

**Oral History Interview of Veteran Revolutionary and Foreign Ministry Cadre  
Luu Van Loi [Luu Văn Lợi]  
DVD 01  
4 June 2007, Hanoi, Vietnam**

**I – Interviewer Merle L. Pribbenow  
LVL – Luu Van Loi**

I: [in English] Today is 4 June 2007, and this is an interview of Mr. Luu Van Loi, a veteran cadre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a veteran revolutionary from the beginning of the Vietnam War. [In Vietnamese] First of all, there is a procedural matter. In accordance with U.S. law, I must ask you to give us permission to use this video as a documentary film for the university, to be shown to students, to historical researchers, etc.. Will you give your permission?

LVL: [grunts] Uh.

I: So you give your permission?

LVL: [affirmative grunt] Uh.

I: OK. First of all, could you tell us when and where you were born?

LVL: I was born on 1 July 1913. That was almost 75 years, I mean 95 years ago. I was born in a village on the outskirts of Hanoi, out in the direction of Gia Lam.

I: Could you tell us about your family's social background, what your parents did for a living, and how many brothers and sisters you had?

LVL: My family was a farming family. Both my mother and my father died at an early age. By the time I was about ten years old both my parents were dead, so all seven of us children ... (short interruption for a sound check) ... There were seven of us children.

There were two boys, my older brother and me – I was the sixth child in the family – and all the rest were girls. After our parents died the seven of us had to make a living on our

own. We had to go to work to support ourselves. We did not own any farmland. Even though we were from a farming family, we did not own any farmland. Therefore we had to go out and do odd jobs to survive. For instance, we caught fish, we caught crabs, or we caught snails to make our living.

I: How much education did you receive?

LVL: I went to school until I finished Level 2<sup>1</sup>. After graduating from Level 2, if we had money I would have attended Level 3<sup>2</sup> and taken my baccalaureate exam, but we had no money, so I had to study on my own. I did that, I studied on my own all the way through the entire baccalaureate program, but I never got a baccalaureate degree.

I: So you never took the baccalaureate exam?

LVL: No, and that was why I could not enter the university.

I: Now, you studied French beginning in elementary school?

LVL: I began studying French at a very early age, from the time I was ten or so, so I speak French very well.

I: After you became an adult and went out to live on your own, what did you do to make a living?

LVL: I was in our country [Vietnam], and I worked as a teacher, tutoring students at their homes.

I: So you worked as a private tutor?

LVL: I studied on my own, and I studied through the entire baccalaureate program, but I didn't take the baccalaureate exam and so I never got my baccalaureate degree.

I: So when did you get married?

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<sup>1</sup> Level 2: Equivalent to junior high school.

<sup>2</sup> Level 3: Equivalent to high school.

LVL: I got married in 1939. By that time I had become a government official.

I: Really? What kind of official were you? What office did you work for?

LVL: It was just an ordinary job. I was a secretary.

I: You were a secretary. Was that in an office out in the provinces or in the city?

LVL: That was my job, but at the same time I had also begun to participate in revolutionary activities.

I: I see. And what year did you begin to participate in revolutionary activities?

LVL: 44 [1944].

I: 44?

LVL: Yes, I joined the Viet Minh movement, the Viet Minh Front movement.

I: Who was the first person from the Viet Minh movement who contacted you and encouraged you to join?

LVL: At that time the Viet Minh movement had two missions [goals]: to fight the French and to fight the Japanese, because by that time the Japanese had already occupied Vietnam. So we had to attack the French and drive out the Japanese. We operated secretly in an organization called the “National Salvation Cultural” organization [Văn Hóa Cứu Quốc].

I: The National Salvation Cultural organization?

LVL: Yes, it was a Viet Minh organization. The goal of this organization was to draw together patriotic intellectuals who wanted to work together to fight the French and the Japanese.

I: I read in your biographic summary on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs internet site that someone who was trained in the Soviet Union was the first person [from the Viet Minh] to contact you. Is that correct?

LVL: I participated in the 1945 Revolution to gain national sovereignty in 1945, and after that I worked as a newspaperman. I was the publisher of two French-language newspapers. One was called *La Republique*, the Republic, and the other was called *Le Peup*, the People. I was both publisher and chief editor of both these French-language newspapers. I did that until the resistance war broke out [December 1946], at which time I had to close both newspapers.

I: Let's return to the period of the Second World War, when you began your revolutionary activities. During that period did you continue to work as a French government officials?

LVL: Yes.

I: While you also worked secretly for the Viet Minh?

LVL: Yes.

I: During that time you must have had to organize things very carefully in order to avoid being arrested, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: Were you ever arrested? I know that back then many cadres were arrested and sent to prison.

