Interview with Douglas Eugene Pike

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DOUGLAS EUGENE PIKE

Interviewed by: John Hutchison

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Q: This is John Hutchison interviewing Doug Pike at the University of California in Berkeley. I'm going to ask him to give us a short sketch beginning with where he was born, what his education was or whatever the milestones are on the way to his duty with USIA and then we'll get into the USIA aspects of it. Doug.

PIKE: I was born in Castlelight, Minnesota, July 27, 1924. My father was a house contractor, a builder. My mother was a schoolteacher before she was married. I'm an only child. I was raised in Minnesota and in North Dakota, went to high school in Minot, North Dakota. I went into the Army at the age of 17 in the last days of World War II or 1943 I believe. Yes, I think so. I served in the South Pacific in the Army and in the Philip- pines and then went on to Japan. I was in the first contingent of troops that landed in Sendai, Japan after World War II.

Q: What sort of duty did you have?

PIKE: I was in the Signal Corps. I began as a high-speed radio operator, was trained at Camp Grant, Illinois. I had one year in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at Michigan State University, then to radio school at Camp Crowder, Missouri.

In the South Pacific our unit—it was called an EJ radio unit—was asked to contribute people to publishing a newspaper called the Guinea Gold. It was an Army newspaper. So I was assigned to that as a reporter and a combat correspondent. And then when I went to the Philippines. I was seconded by my unit to The Daily Pacifican which was the newspaper of the Army in the Philippines.

Q: That would be a little bit like Stars and Stripes was in Europe.

PIKE: Right. And when I went to Japan I then was assigned to Stars and Stripes in Tokyo as the Eighth Army correspondent covering the Eighth Army in Yokohama. Then I went home from Japan—February 1946. I had three combat stars. The point system determined departure date.

Q: I remember it well. I spent three years in Europe.

PIKE: So then I went back to school, to the University of Minnesota and the University of North Dakota. But I dropped out of college after about a year and a half, went to work for a radio station of which I was part owner. Five of us went into this venture in Grand Forks, North Dakota. It did not work out and we lost our shirts on the deal.

So I was then recruited. I went to Okinawa as an Army civilian to work first in the Public Information Office, 1950. Then came an opening on the Ryukyuan Review which was the local newspaper published by the Army.

Q: Did you in the course of this period acquire some foreign languages at school or in Japan?

PIKE: No. When I got to Okinawa I began studying Japanese. I took that 100 hour, 1,100 word and phrase course which the Army offered to anyone who wanted it. The editor of the Ryukyuan Review died at the time I was there. So I found myself the only trained journalist on the scene.

It was one of those things that happens. In civilian life in journalism, of course, you would move up very slowly. I found myself overnight editor-in-chief of a 25,000 copies a day news- paper, a daily newspaper.

I wanted very much to get to Korea. The Korean War was on at the time. I had applications in for jobs in Korea. After about a year, I was hired by the United Nations in Korea, an organization called UNCAC, UN Civil Assistance Command. This was a public information office job. I traveled up and down the peninsula and wrote stories about civil affairs, relief and rehabilitation work, non-combat, non-military stories.

Q: You were still a civilian yourself.

PIKE: I was still a civilian working for the UN. I decided I should go back to school; and I did—to the University of California where I got a bachelor of arts degree.

Q: That was here in Berkeley?

PIKE: Here in Berkeley. Later, to jump ahead on my education, I had a year and a half at American University in Washington, DC where I got a master's degree. Still later, much later, I was at MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology for a year. My intention was to get a doctorate. I'll come back to the reasons why that got sidetracked at the time. Basically because it was a choice of either writing a book on the Viet Cong or pursuing a degree and everyone there advised me to write the book. I'll come back to that in a minute.

After I left U.C. Berkeley—I was still there after graduation—I was offered a job by the U.S. Department of Defense, in Tokyo as editor of the Far East Network News (FEN) Service.

It was also a civilian—Department of the Army civilian job. I was about to get married at the time to a Myrna Johnson who was from Dassel, Minnesota, also a journalist. Tokyo seemed like a very good place to get married, have a honeymoon, get a marriage started.

So we went off to Japan for two years. I was the FEN editor at what was called Pershing Heights, which is now the military headquarters of the Japanese Self Defense Force. I was chief editor of the news operation for the Far East Network. It was a standard radio news operation.

Q: This was for troops or for Japanese?

PIKE: It was in English for U.S. Troops. It was like the AFRS—Armed Forces Radio Service—as it was called in Europe and in Asia it was called FEN, the Far East Network.

Q: It was probably popular with English speaking Japanese as well.

PIKE: We knew the Japanese listened. And I'm afraid we often—I was politically unsophisticated at the time. I realized that much later when I went to work for USIA. We broadcast a lot of stories in Tokyo that must have given the Japanese a warped view of America.

Let me see. After two years we decided to go back to the mainstream in the United States. We had saved enough money for me to do some writing and for us to do some traveling. So we did two things. We took a bicycle trip through Europe—it was the fashionable thing of the day. We bought bikes in London and we rode to Edinburgh and then crossed to Denmark, into Germany and Switzerland and wound up in Italy where we took a freighter back to the United States. That was one thing.

Earlier, after Japan but before we went to Europe, I wrote a book about Japan. It was a very bad book. I still have the manuscript—locked up. It was never published, thank heaven. A terrible book. I had Japan all wrong. It was good training though in writing.

My wife and I worked on this together. But I had things all wrong. I had believed what the Japanese were telling me, that Japan was a permanent economic disaster. Later it became the Japanese economic miracle. It was a miracle. But at the time because of the population growth and the few re- sources, everybody believed that Japan was going to be an economic basket case. That was one basic point the book made. The other was the likely return of Japanese militarism. The Zaibatsu and the military police were going to come back. Again, I was working from secondary sources in the Japanese press—and this was what the press was full of. And so it was a good lesson—not to trust contemporary wisdom. It stood me in good stead later.

I also should say while I was at Berkeley, I specialized in Soviet studies. At the time I had hoped to become a foreign correspondent. I wanted to be a good one, and knowledgeable about the Soviet Union. I studied the history of the Soviet Union, and its economics. Then there was a special program of the U.S. Government that paid students to study Russian. They would pay you to do this, but you had to do it full time. There was a special school here at the university campus teaching Chinese and Russian. I spent one full calendar year studying Russian, six hours a day in class and two hours a day with earphones in the language lab—the most miserable year of my life. I can remember saying to a fellow student over a beer, I understand why the Russians are so hard to get along with. Anybody who had to speak that language can't help but be.

Q: But did you master it?

PIKE: Yes. They had a different evaluation system than the U.S. Foreign Service has now. They evaluate you on the basis of how well you could speak compared to school children in the Soviet Union—I had obtained a ninth grade competency in Russian.

Q: Which is pretty fluent.

PIKE: Yeah, that's fairly good. But in a real irony of waste—again to jump ahead—I never used Russian for about 25 years. I got back to it in the 1980's when I went to the Soviet

Union for the first time. Most of the language had gone. Things would come back to me. In Moscow I would hear phrases that I would recognize. Or I'd see a sign and suddenly realize that means barber shop. You look at it for a minute and suddenly its meaning jumps into your mind.

Q: My experience was kind of similar. I took Spanish in the university and I was pretty good at it. And I took so much of it that I almost spoiled by intentions for a major. I almost had to take a major in Spanish because I enjoyed it. And every now and then I would express my preference in USIA for a Spanish assignment. I never had one and never even set foot in South America until last April.

PIKE: I don't know how things would have gone had I gone to the Soviet Union years ago. Actually, again I'll come back to this—what I learned about the USSR stood me in good stead later, not the language, but the rest of the training. It prepared me for understanding the National Liberation Front or Viet Cong in Vietnam which was a Leninist organization. It all seemed so familiar to me—the motivational activity, the communal appeals, the use of mobilizational techniques and so on.

Anyway, we came back from Europe and I went to work for the Washington Star, the old Washington Star, as a reporter. I was going to school, nights, at American University. Later I went full time to American University. While there I was recruited by USIA. I got sort of a form letter from USIA asking me if I'd be interested in the foreign service as an FSIO.

I was puzzled as to where they had gotten my name. I realized later that probably what happened was USIA planned to expand, and was going to recruit about a hundred—

Q: What year was this?

PIKE: This was late 1956 or early 1957. I think what happened was that USIA asked people in the Agency if they knew of people out- side the Agency they would recommend. And I had known several persons—Bill Jorden and others—who worked for USIA or the

U.S. Embassy in Korea. I knew people in the Foreign Correspondents Club in Seoul. Possibly it was somebody in Tokyo. I knew several Asia Foundation people very well, Patrick Judge and Clarence Petro. Anyway, it was one of those flukes in a person's career. I was finishing college. I didn't want to stay on at the Washington Star. My hope was still to become a foreign correspondent.

