it. This is because of the skyscrapers that have been built in front of it. So Nha Trang—it's thriving. The beautiful beach that I remember, with small shacks that served fresh-cooked shrimp and this sort of this—well, now this is a formal sculpture garden. [Chuckles.] There's still the beautiful islands off shore. And it, the [unintelligible] is lined with luxury hotels and apartments. And when we were there, they were preparing for the Miss Universe contest. So things have changed a lot.

And then the third point is Hanoi and particularly the visit to Ho Chi Minh's house. You just come away wondering how could we get it so wrong? And I think the answer is, one, we were very much, I almost said "in bed with"—that's not the right word, but this is—we were very much supporting the French and the Colonial period, which made us turn aside Ho Chi Minh's offerings. Eisenhower at one point put a small stop on this because there was a recommendation that we use nuclear weapons to defend the French in Vietnam, and he said, "Hell no" to that.

CAROTHERS: [Chuckles.]

KEISWETTER: Fortunately. And then, secondly, there was the misconception of Johnson that somehow we would defeat China and its ambitions in Vietnam. And I think that's, would be hard to support.

So those three observations: Saigon—you can walk down Memory Lane there pretty easily. It's a very busy, thriving, and Nha Trang, an entirely different city, and Hanoi, you know, the sort of center of it all, seems to evoke in me, at least, questions as to why we did all this.

CAROTHERS: Well, thank you for giving me your—your thoughts on that. And is there—are there any other topics, like, that you

would—that you—that you would like to cover or any elements of your story that you feel like were missing?

KEISWETTER: Not about Vietnam. I thought I might provide a little side light as to how I became an Arabist after Vietnam and then being a Europeanist.

CAROTHERS: Sure.

KEISWETTER: Well, this happened because Henry Kissinger at this point was secretary of state, and he came up with the policy of globalization, which had an entirely different meaning than what we think of today. And here, it was a technical term that means that if you had two tours in one area, you should have a tour outside of that so you can develop at least two specialties.

And I had had two tours in European Affairs. One of them was in INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research], Intelligence and Research, and the other one was at Harvard! Training in the Atlantic affairs. But I did work in NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] for one tour, but when it came time again, since I had had three tours, in fact, relating to European affairs—so be it, I have never had a tour in Europe, but that was beside the point—I was told that I should try another area.

And I chose Beirut because I spoke French, and it was a useful language. And this was the beginning, in 1975, of my career in the Middle East, and I have worked on Middle East affairs until I retired, with exception of one tour in Brussels.

So that's how I got from Vietnam to becoming, for a while, a European specialist and spending my career mainly on the Middle East issues.

CAROTHERS: Very interesting. Well, if there's a region in the world that's a particularly interesting one to study, the—the Middle East is certainly up there.

KEISWETTER: Yeah. [Chuckles.]

CAROTHERS: I'm actually reading—reading a book right now. I don't know if you know it. It's called *Lawrence in Arabia* [*:War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East*].

KEISWETTER: Oh, I loved it! I just loved it. I thought it's one of the best books that's been written recently.

CAROTHERS: I'm making my way through. I'm probably 150 pages into it at this point, and it's fascinating. I love it. I don't get as much opportunity to just, you know, sit down with a good book and read as I would like, but it's—it's—maybe after I finish it, I can—I can give you a call and [chuckles]—and hear your thoughts on it.

KEISWETTER: Sure. Yeah. Well, I thought it was excellent, and I have read quite a bit about [British soldier T. E.] Lawrence and the [*Seven*] *Pillars of Wisdom* and so on. I recently watched [the movie] *Lawrence of Arabia* again. When you consider that he was a short man, and blond and not particularly athletic, to see him portrayed as a six-foot-three or –four blond person who *is* athletic—should we say, the body, the stereotype isn't right, but the film was good. [Chuckles.]

CAROTHERS: Well, a little Hollywood magic.

KEISWETTER: Yes, exactly.

Well, is this sort of it, Andrew?

\CAROTHERS: Yeah, that's—that's covered everything that I really wanted to focus on. Yeah, thank you so much for taking two and a half hours to—to sit down with me. It was great to hear about your experience.

KEISWETTER: Well, good. I will be coming to Dartmouth for the 50th reunion in June, but I suspect you'll be gone then. But let's do remain in touch. I'd like to hear—well, for example, do the Green Weenies and the Big Greeners still exist in some sort of form?

CAROTHERS: I—I would say it's probably not quite as—as clear cut as it was,—

KEISWETTER: I see.

CAROTHERS: —as it was in your day, but a little bit.

KEISWETTER: Well, you have—you have women to—to mediate this image a little bit. [Chuckles.]

CAROTHERS: Yes, yes. [Laughs.] I imagine, certainly from that regard, it's—it's a very different place than it used to be.

It's funny. I remember chatting with—chatting with some alums, and, you know, saying okay—from the Class of '67—and hearing—you know, asking them, "What's the biggest difference in Dartmouth in, you know, the nearly 50 years since you've graduated?" And all of them said, you know, "There are women there now."

KEISWETTER: Yes, exactly. So anyway—and I know liquor is a problem, and the college is doing quite a bit to change the—the culture, but do you think that's effective?

CAROTHERS: I think—I think in some regards it is. I think it's probably not quite as effective as the college would like, but I think it's certainly more effective than doing nothing.

KEISWETTER: Right.

CAROTHERS: So—yeah, I think—I think [Dartmouth President Philip J.] Hanlon [Class of 1977] is doing a lot.

KEISWETTER: Okay. Well, thanks for your time, and I look forward to the results, and I hope that it isn't completely inarticulate.

CAROTHERS: I—I—I think it'll be great.

KEISWETTER: Okay. Goodbye. Thank you very much.

CAROTHERS: Bye. Thanks have a good one.

[End of interview.]