LVL: No, I was never arrested. Now, after the August [1945] Revolution, I published the two newspapers and I also censored the newspapers. I was the Director of the Office of Press Censorship.

I: So your job was to win over Frenchmen living in Vietnam to get their support, or at least their sympathy, for the Viet Minh, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: At that time there were a number of Frenchmen who joined the Viet Minh or supported the Viet Minh, right?

LVL: Yes, there were a number of Foreign Legionnaires who joined the Viet Minh. I was the person assigned to utilize them, to direct them in working for the Viet Minh. There were three of them: two Germans and one Austrian.

I: There was one called “Chien Si” (The Warrior [Chiến Sĩ]), right?

LVL: One was “Chien Si”, and another was Le Duc Nhan [Lê Đức Nhân].

I: Chien Si was Borchers?

LVL: Yes, Chien Si was Borchers. And Le Duc Nhan was Schroder. He was a professor of sociology. And, in addition to these two, there was an Austrian named Frey. He was given the name Nguyen Dan [Nguyễn Dân] – his secret codename was Nguyen Dan.

Those three men came and lived in my newspaper offices. I was the one who told them what to do; I was the one who gave them their assignments.

I: That was called enemy proselyting work, right?

LVL: Yes, and then in April 1947 the Ministry of Defense appointed me to the position of Director of the Enemy Proselyting Office, which carried out the job of propagandizing enemy soldiers. So I was the Director of the Enemy Proselyting Office, and by that time the war had started, so I stopped my work on the two newspapers. I became a soldier and served as Director of the Enemy Proselyting Office, which was responsible for propagandizing enemy soldiers.

I: Now, during the Second World War, when you began your secret activities for the Viet Minh, did your wife also participate in these activities, or what was her opinion of your activities?

LVL: No, during that time I participated in revolutionary activities among the intellectual class, so our work was to propagandize intellectuals.

I: But did your family also support the Viet Minh?

LVL: Yes. I propagandized intellectuals and I wrote newspaper articles to propagandize intellectuals. At that time we were putting out a secret magazine called Tien Phong [Tiến Phong] – [In French] *Avant Garde*.

I: Now, the Frenchmen whom you recruited, most of them opposed the Germans and opposed the fascists, right? And they supported socialism, right?

LVL: Yes. Now, from April [1947] on I became member of the armed forces and I was in charge of propaganda activities directed against the French Expeditionary Army.

I: Now, initially the policy in that area was to have Foreign Legion soldiers and French soldiers turn their guns on their fellow soldiers, but later that policy changed a little bit, didn't it? Is that correct?

LVL: When the Japanese invaded Indochina, our policy became to ally ourselves with members of the De Gaulle faction in Indochina, and the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party met with a representative of the De Gaulle faction right inside the city of Hanoi.

I: The General Secretary was Truong Chinh [Trương Chinh], right?

LVL: Yes, it was Truong Chinh. And we suggested that the two sides cooperate in fighting the Japanese, but they refused to form a common front with us.

I: Really. What was their reason for refusing?

LVL: They refused to work with the Viet Minh.

I: The French refused because they still wanted to keep Vietnam as their colony in the future, right?

LVL: What about Vietnam?

I: Back then, why did the French Communist Party refuse?

LVL: No! It was De Gaulle's party that refused.

I: Oh. The De Gaulle party.

LVL: So after they refused we simply continued to fight the Japanese by ourselves, and we fought the French as well. The slogan back then was to fight the French and at the same time to drive out the Japanese. Fight the French and drive out the Japanese.

I: During that period had you heard of Ho Chi Minh?

LVL: Yes, I had.

I: When was the first time that you met Ho Chi Minh?

LVL: The end of August 1945.

I: 1945.

LVL: That was when Ho Chi Minh came down to Hanoi from the Viet Bac War Zone. That was the first time that Ho Chi Minh returned to Hanoi, and that is when I met him.

I: At that time there was an American military delegation accompanying him, wasn't there?

LVL: Yes. This was before the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

This was in late August, before 2 September.<sup>3</sup> My friends and I were the ones who

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<sup>3</sup> On 2 September 1945 Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnam's independence during a ceremony in Hanoi.

organized the ceremony to proclaim the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 2 September.

I: Really! So you are considered one of the founders of the Vietnamese republic.

LVL: No, not exactly (laughs). Ho Chi Minh was the founder.

I: Naturally, but you were one of the ones who made the first contributions to this effort.

Others involved were Vo Nguyen Giap, Truong Chinh, and Pham Van Dong [Phạm Văn Đồng], correct?