Q: Those were the days when the Noyes family—

PIKE: Right. The Washington Star had one foreign correspondent, Newbold Noyes, and he owned the newspaper.

Q: It was Newby Noyes.

PIKE: It was Newbold Noyes, right.

Q: I knew him in World War II in Europe.

PIKE: Well, the possibilities of my getting a foreign correspondent assignment at the Star were not very great. Out of the blue comes this offer.

There was an interregnum—you may remember this—after we were all recruited. We were interviewed, then paneled, underwent security clearance and were waiting to be sworn in. I had received a notice saying come in for the swearing in ceremony in about a month. And so I quit my job and I was just waiting. Two weeks later I got another letter from the Agency saying we are not able to recruit anybody at this time for budget reasons. And I didn't—

Q: A familiar story. I've seen that happen.

PIKE: What happened, I found out later, was that Arthur Larson was the Director at the time. He was on the Hill testifying before Senator Lyndon Johnson's committee about the

budget. And Johnson said to Larson, “I understand you went out to Hawaii and made a philosophic speech about the New Deal in which you called it an alien philosophy.”

Q: I remember that.

PIKE: Technically it was an alien philosophy.

Q: Yeah, to Larson it was.

PIKE: I mean, to historians it was. It was non-Jeffersonian, something that came from Europe. But Larson gave the wrong answer. He said, “I thought I was here to answer questions about the budget.” And Lyndon Johnson said, “You are here to answer questions that I care to put to you.” Johnson cut the USIA budget that year just to prove that he could do it. I mean, it was very irresponsible. I have never forgiven him for it.

Anyway, I was out in the street. Today we'd sue of course. There'd be no question. We had a legal contract. Letters telling us to come to work. There were people in our group who had quit their jobs teaching in Oregon; had come to Washington to be sworn in and had to go back to Oregon.

Q: I wasn't in the Agency at the time. I had been. And, of course, I went back later on. I was out here in San Francisco. And someone whom I had been asked to help recruit, I still occasionally had some inquiries from Washington saying look for somebody. And I helped recruit someone, I can't remember who it was, who quit his job and went back on the written assurance that he was employed. He showed up in my office two weeks later. And I said, “What are you doing here?” He said, “They didn't have a job for me.”

PIKE: Yeah. Well, as I say today we'd go to court. Today the government wouldn't do this. It just couldn't you know. We all accepted it. Anyway, I decided to go back to American University and start on a Ph.D. I re-enrolled. I was also doing some free-lance writing that

brought in a little money. My wife was working at AP in Washington. So I was largely living off her.

Then out of the blue about a year later I got a phone call from Barry Zorthian or Bob Goldman, his boss, can't remember which. Robert Goldman went on to run a Spanish language magazine in New York. Anyway, Zorthian was number two.

Q: At the Voice.

PIKE: At the Voice of America, right. And Goldman was number one at the time, later Zorthian replaced him. Come to think of it Russ Spillane was the guy that actually called me first. He said, “Would you be interested in a job with VOA as a radio news writer?” And I said, “Yeah, I might”. He said, “Okay, you've got to come in today, Friday, and we'll interview you today. And you've got to start work Monday.”

Q: You were to start on Monday?

PIKE: What I realized later was that my security clearance following a full field investigation by the FBI would expire in a year.

Q: Yes.

PIKE: So they had to hire me before Monday or have to go through this long clearance process over again. I was a guy that they could hire immediately, I didn't realize at the time that they probably would have to hire me no matter how good I was or how bad. At the time I thought, boy, they must know how good I am. They knew I worked for FEN and I once owned my own—or rather was part owner of a radio station in North Dakota. So, on paper I looked pretty good. But they hired me because they needed bodies in a hurry.

Q: USIA at its manic best.

PIKE: Right. So I went to work for VOA. When I got on board the Agency Personnel Office told me that the foreign service thing was still in the mill. When I went in to see the Personnel fellow—I was a little put out at the time—he was very sympathetic. He said, “Your name is on the FSIO roster and as soon as we open this up, get authorization and money, you will be one of the very first ones recruited. You won't have to pass the board a second time.” This was the understanding. So again, this was a very fortuitous turn on the career road.

VOA was at 1776 Pennsylvania in those days. And I was working for what was called IBS, International Broadcasting Service.

Q: Yes.

PIKE: And IPS which was the—

Q: I was—well, not at that time. But before and after that I was Director of IPS.

PIKE: Yes. Well, we were just separated by that thin plaster wallboard. I was in the corner working with Van Seropian, Dan Bell, Herb Little, and Bill McNemmeman in IPS.

Q: Bill McNemmeman.

PIKE: McNemmeman was on the other side of the wall—a big window—we used to talk back and forth. I'd ask him questions about IPS and so on. One day he said, “Look, we need another man to cover the Eisenhower press conference—one a week. We've got two people. Would you be interested?” And I thought, that's really great.

So the next week I found myself covering an Eisenhower press conference. And sitting next to Jerry O'Leary from the Washington Star—had taken him 20 years to get there. And I had done it in 3 months. I think that's an important point—government gives young employees responsibility they can never get outside. Government is a great place to work

although I'm not so sure after 20 years it's all that great. It depends on what happens to you.

Q: Do you remember Jim Pope?

PIKE: Yeah.

Q: A young black fellow?

PIKE: Yeah, right.

Q: He was a very good—he covered Congress as I recall for IPS.

PIKE: That's right.

Q: And he's an example of what you're saying. Because he was very good. And I remember that when we had that terrible reduction in force, oh, back after the McCarthy disaster, personnel was frozen.

PIKE: That's right.

Q: We couldn't take any personnel action for months. Actually frozen. And it got to be a great source of speculation and anxiety who was going to get the first promotion when the freeze went off. And I still remember thinking this over because there were lots of people; there probably were a hundred people that deserved promotion. And I knew the psychological effect might create all kinds of jealousy. So I promoted Jim Pope.

PIKE: Well, that's the way it goes. Anyway, I had covered the White House every Thursday when there was a presidential press conference. We'd all phone in our stories. I was also working the VOA Far East desk. What I covered mostly there was Asia, anything on India or Kashmir which was the big one or Korea.

Q: This may be why you remember the name Lee Fallon because I think he had the Asian branch of IPS.

PIKE: Yes, he did. Meanwhile, my name was being considered again for foreign assignment which is what I really wanted. Finally it came through. I had been doing my graduate work at American University on communications of ideas. I did my master's thesis on international humor.

Q: Oh?

PIKE: International humor. I still hope to redo it someday and publish it as a book. I think it would make a fairly interesting one.

Q: I think it would make a grand book.

PIKE: There are three basic ways that ideas can be communicated: first, mass media; second, informal channels of communication, such as word of mouth, and rumor, which is the way most ideas have been communicated through most of man's history. It's an unreliable system if you're trying to use it to communicate ideas systematically. The third way is using social organizations as channels of communication. Social movement, you know, church or a trade union or a fraternity on the campus—these communicate data. They communicate value judgments: what kind of wife to marry, politics and so on. In developing societies, you don't have mass media by definition. You do not have reliable word of mouth system. But you do have social organizations. This is what I was concentrating on. So what are the dynamics of this? How does this process work? How does it work in a modern society? How does it work in a traditional society? When I went to Vietnam that was my orientation, my approach in thinking about the society. I'll get back to that in a minute.

When I finally was sworn in as an FSIO I was offered three posts, Seoul, Vientiane or Saigon. I had been in Asia, of course. I'd lived in Japan. I'd lived in the Philippines and

lived in Korea. My memory of Korea—this was ten years later—was of a very pitiful place, broken by the war, which it was. I remember the winter I spent in Pusan as one of the coldest in my life. And I was born in Minnesota. So the idea of going back to Korea—I should have gone back to Korea looking back at it in terms of career—didn't seem a good idea at the time. Vientiane in Laos—I had a vague idea of where it was—didn't sound very interesting. Saigon sounded exotic.

Anyway, I went to Saigon—again one of those roads taken and not taken thing—it turned out to be very fortuitous for me. I arrived in Saigon at the time working for a communication agency with a very definite interest in how ideas are communicated in a society like Vietnam.

Q: What year was this?

PIKE: 1960.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: The month I arrived, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam or the Viet Cong was formed. I became immediately interested in it in terms of how it communicates its ideas. What were the techniques they used? How do they use their agit—prop cadres? How do they mobilize people? How do they organize them? How do they motivate them? What is their strategic communication process?

I began to collect materials, propaganda leaflets, did interviews with defectors, etc. I got a reputation in Saigon—there was only about 400 Americans there at the time—as a person who was working on the Viet Cong. The CIA did not have anybody assigned to this. The Embassy did not have anybody assigned to it. It wasn't until four years later that they had anybody working full time on the National Liberation Front.