LVL: Pham Van Dong [Phạm Văn Đồng].

I: In late 1946 the French returned to Hanoi and fighting began, right?

LVL: No, I joined the armed forces in April 1947.

I: After the Viet Minh evacuated the city and moved up to the Viet Bac War Zone, right?

LVL: Yes, it was in the Viet Bac. My job was to spread propaganda among enemy soldiers. And then in June 1954, after the battle of Dien Bien Phu, General Navarre sent a radio message to General Vo Nguyen Giap saying that he wanted to arrange a prisoner exchange of sick and wounded prisoners with the Viet Minh. I was the person who met with Navarre's representative to deliver the letter of response. And in that letter Giap also suggested that a meeting should be held between the representatives of the High Commands of the two armies.

I: Was that the negotiations at Trung Gia?<sup>4</sup>

LVL: Yes. And Navarre agreed immediately. And Giap took the initiative by suggesting that the two sides should appoint liaison officers to organize this meeting. I was the person chosen to organize the Trung Gia conference. I met with Navarre's representative

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<sup>4</sup> Trung Gia was located on Route 3 about 40 kilometers north of Hanoi.



to organize the Trung Gia conference. And I participated in the conference from beginning to end.

I: At the time that you fled to the Viet Bac, did your family accompany you up to the Viet Bac or did they remain behind in Hanoi?

LVL: What?

I: Your family, your wife and children, did they go up to the Viet Bac War Zone?

LVL: Yes.

I: They did. Ah! Life up there must have been very difficult for women and children, isn't that right?

LVL: Yes.

I: How many children do you have?

LVL: What?

I: How many children – sons and daughters?

LVL: Oh, I have five children.

I: Five children.

LVL: The oldest studied in the Soviet Union and received a PhD in astrophysics.

I: Very impressive!

LVL: My second son became a communications officer in the People's Army of Vietnam. He also attended a military school in the Soviet Union. And my third son went to school in Czechoslovakia, and he graduated from school there with an engineering degree. As for my son who was a communications officer, a short time after he returned home from abroad he fell ill and died. And his younger brother, the one who got his engineering degree in Czechoslovakia, also suffered from heart problems, and he died in

Czechoslovakia. So two of my sons died, and the only one left is the one who is a PhD in astrophysics. He came home and works here in Hanoi.

I: Do you think that it was because of the years that your children lived in the Viet Bac zone, where there are many diseases? Do you think that perhaps that might have affected their health?

LVL: Yes, that is possible. As for my two daughters, one works in literature. She graduated with a degree in literature. And my other daughter, who is the youngest in the family, is a housewife, that's all. She did not receive any [higher] education.

I: So all your children achieved success as adults. Now, I heard that for a time you served as the political commissar of a regiment. Is that right? Of the Song Lo Regiment?<sup>5</sup>

LVL: No, he served in the communications division.

I: No, no. I mean you – during the war against the French, did you ever serve as a regimental political commissar?

LVL: Yes. I had a brother-in-law, “bo frer” [spelling], he later rose to the rank of colonel general. His name was Vu Lang, and he was one of our most talented generals. He's dead now.

I: A Frenchman?

LVL: No, a Vietnamese.

I: Ah, now I understand. “Bo frer” is a French word.

LVL Yes. It means brother-in-law.

I: OK, I see. Now, could you tell us, when you first made contact with the Viet Minh, what were the motivations that made you join the Viet Minh and oppose the French?

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<sup>5</sup> Sông Lô Regiment: The Lo River Regiment – 209<sup>th</sup> Regiment/312<sup>th</sup> Division.

LVL: It was the same reason that motivated the young people of my entire generation.

We could not stand to have our country be ruled by the French, so we all shared the ideal of conducting activities and struggling to gain our independence. At that time my entire generation of young people felt that way. So the motivation was patriotism, that's all.

I: At that time there were many organizations that opposed the French. There was a Trotskyite organization, and the Vietnamese Kuomintang,<sup>6</sup> etc. There were many such parties, so why did you choose to join the Viet Minh?

LVL: I chose the Viet Minh because theirs was the correct policy – to struggle to gain our independence and liberate our country. The other parties were all set up by the Chinese, like the VNQDD and the Vietnam Revolutionary League,<sup>7</sup> etc. All of those were Chinese organizations.

I: They were all Chinese organizations?

LVL: Yes. And after we gained our independence and after the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, China sent forces into Vietnam to administer the area and accept the surrender of Japanese forces here. And the Chinese wanted to overthrow Ho Chi Minh and install a non-communist government.

I: A pro-Chiang Kaishek government.

LVL: That was Chiang Kaishek's plan. So for the people of my generation who followed the ideal of struggling to gain our independence, naturally we could not join those political parties, so we joined the Communist Party.

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<sup>6</sup> The Vietnamese Nationalist Party, commonly called the VNQDD - Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng.

<sup>7</sup> Translator's Comment: LVL made a slight mistake regarding the name of the "Vietnam Revolutionary League." He called it the Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng **Chí** Hội; the correct name is the Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng **Minh** Hội.

I: In your family, did all your brothers and sisters join the Viet Minh, or did some members of your family join the nationalists? Because the war divided many families.

LVL: My older sister joined the Viet Minh, and she also joined the Communist Party. After the August Revolution [in 1945] she became a Village Chairman.

I: Oh really? Oh, there is something I forgot. When you were a child, what religion did your family practice? Buddhism, or...

LVL: We were Buddhists.

I: You were Buddhists. That is the traditional religion of Vietnam; you were Catholics or something else?

LVL: No.

I: During the time you were doing enemy proselyting work to win the support of Frenchmen, what kind of contributions did the French people who joined the movement make to the Viet Minh movement?

LVL: The contribution we made was that we carried out propaganda work to introduce the Viet Minh as a patriotic movement, and, second, to oppose the return of French rule. My two newspapers, ah, the goal of my two French language newspapers was to promote the implementation of the 13 March 1946 provisional agreement.

I: Yes. Now the Frenchmen like Borchers or Frey, I mean the Legionnaires like Borchers and Frey, all of them had already deserted from the army and joined the Viet Minh, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: But during the Second World War, prior to 1945, they were still serving in the Foreign Legion, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: So you had to use secret methods to contact them and had to organize ...

LVL: They were already followers of our movement while they were still in the French Army. Before they had been Germans who were victims of Hitler's fascist policies, so they escaped to France. And France gave them two choices: either they could join the Foreign Legion, or France would turn them back over to Hitler. The French pressured them in that manner, and so in the end they joined the Foreign Legion, but they were good people. And when they were sent to Vietnam we made contact with them, we proselytized them, and they joined our cause.

I: So they already had progressive tendencies before they came to Vietnam, right?

LVL: Yes. So during the war, the three men who joined us, ah, because they were Germans I used them to conduct propaganda activities aimed at Legionnaires ...

I: Germans.

LVL: ...who were of German origin. And they did good work for us.

I: I have heard that a number of Japanese soldiers also joined the Viet Minh, right?

LVL: That is right. They worked with the military side, and they helped us to train our army.

I: Now, were you in charge of the Japanese as well?

LVL: No.

I: That was the job of another component?

LVL: That was another component.

I: You were only responsible for those who spoke French?

LVL: Yes. Now let me continue. When Navarre returned to us a number of sick and wounded prisoners of war, I was the person sent to receive those people, and I was also

the communications channel who delivered the letter from Vo Nguyen Giap suggesting a meeting between representatives of the two High Commands. And from that point on I was involved in diplomatic activities.

I: I see. So that was where your diplomatic career began.

LVL: That's where it began. After that, I organized the Trung Gia conference, and I was the Chef d'Cabinet<sup>8</sup> [chánh văn phòng] of the agency in charge of the implementation of the Geneva Agreement. So from that time on I continued down the diplomatic path. So I continued to fight for the implementation of the 1954 Geneva Agreement.

I: At that time, when you were negotiating with the French -, this was after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu – what was the attitude of the French officers? Were they discouraged or what?

LVL: At that time they did not approve of the war and they thought it was a dirty war. They called it a dirty war. And their families in France were protesting to demand an end to this dirty war and to demand that their sons be returned home to France. This provided favorable conditions for me to carry out my propaganda assignment.

I: During that time, did you have opportunities to have private discussions with French officers so that you could have a chance to explore their attitudes?

LVL: I had meetings with them from the time that the Trung Gia Conference began. That was the first time I had an opportunity to have such contacts, because up to that time the two sides were fighting each other. We were not meeting with one another.

I: Many times, when we are carrying out diplomatic assignments we had two objectives. One is to negotiate with the other side, and the other is to explore the attitudes of the other side in order to provide ideas and suggestions to our superiors, right? So during

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<sup>8</sup> Chef d'Cabinet means “office chief” and is probably closest to the position we would call “chief of staff.”

that period you probably found that France had accepted defeat and that it could not fight any longer. Is that right?

LVL: Uh [affirmative grunt]. And beginning with the signing of the Geneva Agreement, we had the job of implementing the Geneva Agreement, and I was assigned to the component responsible for the implementation of the Geneva Agreement.