Q: It's astonishing how we—

PIKE: Right. It's vincible ignorance, as we used to say. Anyway, the CIA people and others would send me over things, briefings, and propaganda leaflets they'd pick up in the field. And I'd do an analysis of these—analyze them for them, for content, subliminal messages and so on. You work backwards with this sort of thing, to try to determine what the operational code and the value system is from the appeals used.

Q: Were you supplying some of this material or analysis and guidance to the Agency for instance?

PIKE: Well, I'd give it to anybody I could. But nobody was—

Q: USIA?

PIKE: Yeah, I was tried to press it on them is what it amounted to.

Q: Yeah.

PIKE: Nobody was particularly interested.

Q: Yeah.

PIKE: I was writing speeches for the Ambassador—Nolting and Durbrow were the early ones. And I would bring up the subject of what the V.C. were saying and they would be mildly interested, saying, “If you have a report on this send it along”. And I would.

Q: We're backing into the swamp.

PIKE: I don't think the early Ambassadors paid any attention to this. It was a syndrome we suffered from all through the Vietnam War. It's what Aldous Huxley calls vincible ignorance. Vincible ignorance is something that you don't know; you know that you don't know it; but you don't think it makes any difference. These people did not know anything about the Viet Cong or their strategy or their political mobilization techniques. They knew

they didn't know but it didn't make any difference. All of us do not know a lot of things. For instance, I don't know anything about the polar icecap and the greenhouse effect, but if the ice- cap melts, this office is about ten feet above sea level. So, if the Pacific ocean goes up twenty feet, as I'm going down for the third time, I'll say that's an example of vincible ignorance. I wasn't all that certain myself about the war. I was interested chiefly in the career terms. Still I wanted to do a doctorate on this communication process.

Q: Sort of academic to you.

PIKE: Right. I didn't see the full meaning of it.

My first assignment in USIA was in the motion picture section—a commentary, I would say, on USIA. Consider its many activities: I had worked on newspapers. I had worked on radio. I had worked in the cultural field—very strong on Great Books of the Western World Adult Education Program. I had led Great Books discussions, had taken training in this, my wife and I. So what do they put me into?! The motion picture section. It was the biggest agency motion picture operation in the world, at that time, run by a guy named Dave Sheppard who was a Hollywood-trained motion picture maker and very good. I realized later the reason he worked to get me assigned was because he wanted somebody who didn't know motion pictures, because he had a lot of trouble with assistant motion picture officers who thought they knew the business.

Q: That makes a certain sense.

PIKE: I found it very interesting. I made movies. We made the newsreels that went into all the theaters across Vietnam. We made documentaries on highway building and a hundred other subjects. I went out shooting. I would sit for hours at the moviola. I wrote scripts. I wrote a series on the enemy. I did research on the Viet Cong. Did one on the Montagnards —the highland people. We made a series of documentary shorts on them.

Q: It also sent you out into the field.

PIKE: Right. I spent a lot of time in the hills. Again, I collected a lot of material on the Montagnards that I used in the scripts. I thought it was worth publishing, for the USIA to publish. So I wrote this short monograph. We published it. And it was at the time the USIS buildup was beginning in Vietnam. There was lots of interest in the Montagnards. I think they published something like 150,000 copies. I became identified for the time as an authority on the Montagnards. People would come in and say “You're an authority on the Montagnards”. I'd say, “No, I'm not. I spent ten days up there, skimmed a little cream, came back and put it into a report that's all. I'm not an authority on the Montagnards.”

Q: Compared to what else was available, you were.

PIKE: This would irritate them. They would think I was being modest.

Q: Yeah.

PIKE: So finally I say, “Okay, I'm an expert. What do you want to know?” For years I had to live down what to me was a false reputation. All they knew was that I had published this monograph. I would say look at it. It's nothing. It's like a long news- paper article. There's no depth in it. There's no research. Anyway, it's an example of the fact that Americans went to Vietnam ignorant of the country and the culture. Later they did a lot of work quickly. I mean, we got smart in Vietnam. We had people there who in four years or five years became genuine authorities. They knew Confucianism. They knew the Hoa Hao. They knew the Mountainmen. They knew the Viet Cong. There was an absence of knowledge. We were not ignorant in that sense. It was vincible ignorance. The first ambassador that ever really took us seriously was Ellsworth Bunker.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: He would call me in for periodic chats about the other side. None of the other ambassadors before him did that. They knew me. They would mention my experience at a cocktail party. But there just wasn't the interest on their part. I think this was even worse

back in Washington. I had one session with Lyndon Johnson earlier in Washington when I was in school and my wife, after she left the AP became an administrative aide to Quentin Burdick, Senator from North Dakota. He was in the House at the time. He was a good friend of Hubert Humphrey's and we were from Minnesota. We were with the Hill crowd. We got to know Humphrey quite well.

Anyway, one of the times I was back in Washington and I was calling around on the Hill and Quentin Burdick called Humphrey and said, “Would you like to talk to Doug Pike?” He said, “Better than that I'm going to the White House to talk to Lyndon. I'll take him with me.” So the two of us went in. I had about five minutes with Lyndon Johnson. He said, “All of you are doing great things out there. We're proud of you. Anything that we can give you we will. All you need to do is ask. Is there anything you need?” And I said, “Yes, we need time.” His fist came down on the coffee table and he said, “That's the one god damn thing I cannot give you.” I understood his problem.

Q: Sure.

PIKE: But our view was that this was a protracted conflict. We had to have the determination to last. I knew that that was not the perception in Washington. They wanted victory quickly. The enemy knew we wanted it quickly. So that's why they fought their 50-year war as they called it. They dragged the thing out, protracted conflict.

The point of all this is that there is always this problem in the foreign service and in government in general of people who know things that the principals do not know. Either they know they don't know it and it doesn't make any difference, or they genuinely do not know it and should be told. But there is the difficulty—no mechanism to get knowledge across. I mean, with our peers or even with people slightly above you, you can press these ideas on them. But you cannot grab the President of the United States by the lapels and say, now, you're going to sit down here and listen to something you need to know.

Q: Of course, he has his own priorities which are pressing, he thinks pressing him much harder.

PIKE: Often the person winds up telling him what he does know. Woodrow Wilson once observed that the worst thing about being President is you have to spend so much time listening to people tell you something you already know. And I didn't know what Johnson really knew. And it didn't really occur to me that I should take on the mission of educating the President of the United States or the ambassador or anyone else. Looking back on it, I think I should have tried more. I should have been an advocate—because I was one of the few people that understood the National Liberation Front (NLF), the Viet Cong. Evidence from things that have been written subsequently, even by some of our top generals, shows they never did understand the other side. To this day they still do not understand it; the major reason why we lost the war.

Anyway, I had gathered all this material on the NLF. And I was still thinking about a doctorate. So I asked for a sabbatical. They had in those days, they may still have it, a sabbatical setup which offered three persons a year at a university as an assignment.

Q: Sort of scholarship.

PIKE: Kind of a scholarship. It was a sabbatical to go and study or to go and write. It was competitive. You put in a proposal and the committee picked the top three. So I proposed that I go to Stanford and do a study on the communication process of the National Liberation Front, the Viet Cong. At that moment, Dan Lerner who was a very famous figure in the field of communication of ideas from MIT came through Saigon. His book “Passing of the Traditional Society” on Iran is still probably the greatest book on communication of ideas in a developing society ever written. He's dead now. Anyway, we got along very well. And he said, listen, you should come to MIT. Don't go to Stanford. We've got the best setup here, etc. So I changed the proposal. When I got to MIT I reported to Max Milliken, head of the Center for International Studies. Lucien Pye was my mentor, as were

Ithiel Pool and Harold Isaacs. They had some very good people. These were my informal advisors. And all of them said, “Why are you monkeying around with a Ph.D.? What you should do is write a book on the Viet Cong.” And I said, “Well, I just thought I would be interested in getting a doctorate and ending my career at a university eventually.”

Q: Why couldn't a book of—

PIKE: You couldn't do both. There wasn't time to do both—a book and a doctorate.

Q: Oh, I see.

PIKE: You couldn't do all the course work and do the dissertation. In fact, regulations stipulate you have to spend 2 1/2 years on campus. So I thought maybe I would quite the government and continue my doctorate. But they argued I should stay in the foreign service, that it's a good career. A Ph.D. isn't all that much an advantage in the foreign service. But it is the union card in education. You've got to have it or you're not hired by a university.

Q: Academics are a little bit suspect in USIA or used to be.

PIKE: Well, they were. My advisors saw me as a person who knew a great deal about the Viet Cong, who should write what he knows. The second argument, I said, was that the Agency expected me to do a book on the communication process, not a book on the Viet Cong. Actually, the people who sent me there were a committee and nobody in Washington cared what I was writing.

Q: The committee had been disbanded long ago.

PIKE: Right. And by the time the book was out 2 1/2 years later, nobody remembered. Lucien Pye was a very famous Asian scholar, missionary's son born in China and raised in China. He thinks like a Chinese. He said, “Look, isn't it true that everything the Viet Cong does is an act of communication? I mean, an ambush, an assassination, are

messages they're trying to deliver. Okay, so you define everything they do as an act of communication. Then you write a book on everything they do. And then you say, 'I've written a book on their communications process.'” As I say, he thinks like a Chinese.

Well, the question was get a doctorate or do a book. So my adviser persuaded me to write a book—that really was the right way to go. A Ph.D. doesn't do you a great deal of good in government. It probably gets you a little better start at least in the civil service. The thing about a successful book like this is that it makes you overnight. I mean, this came out at exactly the right—

Q: You are an authority.

PIKE: And I got front page reviews in the New York Times and the Washington Post. That impresses people who never read the book. I've had one ambassador who said, “you've written this book on Vietnam.” And I said, “yes.” He said, “would you mind sending me the reviews of it?” Not the book, just the reviews. I thought he at least was more honest than some of the others.

Q: The blurb on the jacket.

PIKE: People have said, you know, I've read your book. It was very interesting. And in talking to them I realize they have read only the dust jacket.

Anyway, the book labeled me within the Agency as an authority on Vietnam. It meant that I was stuck in Vietnam for the duration of the war. Actually, I was assigned to Vietnam from 1960 until 1975 with the exception of the nine months at MIT. There were what were called regional information assignments which involved traveling and lecturing and attending conferences. I had this assignment for seven years. I was out of Vietnam for long periods, on the road. I think I must have circled the world at least 25 times. I've made about 2,000 lectures on Vietnam in 40 countries. I've heard every question on Vietnam that's conceivable and some that are inconceivable.

Q: Like what?

PIKE: Well, what is the relationship of Vietnam to the Maldives— which I heard in Argentina. Or in Ankara, how do you compare the Vietnam War with Cyprus? What is the connection? It's wrong to say I don't think there is any connection. Because they say, well, I will tell you the connection. And they go on at great length about the Maldives or the Falklands or Cyprus.

The point is that in these travels and lectures what I encountered was not hostility for the American involvement in Vietnam, but a puzzlement as to what we were doing there; why the war went on for so long; why it's so indecisive; what it's all about. It's was tinged with hostility sometimes, but essentially most foreigners, unlike most Americans who are either very pro war or very anti, were simply puzzled by what the war was all about.

The reason for this I realized later was that the Vietnam War was a new war in kind. It was not a kind of war we'd experienced before. It was a culmination of a development of warfare that began with Napoleon. This blurring the line between combatants and non-combatants. It's an unlimited war in which all people are involved. Not even children are excluded, particularly not even children you might say. This is people's war. This is what Ho Chi Minh and General Giap and before him Mao Zedong had developed. Where we saw it fielded really for the first time was Vietnam.

Since then we've come to understand this phenomenon—hence what's happening today in Beirut, or in Belfast, or in Afghanistan or Cambodia. It's the new face of war. The downing of the airplane, 707, over Scotland or kidnapping people on cruise ships or the militants in Beirut. That's the future face of war. We call it terrorism. It is terroristic. But it is also a strategy. I think the world has come to understand this better than during Vietnam.

Q: Extension of war into terrorism.

PIKE: It's blurring the line between war and politics, the gray area where you're talking about politics with guns. Whether that's warfare or politics with guns as Kissinger used to say a distinction without a difference, particularly if you're on the receiving end of it—you're not being killed in war, you're being killed because of politics. Anyway, it was a phenomenon.

Q: It should be considered that these things weren't fair.

PIKE: So we said—you just didn't do this, there were rules of engagement and so on. Anyway, that was the phenomenon that we didn't understand. In these lecture tours I was trying to express it. I didn't have a great deal of difficulty because I focused on the other side—I did not talk a great deal about the American side of the war although I would answer questions about it.

There were a couple of time when it got sticky. I was barred from Delhi University by a demonstration of young girls in saris blocking the road. They canceled a meeting at Monash University in Australia when demonstrators denounced me as a war criminal. Those were the only two times that I ever ran into any serious trouble. Of course I did not speak in the United States because as a USIA person I was prohibited from “propagandizing” the American people. I did do interviews. I mean, there is a limit to such censorship—the First Amendment to the Constitution does apply to foreign service officers and FSIOs as well.

Q: There was always that row about distributing any film.

PIKE: That's right.

Q: Or publication.

PIKE: Of course it was gotten around very easily because the White House would order materials from USIA which the Agency was obliged to send. Then the White House would

send the stuff out. I don't know whether that was legal or not. But you couldn't blame USIA, although they weren't, I don't think, against the idea. It's a little silly, you know; one of the crosses that we had to bear.

Anyway, where was I? I was working out of Vietnam traveling, lecturing. This was right up until the end. After my MOPIX assignment in Vietnam I ran a propaganda analysis operation for JUSPAO, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office. We had a team of American military and Vietnamese. We were analyzing propaganda. We were doing studies. We were doing in-depth interviews. We were doing public opinion research work, what we called barometer opinion surveys, in-depth studies of anti-Americanism—essentially research work.

Serious interest in the other side was shown when Graham Martin arrived. The nature of the war had changed considerably and that was one of the reasons.

Q: Did Martin replace Bunker?

PIKE: Yes, right.

Q: He had been in Bangkok I think.

PIKE: Right. He had been ambassador in Bangkok. He had me setup an interagency organization, an ad hoc committee. I was the chairman. Members came from throughout the mission: the military; CIA; Frank Snepp, the famous Frank Snepp was our USIS representative on this; the embassy and so on and so on.

Q: AID Program?

PIKE: Yes, AID people. Let me think of who else was there. Several branches of the military and MACV, Military Assistance Command Vietnam. If we had had an embassy in Hanoi we would have been the political section. We were the equivalent. Our job was to read cables and radio broadcast transcripts and write reports. And Frank Snepp would go

off periodically to Hong Kong to debrief Third World diplomats stationed in Hanoi and so on. We were simply trying to understand the politics of the politburo, know the operational code of the politburo—how do Hanoi's leaders decide things? What are their attitudes on the Paris talks? What are they likely to do, etc.?

Q: Sure.

PIKE: That which political officers do. That was my last job in Saigon. I liked it and I was very interested in it. One day I got a cable from the Agency saying you are hereby informed that you must return home immediately because there is a regulation in the foreign service that says in the first 15 years you must spend two years in Washington. You've been out 15 years and you've never been back once. I took the cable to Graham Martin and he said, “Don't worry, I'll fix it up.” The next thing I know I get my orders to come home. So Martin called me in and said, “I really thought I could fix it.” You understand I was an Indian way down the totem pole. If the ambassador in a major post—the biggest post in the world, we had 1,100 people in that embassy, if he wants something from Washington he's going to get it normally. Martin had gone to Kissinger on this. I couldn't imagine the Agency bucking Kissinger on something like this. Martin showed me a letter from Kissinger. It said this two-year business is not a regulation, it is a law. It's in the law—the enabling legislation for the foreign service law says that you must serve two years of your first fifteen in Washington.

Q: This I didn't realize.

PIKE: Therefore the Kissinger letter said what you're asking us to do is to bend the law. And with Watergate and all we got into a lot of trouble bending the law. We just cannot do it anymore. So Martin said, I'm very sorry. He was apologetic.

The irony is I left at the beginning of 1975 taking with me all of the material that became the University of California's Indochina Archive, some three million pages of documents, 50,000 maps and graphics and photos and 12,000 books.

Q: Let me insert a little comment to sort of set the place we're talking here. We're surrounded by, I suppose, hundreds of volumes, books, pertinent to Vietnam's history.

PIKE: All of them on Vietnam.

Q: The war and so on. And a great many souvenirs that you, Doug, have collected.

PIKE: Yes.

Q: I can see looking up here coins and paper currency and an old—

PIKE: AK-47.

Q: That's an AK-47 on the wall, a dark pistol.

PIKE: Viet Cong. Supposedly Viet Cong.

Q: A great many scrolls and paintings and watercolors, pieces of ceramic, both ancient and modern I assume.

PIKE: Right.

Q: You're immersed in this lore.

PIKE: Right. So all of this I had in Vietnam and all of it I got out in good fashion. Because this was before anybody expected anything except a routine return to the United States.

Q: Before the collapse.

PIKE: I had gone out in 1960 with what was known as a full household shipment. In those days everyone took all his furniture with him including their grand pianos and so on. We didn't take much with us. But what that meant was we had a big weight allocation. It was still in effect, because we'd never gone home since 1960. If we'd gone home and come back it would—

Q: Limited shipment.

PIKE: Exactly. So we bought furniture in Hong Kong, rosewood furniture and so on, but not too much. I used my weight allocation to ship home all of this research material.

Q: The weight must have been enormous.

PIKE: Yes.

Q: Books.

PIKE: That's right. Dozens of lift vans. Anyway, the point is that I got out of Vietnam in good order. I was one of the last people who did get out in routine fashion. Most Vietnamese I know today believe that I saw the end coming and that I quietly slipped out. Actually, I didn't. I didn't see the end coming.

Q: You were ordered out.

PIKE: Yes. But I can't get any Vietnamese to believe this. Anyway, the point is that all of this material did get out.

At the end we couldn't even get 20 tons of gold out of Vietnam. It was left sitting there on the tarmac at the airport. I was back in Washington at the time in Policy Planning trying to get Swiss Air to fly the gold out. There was the question of insurance, in case the plane

went down. We waived that but by then it was too late. And the communists overran Than Son Nhut and captured the 20 tons of gold.

Q: What's that worth today?

PIKE: About $100 million. Maybe. It was $80 million at the time.

Q: Three hundred and some dollars an ounce.

PIKE: Yeah, times 16 times—

Q: Two thousand.

PIKE: It was 20 tons of gold. About a month later in Nhan Dan newspaper in Hanoi there was an article saying among the great victories that we achieved in the south is when we captured Tan Son Nhut, we captured 15 tons of gold. And I read that and I said, but it was 20 tons. So the next thing you know gold starts showing up in the refugee camps, in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand. This is GVN gold, with the GVN stamp on it. It's gold out of that shipment. We send word back through CIA asking are these people coming out with this gold? They say you can't believe this, but it appears to be North Vietnam security officers. No surprise. If you get your hands on five tons of gold or even a half a ton, it's too big a temptation.

Q: Gold is extremely important to the Asians too.

PIKE: That's right. It certainly is. Well, anyway, to return to me, coming back to Washington. I didn't have an assignment, the prospect was I would be, as they say, walking the corridors looking for a job, an assignment. But when I got back there was a message that Henry Kissinger had called and asked me to join the Policy Planning Council which was run by Winston Lord, which as you know is a think tank or advisory group to serve the Secretary of State. I really think he did it because it would have been a kind of double insult to Ambassador Martin to order me home, and have him later told I was

walking around looking for a job. I don't know. Maybe they needed somebody. This was near the end of the Vietnam War.

Q: What year was it?

PIKE: It was 1975.

Q: You came out in '75.

PIKE: The war ended April 30, 1975. It was that five-month period.

Q: You came out earlier in that year.

PIKE: I came out just before Christmas—actually in 1974.

Q: Oh, I see.

PIKE: My first assignment in Policy Planning was on what was called the Ingersoll Committee. Ingersoll was the Deputy at State, Under Secretary of State. Kissinger would attend cabinet meetings in an overall policy role; Ingersoll would attend this same council meeting, an expanded cabinet meeting, as the State representative. Our committee was the highest level within the State Department with the job of backstopping Vietnam.

Q: It was seconded from USIA.

PIKE: Yes, we met every afternoon at five o'clock. Originally we met at nine o'clock in the morning. Then the meeting went on all morning. So Ingersoll very wisely scheduled it at five in the afternoon which tends to reduce the amount of talking. We were supposedly to backstop the effort in Vietnam, to do whatever was necessary to try to shore up and prevent a debacle. But by the time the committee was set up—this was after the Battle of Phuoc Long which was really the decisive beginning of the end in Vietnam. That was in December of '74, which in a sense was the last battle of the Vietnam War. The war

strung out for another three or four months. But after Ban Me Thuot it was obvious that the war was lost, that nothing we could do that was politically realistic could save it. The presidency had been badly debilitated by the Watergate scandal. The understanding that we had with them about supporting the South Vietnamese in case of North Vietnam invasion went out the window. I would argue that the North Vietnamese would not have resumed the war if our credibility would have remained, if the threat that the B-52s would come back if they had to. In Hanoi, the so-called dove faction, which was predominant at the time had argued against new war because the B-52s would come back with the same devastating attack as in December of 1972, the so-called Christmas bombings—with smart bombs and laser guided bombs and which gave them a taste of all out warfare which was worse than what they thought possible. Once the presidency was debilitated the Hanoi hawks could say, we can guarantee you the B-52s won't come back. In a way the Vietnamese were the ultimate victim of Watergate.

Anyway, our committee met, and read cables in disgust, but there wasn't much we could do. As Ingersoll said at one point, “We're on the river of no return, we're just going down this river without a paddle, just riding the current.”

After the war I stayed in Policy Planning following Vietnam. I was in effect Kissinger's advisor or thinker on Vietnam. Of course, he wasn't interested in thinking about Vietnam—he was psychologically shaken. All the principals were. I don't think many people realize that.

I remember one time when Kissinger came into the Ingersoll Committee. He would sometimes come in and sit and listen, usually not say anything. But this time he suddenly got up and everybody stopped. This was in February, 1975, the point when we still could have decided if we had the will to send in the B-52s or even troops. But we all knew this was not possible. This was the moment when either you had to decide to do something or not. So he stood up and everybody stopped. And he said, “What kind of people are we? That's what I want to know? What kind of people are we?” Then he walked out. Nobody

said anything. His was not a rhetorical question. It was a genuine question genuinely seeking an answer. Here was this German Jewish immigrant to the United States who thinks of America as a certain kind of country. It stands for certain things, believes certain things. Suddenly he wonders what kind of a people are we? Am I wrong in what I've been thinking about America or what? That's what I think he meant. Maybe it was a rhetorical question. But I didn't feel so because I thought the same thing.

The outcome of the war did not tear me up as much as it did some people who spent a lot of time there and had gotten emotionally committed. I got emotionally committed very early. But soon I realized that this was a serious mistake on my part, to get emotionally involved. I wasn't doing myself any good. I wasn't doing the service any good, nor the U.S. So I deliberately steeled myself, but a lot of people didn't. That's why one of them wound up living in Paraguay. Another lives in a hut outside of Las Vegas in the desert. A brilliant Ph.D. historian quit all intellectual activity and runs a motel in northern New Hampshire. People were psychologically destroyed by the war. It came close to me but I didn't go over the edge.

Q: Westmoreland must—reports a lot of this, the thrashing around the NSC.

PIKE: I think most rationalize it.

Q: I suppose so, but—

PIKE: It depends on how introspective you are. When I first went to Vietnam I cultivated Vietnamese to find some that spoke English particularly. Some I could consult and talk to about Vietnamese culture, society history. One was the last mayor of free Hanoi, named Do Quang Giai, a very devout Confucianist. We had long discussions, I was struck by how many times, he would talk about the mandate of heaven—the ideal that if the emperor is a good emperor he rules by mandate of heaven. If he's a bad emperor the mandate is withdrawn and the people have the right to depose it. That's pure Jeffersonian democracy.

Q: Yes, it sure is.

PIKE: The words are different but the concept is the same. In another case, it was with Dinh Thuc, the wisest Vietnamese I ever knew. He was Dinh of the faculty of law at the University of Saigon. I remember clearly our conversation when I was just a young arrival and he was a prominent scholar. He was telling me that the history of Vietnam is full of duplicity and double dealing and betrayal. We have a 1500-year history of betrayal he said—at the national level and betrayal at the personal level. You could write the history of Vietnam in terms of the double cross he said. Every one betrays us. Sooner or later you Americans will betray us. This was 1962. I said no, we are different, we do not betray people. He didn't say anything, just nodded. Well, we did betray them.

Q: Yes, we did.

PIKE: Years later, about four or five years ago, I met him again in Paris.

Q: Oh.

PIKE: I don't suppose he remembered our conversation. He was an important figure and I was just one of many visitors. Maybe he did remember, but was too polite to say, I told you so.

Q: Yes.

PIKE: I didn't bring it up, naturally.

Q: They're an extremely tactful race.

PIKE: Well, I don't know. You have a conversation with some young person who doesn't mean much to you. But he may remember what you say all his life. Because when you are

young you are impressionable. The things you hear, the books you read stick with you as they don't later. That's what a teacher can do—touch eternity.

Anyway, I think that's important. Here is the mindset of the Vietnamese. They see duplicity. It comes right down to the present. They do not trust the Russians. They don't believe the Russians would back them up if they got into serious trouble. They don't trust anybody—they have a singular inability to trust.

Q: Well, they've been so bruised through the centuries. And, of course, this applies to some other Asian countries.

PIKE: That's right.

Q: I suppose it applies to Central America in many instances.

PIKE: It's true I suppose of every culture to some extent. It's a matter of degree. If you study Vietnamese history you find negativism, pessimism.

Q: They call it realism.

PIKE: They're aware of this cultural influence, or a heritage determined by history and their personal experience as well as national experience.

Then the Carter Administration came in. Policy planning jobs are what are called Schedule C assignments. They are political appointments, part of the 600 jobs that the President has to pass out. Policy Planning is not considered a permanent assignment anyway. The idea is that people rotate through. So I was to go back to the Agency for assignment. I was FSO-2 at the time. I was afraid I would be socked into some place in Africa as a PAO. I didn't want that. I wanted to stay in my field. But there was no field left.

William Whitson was then running the Library of Congress Congressional Research Service (CRS). I met him at a cocktail party and he said, “There is a way in which we can

get you into CRS on reimbursable detail—that you can be detailed to us and we'll pay your salary back to the Agency. We'd be willing to have you come up here for a year or two to follow Vietnam, write, and deal with Congressmen on Vietnam." Congressmen get letters on Vietnam and if they require some research they buck them over to CRS to answer. So, I agreed and the job was set up. It was a good job.

The major project in those two years was with Senator John Glenn and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He had me testify a couple of times, then asked me to do a general study for the committee on Vietnam foreign relations which I did. It was a 200 page study which his committee published. Then I did some work testifying, writing for Representative Stephen Solarz and his House subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific. But most of the work was routine, they left me alone. The idea was that I would be free to read and study FBIS, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, talk to people, go to conferences and so on. It was a very good deal. It lasted for about two years, was set up to last for only two years.

Then my problem was what to do? Do I go back to the Agency and wind up in Africa? At that point Mike Armacost was in the Pentagon in what's called ISA, International Security Affairs, which later became—

Q: Went to State, didn't he?

PIKE: Went to State as the number two man and is now going to Tokyo as Ambassador. Anyway, he heard that I was looking for a job and called me and asked me if I would be interested in coming over there.

Q: To State?

PIKE: No, to ISA—he was at the Pentagon.

Q: Oh, I see.

PIKE: At the same time Mort Abramowitz was Ambassador in Bangkok and wrote me asking if I was interested in coming out to an embassy job—

Q: Political officer.

PIKE: As a watcher of Hanoi. There was some static about this at State because of the feeling that Abramowitz was Ambassador to Thailand but acting like the Ambassador to Vietnam. So State did not like the proposal. But the deal offered by the Pentagon was too good to refuse. I had a free hand to do what I wanted in watching Vietnam—could write what I wanted, send it to whoever I wanted in government. All my life it's been this way —phone calls out of the blue. At the time I was beginning to wonder what I should do, up comes ISA, a so-called little state department in the Pentagon.

Q: Did it have State Department people?

PIKE: About half the people were foreign service. There were some USIA people.

Q: Sort of a little security council.

PIKE: Well, actually the way we thought of it was we were foreign service people keeping an eye on the military. Over in the State Department was a military officer keeping an eye on the civilians. But we got along very well. And it was a very good assignment.

Q: I still exchange Christmas cards with Otis Hayes.

PIKE: Right. Well, very famous people went through ISA. Dan Ellsberg. Then came a phone call from Robert Scalopino, my old professor [from California]. I don't know if he remembered me from then, but I had known him for years. Also others—professors from California—Chalmers Johnson, Carl Jackson, people working in my field—had come through there from time to time.

Anyway, the university people asked me if I was interested in taking early retirement—you can do this when you're 50 with 20 years service—and coming to the University of California in Berkeley to set up a study center on Indochina. I wasn't sure they were talking to the right person. I said, this is Berkeley calling? They said, yes. We know what you're thinking, that there's a big anti-war movement here, but they've moved on. The atmosphere here is now very good. Berkeley is a funky place.

Q: But students or young people these days can't even point in the direction of Vietnam.

PIKE: Right. There's little anti-war sentiment left. Radicals were into other things, animal rights and so on. Anyway, my original anxieties were not fulfilled. When I first got here we did have the campus security people show up because there had been an article about us in the San Francisco Chronicle.

Q: When was this?

PIKE: This was 1980.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: It was a very favorable article. But the headline—because the reporter had seen all of the Viet Cong flags, the Vietnam war posters and so on—the headline said, “A Little Bit of Viet Cong Territory in Berkeley.” The story itself was straight forward description. But the next morning the security people had shown up and said, we're a little worried that you might be the victim of some kind of anti-war action by some of the Vietnamese #migr#s. They said, we're glad that you're on the fourth floor here because I don't think you can throw a fire bomb up this high—it would take a very good arm. And I said, well, I get along with the Vietnamese #migr#s very well. Actually, I get along with the anti-war types around here. There aren't many of them left but they are at least people I can talk to about the

Vietnam War. We had that interest. And there aren't many of us around who want to talk about it one way or the other.

So we set up the archive and it is now operating. We're probably the largest research facility on Indochina, on historical or contemporary Indochina, anywhere in the world.

Q: Now, is this open to scholars?

PIKE: Open to everybody. We have about three million pages of documents, some 50,000 graphics, maps and photographs and about 10,000 books. Many people use it—we get novelists who come in as playwrights as well as students, writers and academics.

To complete this description which is a little outside of my post-USIA career, I set up the Indochina studies program for the university. It runs this archive. We also publish books. And we publish a quarterly called “Indochina Chronology” which is meant for specialists in the field. We published long works. We're publishing Ellsworth Bunker's papers.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: On Vietnam.

Q: How long was he there?

PIKE: He was there through the key years in the late '60s. He made a deal with Lyndon Johnson before he went out to Saigon that he would have direct communication, what we used to call back channel. He would send the President a telegram each week telling him what had happened, telling him what he thought he should know about Vietnam the previous week.

Q: He went to Panama after that didn't he?

PIKE: Yes, I believe so. Anyway, these messages are very good. Bunker was a very careful reporter. This was a very valuable contribution to scholarship. There were 96 cables all together. His wife helped us get them declassified. We got a grant from the Asia Foundation to publish. That's our major publishing project of the moment.

Q: I want to interrupt you for a minute. What is your position here?

PIKE: I'm the Director of the Indochina Studies Program. As I say, that's the kind of umbrella—

Q: For the University of California.

PIKE: For the University of California at Berkeley. And we are part of the Institute of East Asian Studies in academic jargon its called an ORU or Organized Research Unit. There are about 50 or these on campus—in science and technology, area studies, etc. And the East Asia Institute is an ORU with a China Center, a Japan Center, a Korea Center and an Indochina Center.

Q: Do you teach?

PIKE: Well, I teach but I'm not tenured faculty. I've been teaching government and politics of Southeast Asia in the Political Science Department to fill in for professors who are on sabbatical or leave or something. And next year I'll teach the history of the Vietnam War in the History Department. I also have taught history at San Jose State.

Q: San Jose State?

PIKE: San Jose State University. To take the place of the fellow who's on sabbatical in China. Mostly, what the university expects me to do is research. They consider this a research university and that's why the emphasis on this.

Q: We're talking here about the University of California at Berkeley.

PIKE: That's right.

Q: Not San Jose State.

PIKE: Yes, Berkeley. So the ORUs do the usual things the research units do. They publish. They stage conferences, they facilitate research. They try to bring along the scholars, not through teaching but encouraging them and facilitating their dissertations, finding them jobs and that sort of thing.

Q: How many people would you say this serves?

PIKE: Well, it depends. We get on an average I would say of about ten or twelve people a week coming in here using the archives. We have visiting scholars also who are here full time, mostly from Asia, from Thailand and Australia and so on. Then we get a lot of phone calls and we get requests for materials. Quite a few people are what we call walk-ins. We get novelists from across the United States. Sam Zaferi who just published a novel, a Chicago novelist has been here several times. A woman comes in who's writing a play on Viet Cong women. We get a lot of military. The Army and the Navy historians office in Washington will send people out looking for graphics and photographs. It's a vague job assignment in a way. My marching orders are to do whatever is necessary and whatever I can to encourage research, writing, teaching, publishing, on contemporary or historical Indochina which is Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. I go to a lot of conferences. In the last summer and fall I have been to nine international conferences—Moscow, Beijing, Bangkok, Taiwan, Singapore, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur. And I do a lot of conferences held in the United States. There is about one a month I would say somewhere in the world.

Again, the purpose of this and my purpose is to try to encourage people that I meet at these conferences—establish a network of these people who do serious work on Indochina. I try to do whatever I can to help them. We don't have a great deal of money.

That's one thing I can't help very much, although I some- times endorse their proposals to foundations and so on.

Q: Does USIA draw on your resource material?

PIKE: Not too much. The last job I had, if you can call it that, was about three years ago when they commissioned me and Phillip Marcus who runs the foundation in New York to do an evaluation of the East West Center in Honolulu. The question was: Is the Agency getting its money's worth? I think they put $6 million a year into it.

Q: And is it?

PIKE: No, that's the short answer. We went there, did a long evaluation report. My understanding is that they have done similar evaluation reports on the Center over the years. It's a kind of an inspector job, so we weren't particularly welcome. They were very polite but you could tell they didn't trust us. Actually, we were fairly kind to them. They had a new director there, Victor Lee. We made a very specific point that he was brand new. So any criticism of the place obviously didn't apply to him personally. He had only been there a month or so. But, I felt that they were not doing much—this is a judgmental call—I felt that they should be doing more important work, not a lot of trivial things, such as the suicide rate among Fiji teenagers. That's all right as a subject, but it isn't really mainline academic research.

What the East West Center should do, I felt, was in two areas: It should become the primary repository for the study of regionalism in Asia—study regional groups in Southeast Asia or Northeast Asia, the Indochina Federation, etc. I think the future history of the Pacific lies in regional groupings. Somebody should be monitoring this activity—should be understanding the dynamics of regionalism. The other thing it should be doing is work in trans-cultural communications, the so-called scratches on the mind. We know that the Japanese do not think the way we think. The Chinese do not think the way we think. We don't think the way they think. We may arrive at the same conclusion on a subject, but we

get there through vastly different thought processes. The East West Center in the early days when first set up was doing this work. They had a fellow named Nakamura who did “The Ways of Thinking of Eastern People.” Another book was by a Swiss psychologist, Lilly Abegg, called “Mind of East Asia.” It's the question of how people think. You know, of course, having lived abroad—as anybody that's lived abroad knows—the people in the country you are in are influenced by their culture and their heritage. They don't think the same way you do.

Q: Right.

PIKE: Lilly Abegg uses the image of a hunter in a field and an eagle circling over head. There are some rabbits in the field. The hunter, looking for dinner decides to shoot one particular rabbit. His logic is that it's close, is a clear shot and so on. Then suppose the eagle swoops down and seizes that same rabbit. The question is, did the eagle think like the hunter or not? They both arrived at the same conclusion. You don't know in any case, of course, you never know. But when you're comparing two thought processes there are things to compare yet nobody does this. It's vital for USIA, I felt this for a very long time, to subsidize and contribute to research in this field.

Q: I spent 2 1/2 years in the Philippines. And I think what you're talking about was more apparent to me there than my service in Europe.

PIKE: The Europeans do think more like us. Their thought process has the same base —Roman law, Greek aesthetics, Judaic monotheism. A culture that tends to shape our thinking in a certain way.

Q: Morality has an entirely different definition.

PIKE: That's right. Well, within the Agency, over the years I argued that we had borrowed about as far as we could go from other disciplines in what we did. We had borrowed from the missionaries. We had borrowed from Madison Avenue advertising writers. We had

borrowed from the British with their political warfare. There are these communication technologies, techniques that others had developed. But we had expended that. I mean, there was a limit to how much you can steal. What we needed to do was what Rand Corporation did for the Air Force after World War II—determine what is our future mission. What conditions can we expect? What ought we to communicate? It's very theoretical to invent a whole series of concepts about the communication process. I argued that USIA should be involved in this, should be run by serious communicators, people who understand international communication. Of course, we never had this. I'm now free to say most of our directors have not had such skills. Most of them have not even understood the need.

Q: Few of them ever lived abroad in their lives.

PIKE: I see USIA as a kind of poor orphan. It's merely tolerated by other foreign policy agencies and institutions like State and so on. Actually it is an instrument with tremendous potential if only—

Q: There's no constituency in this country to support it.

PIKE: That's part of it. You've got to be careful in making distinctions here. Look at the Leninist world and the institutions that it has developed—the Agit—prop cadre, the self criticism system, whole institution for mobilizing and motivating people through the communication process. We don't have anything like that. I'm not saying we should imitate the Leninists. That works for them and has worked very well through the years beginning with Lenin. What they accomplished—this is the way they accomplished it. What we need is the equivalent on a democratic basis. And I don't know what this is. If I knew, I would have written on it a long time ago. All I know is that what you need in USIA is people who are professionally concerned with the communication of ideas, who understand its dynamics, who are educated in the process.

I sat in once on some VOA policy reviews. VOA would review the language desks' work and broadcasts. Later when Allen was chairman of the review, he made an observation: if you make a broadcast to one country in one language, to one people that message, for the sake of argument, say, is 100 percent effective. If that same message is written for two countries, two cultures, it at best is going to be only 50 percent effective. If it is for three countries it will be 25 percent effective. If it is for four or more it will be zero effective. You cannot send the same message to four different cultures and expect to have it be meaningful.

I went back in the newsroom after the meeting. I was writing news from the Far East round up. I said, I know this story is going to Vietnam. I know it's going to Japan, Korea and it's going to China. It's going to India. All will hear it differently.

Well, the point is that there is this dynamic, this body of knowledge, this technology if you will, which has never been accepted in the United States and still is not. In the Leninist system the people who do this work occupy the very highest positions in government. The number two man in the Soviet Union today, is the equivalent of the USIA Director. For years we didn't even have a voice. Murrow was the first who was at the cabinet level. Then there was a decline in which we had no status, no representation of significance in Washington at all.

Q: We've had some complete clowns.

PIKE: Zilches. The problem is that then Washington people get a delimited idea about communication and diplomacy, the whole business of implementing foreign policy— contributing to foreign policy goals — through the communication process. We do it through foreign aid, through military aid, through direct diplomatic representation. And through the communications process. It has never been given a chance. But mostly I argue that because we don't have the body of knowledge required. In Vietnam the

communication process came down in the minds of a lot of people, particularly the military, to just kicking paper out of airplanes, leaflets.

Q: I know. I was printing it in Manila by the 707 load.

PIKE: We were burying the Mekong Delta in this paper. Leaflets are one communicational instrument. They're not too important. The notion that you can build a whole communicational process on them alone is simply wrong.

Q: No, I was absolutely flabbergasted by what we were asked to produce. I produced 14 million tons of paper in the last year I was running OIC Manila. And I thought we must be trying to smother—

PIKE: Well, the point is that this, I mean, like any other communicational effort it is a contribution. But if you don't understand the whole process and the cultural differences you don't get into the mind of another person. It's common sense if somebody hands you a leaflet in the street, e.g. save the whales or something, that it's going to have very limited effect. It's not going to turn your life around.

Q: One thing that has always struck me is the tendency of administrations, the White House, no matter who's in there, to be sort of frustrated with what's going on with USIA when they pay any attention at all and think it's not doing its job because of a foreign country's hostility towards them. And they decide that they must take an advertising man or a movie producer. In other words, they try to think of the qualifications. There are no qualifications in my mind for operating USIA except those you learn in USIA or its equivalence. That's the only place you can get the training. There is no outside training for the job.

PIKE: That's what I'm saying, that's a short cut. We need that.

Q: That's right. That's why we've had directors of the Agency who haven't the faintest understanding of the problems or the resources.

PIKE: Right.

Q: To apply.

PIKE: Right. Again the model for research is Rand Corporation. What it did was lay out a theoretical approach for the Air Force's mission. They told them what they needed to know that nobody knew, and how to determine it. That's what should have been done a long time ago in the case of USIA. One way or another there should have been a body of knowledge accumulated beyond Madison Avenue advertising mass media, television commercials.

It isn't kicking paper out of airplanes. You have someone in another culture and you want to persuade him of certain things. What are the problems that you are up against? What are the means that you can use? How does he think? What are the impediments? We don't know that. A PAO goes to the field land begins a seat of the pants operation. He does what he can do. He doesn't have adequate data to begin with. But he talks around, gets ideas, gets a lot of nutty ideas from the ambassador or somebody. Works from these.

Q: Has the area director breathing down his neck.

PIKE: Right.

Q: Why can't we solve this problem?

PIKE: Why couldn't we get the Buddhists off the streets of Saigon in 1963? That's what Washington asked. You've got to communicate to them that this is not in their interest. But we didn't have the wherewithal to do this. We didn't have people who knew Buddhism. The problem was very complex. If there had been a simple answer, somebody would

have thought about it a long time ago. But it's the ultimate in talking from one language to another.

Q: We once had a religious advisor.

PIKE: Oh.

Q: When I first went to IPS there was a very scholarly and gentle old boy who was a retired Presbyterian minister but who as a student of religion had a very broad view on things. And he was what we were—the man we were supposed to go to if we had a question about how to deal with a religious question abroad. Well, he certainly didn't have the qualifications that you would hope to find. But he was a broad minded man. And we would consult him at that time.

PIKE: Yes.

Q: But then he was sacked after the McCarthy debacle. And they brought in a man named Dr. Trueblood. And one of his first public appearances after he was appointed was to make a talk somewhere out in Maryland saying that the mission of USIA was to make every person in the world a card carrying Christian.

PIKE: Yes.

Q: And after that we referred to him as Dr. Bloodshot.

PIKE: Well, that's a typical missionary influence.

Q: Yes.

PIKE: Actually, the missionaries in the field do have good communication techniques. They know how much they reach people. Although in Vietnam missionaries were a pain in the neck. They used to come into the USIA libraries covertly and slip religious

propaganda into the books on the shelves at Can Tho. It reached the point where they had a Vietnamese librarian go through the books every night to take out the tracts.

Q: To delouse them.

PIKE: Because people would check the book out and then come back and ask us why this propaganda was in there, particularly if they were a devout Buddhist wanting to know what —

Q: To convert to Mormonism.

PIKE: Fundamentalists mostly.

Q: Well, do you have any suggestions on things that should be done by USIS in the future, perhaps more detailed?

PIKE: Well, only that we should treat this business of trans-cultural communication as a separate discipline that requires you to recruit people who have had training in this field. If there isn't—and there isn't very much training available—then you've got to set up your own training system with heavy emphasis on language and on communication processes. Mostly its a matter of developing a body of knowledge, a conceptual approach to ways to translate and communicate an idea from one culture to another, and to be sure your intention, the idea you want to communicate, is actually communicated.

It's metaphysical at root. Like the eagle. Why did the eagle pick that rabbit? My practical experience in USIA constantly threw doubt about this—the question of miscommunication. We were getting U.S. newsreels which we put into the Vietnam newsreel. Some would be of skiing in Canada, light stuff. I remember one clip on the Berlin Wall. They had just built the wall. People were still trying to get over the wall. There was very dramatic footage of a guy going out of a second story window and the East German police reaching down to pull him back through the window. His friends are on the ground pulling him out.

Q: I remember, I remember something like that.

PIKE: In one scene #migr#s were running along a barbed wire fence. There was a hole cut and this fellow ducked under and a little piece of the barbed wire nicked his head. There was a little blood dripping down by his eye. The camera had a close up. Very dramatic stuff. We were in the projection room watching it, four of us: Dave Sheppard, myself, and two Vietnamese scriptwriters, one a technical editor. The Vietnamese who were our advisors who were to tell us the psychological meaning of a film clip in the Vietnamese culture.

The important point in this story is that all four of the Vietnamese people were North Vietnamese refugees. They were #migr#s who came south in 1954 and were resettled. The other important thing to understand is this was in the winter in Berlin. So the East Germans coming out were wearing overcoats, heavy overcoats. So the screening stopped, and lights went up. I said, “What did you think of that dramatic footage?” And the wisest, most knowledgeable Vietnamese of all said, “They were very well dressed weren't they?” I was absolutely floored by his response. The U.S. Government had gone to all the trouble to process this communication. Then I realized his thought process. He had fled North Vietnam. He had very little clothing with him. Probably his clothing was tattered. And here were these German #migr#s coming. They wore neckties. They had storm coats. It was an instinctive reaction by the Vietnamese. But then I went back to my office in despair—how do you communicate an idea across a cultural barrier and be sure it is received the way you intend it to be received?

Q: Yeah.

PIKE: This problem fully came home to me when I wrote my master's thesis which was on international humor. What I was trying to do in the thesis—its purpose—was to suggest that the humor is the ultimate weapon in propaganda. In international communication you can lampoon communism, satirize it, and there's no defense against it possible.

Q: Right.

PIKE: Defense against communism is serious, no laughing matter. But the worst thing communists can do is to reply by being serious about something that's funny. It makes it even funnier. What struck me during thesis research, this specific scientific examination and testing of humor, was that on the one hand there is humor that is universally trans-culturally communicable. Mickey Mouse cartoons and silent movies of Charlie Chaplin

Throughout the world researchers test audience's reaction to humor with stopwatches. They note when an audience laughs—pie in the face and that sort of thing. What they find is that in darkest Africa among primitives or in New York City the reaction is the same—everybody laughs at the same moment. On the other hand, there are instances where this does not prove to be the case at all. I went through 1,000 German cartoon research projects. Only the Germans would do this. They had been researched with a thousand subjects who had listed them from one to one thousand, in terms of degree of humor. Number one was the funniest, number one thousand was the least funny. I went through them in reverse order beginning with the least. Not one of them struck me as being funny. Here was a failure in trans-cultural communication. What is humorous for some people is not funny to you. I remember in India an Indian telling me one of the funniest things for him is a man falling off a bicycle. That's funny? The point is that these are scratches on the mind. We don't even understand something as simple as why a joke is or is not funny in different cultures. There are a lot of these anticommunist jokes. “Come over to our side to go fishing because over there the fish don't dare open their mouths.” That's a joke you hear in Poland about the Soviet Union; in every totalitarian country you'll hear the same joke. It's funny universally. Others are not. It's that process that we don't understand. I despair that we'll ever make a serious effort to try to determine the—

Q: One of the problems I think is the discontinuity of USIA and its leadership. And even in many of its middle level people who are moved from foreign service to domestic service and from one—

PIKE: Yes.

Q: Between two countries which have very little in common, at all.

PIKE: USIA needs a director and people at the top who understand the full potential of the communication process, what it can contribute. We have never had that. I don't think even Murrow ever fully appreciated this idea.

Q: I suppose the ideal is a man who's had 10 or 20 years—man or woman—has had 10 or 20 years in the Agency in assorted jobs.

PIKE: In the field.

Q: And is apolitical.

PIKE: Right.

Q: That is bureaucratically apolitical. And this is almost impossible.

PIKE: He has to have been in the field.

Q: Yes. Oh, yes. That is, you have lived abroad and traveled.

PIKE: I'd lived in Asia five or six years by the time I went to work for VOA. I was one of the few people in the newsroom who had ever lived abroad. It struck me how parochial some of these people were. News is news to them. I would argue this story is nothing in Asia. Nobody cared and would use the story anyway because its important to the U.S. When I traveled I would carry a Zenith transoceanic radio to listen to VOA. I remember once in

Paris during the Watergate hearing there was a VOA story saying that Mr. X said that Y had said that Mr. Z had told Mr. Q that Y was—and I didn't even know who X, Y, Z and Q were. Then I thought imagine a Frenchman listening to this about X, Y, Z, and Q. He would wonder what the hell is this all about. Later that day a Frenchman did ask me what is this business about Watergate? And I said, “Well, it's the point that the President authorized or went along with wiretapping and spying on the Democrats.” And the Frenchman says, “Yes, but what is it that he did?”

Q: What's wrong with that said the Frenchman?

PIKE: I said “That's illegal.” He said, “Naturally but everybody does it all over the world.” I think he thought I was conning him, giving him some superficial explanation—that no one could be that serious about a wiretap. Even to this day I am not sure I really understand Watergate. At the time, the common wisdom was that all the presidents have done this. Barry Goldwater talked about bugs in his room while a presidential candidate. I think all of us assumed at the time that this was done. Sure it's illegal, maybe it's wrong. But, if you live abroad bugs are a way of life. You assume that the KGB is listening. That's why we have embassy safe rooms where the—

Q: The bubbles.

PIKE: Right. So the idea that somebody is surreptitiously listening to you is enough to bring down the President of the United States seems absurd. It's another case of the trans-cultural communication problem—VOA never could explain Watergate to the Europeans.

Q: I have written for some newspapers in New Zealand for more than 15 years. And I have to be careful that I—I have to try to think like a New Zealander. Of course, I lived there four years and I could do it better than most Americans could. But I have to be very careful that I'm using not only ideas that make sense to them but even vocabulary and spelling.

PIKE: And images and historical references that they know.

Q: Apparently I'm fairly successful at it because they're using my stuff. That's about the only test you can apply to it.

PIKE: And, of course, you're communicating into a relatively similar culture.

Q: A very easy culture.

PIKE: If you were doing this with Tibet—

Q: Oh, yes. I'm always aware of that.

PIKE: I think it's do-able. There are some principles that can be used universally, but there is always going to be a certain vagueness. But in a general sense, it's verifiable. You can prove it with feedback tests. My quarrel with USIA is that they have assumed that because you're an American and have a good speaking voice that you can communicate to foreigners with empathy. You have to know the foreigners. You have to know the mental blocks involved. Every one has the same problem. The Japanese, for example.

Q: Oh, sure.

PIKE: The Japanese do a miserable job of explaining themselves to us. Even the Russians do I would say. I didn't used to believe that. When I arrived in Moscow for the first time in 1980 I realized that a lot of the intellectual baggage I had carried around for years was wrong, simply wrong. I found the Soviet Union much better in many ways than I had expected and worse in other ways. Anyway, I didn't have it straight. I had been going for years with a certain mental picture that didn't hold up when I was there and talking and walking the streets.

So obviously the first principle is you have know your audience. It's a basic rule of communication that the more you know about me the better you're able to communicate with me. If you don't know anything about me it's much tougher. But if you know what

my political beliefs are, what my philosophic attitude is, what my heritage is, you can communicate much more meaningfully.

I believe in the strategy of truth which we used at VOA. I believe you should be scrupulously truthful about facts, no fiddling. You can't get away with lying. All research done proves this. Maybe for a short run you can run a disinformation campaign, but you ruin your audience for the long view.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: What you're doing is shaping a perception, trying to get someone to look at something a certain way. There are many ways you can look at something. And all I'm saying is here is a way I think you should look at this. And we understand this.

Q: That's right.

PIKE: Well, thank you very much.

Q: This has been, I think, a very successful recording. There's a lot of good stuff here.

End of interview