I: So does that mean that you also had contact with the International Control Commission? Or did you just have contact with the French delegation?

LVL: France had a delegation, and we had a delegation, and I was the Chef d'Cabinet of the agency responsible for the implementation of the agreement. So everything went through my hands.

I: Now, initially the Viet Minh side thought that the Geneva Agreement would be implemented properly and that there would be general elections in two years, right? So did you anticipate ahead of time that South Vietnam would oppose the general elections? Or did you think that everything would go smoothly?

LVL: The situation in Indochina, ah, after the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu and were forced to sign the Geneva Agreement, the situation in Indochina was like this: First, France had been defeated and could not remain in Indochina any longer. Second, at that time the U.S. also wanted to push France aside, they wanted to replace France. So that is why, while the Geneva Conference was still going on, on 18 June 1954 France was forced to remove Emperor Bao Dai's Prime Minister, Prince Buu Loc, in order to replace him with Ngo Dinh Diem. And the overt involvement of the U.S. [in Vietnam] began at that point, when the U.S. installed Ngo Dinh Diem to replace Prince Buu Loc as the Prime Minister of South Vietnam.

I: During that period, you were in constant contact with the French delegation in Hanoi, right?

LVL: What do you mean?

I: Because at that time you were in charge of the committee to, ah...

LVL: To implement the agreement.

I: ...to implement the agreement, so you had to be in regular contact with the French, right? During that time, did the French make any private comments to you about the Americans jumping in to replace them?

LVL: No. At that time the morale of the French was the morale of the defeated side, so they were no longer active and aggressive as they had been before. Their morale had deteriorated. Their morale had been broken. Especially because they were under pressure from the Americans. France was forced to replace Prime Minister Buu Loc, to not allow him to be Prime Minister any longer, and they were forced to accept Ngo Dinh Diem as his replacement. So Ngo Dinh Diem came over, and Diem had already arrived and was the Prime Minister by the time the Geneva Agreement was signed.

I: But during that time France was somewhat suspicious of Ngo Dinh Diem, and they apparently wanted to replace Ngo Dinh Diem and organize something with General Nguyen Van Hinh...

LVL: No, that's not true.

I: It's not true?

LVL: No, because the Prime Minister at that time was a cousin of Emperor Bao Dai, and he was pro-French, so France did not want to get rid of him. It was because the U.S. wanted to get rid of those kinds of people so they could become involved in Vietnam, so



they pressured France to get rid of Buu Loc and install Ngo Dinh Diem in his place. And Ngo Dinh Diem marked the beginning of the struggle between France and the United States for control of South Vietnam.

I: During that time, did the Committee for the Implementation of the Geneva Agreement have a policy position on this, such as helping the French to oppose the Americans, or anything like that?

LVL: Um (grunts and nods). So beginning with the installation of Ngo Dinh Diem U.S. intervention became stronger, and after the Geneva Agreement was signed President Eisenhower wrote a letter promising to help him build a strong anti-communist government. That was a letter from President Eisenhower, but the letter was not made public until November. Initially the letter was not made public. So as I said, there was a conflict between France and the United States. The U.S. wanted to push the French aside. This struggle was fought over several issues. First, the U.S. demanded to be allowed to give aid directly to the governments of Indochina. Previously the aid had been provided through the French, but now the U.S. would provide the aid directly. Second, the French had previously been responsible for the organization and training of the armies of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, but now the U.S. demanded that the training of these armies be done by Americans, and not by French officers like before. So the two sides fought each other over those two issues, which were two very important issues. And then in 1956, Diem had already established the Republic of Vietnam, which was a violation of the Geneva Agreement, because there would be no unification. And second, at that time Diem had begun to implement policies that violated the Geneva Agreement, including opposing the French, and he demanded that the French withdraw. So in April

1956 the Ngo Dinh Diem government asked France to withdraw their troops, and in April 1956 France was in a position in which it was forced to withdraw its army, meaning that they could not stay in Indochina any longer. Therefore from April 1956 on the French Army was no longer in Indochina, and the French High Command in Indochina was also gone.

I: Probably the Committee for the Implementation of the Geneva Agreement also was dissolved at this time, right?

LVL: No. We continued to maintain the Committee for the Implementation of the Geneva Agreement. We continued to implement the agreement, and at that time the International Control Commission, which consisted of three countries – India, Poland, and, ah, um...

I: Canada.

LVL: No. Ah, India, Poland, and...ah ... Canada! At that time the International Control Commission made up of these three countries continued to operate in practice. There was a special situation at this time – this is what I mean. France, which had signed the Geneva Agreement, had withdrawn. And Diem said, “I didn’t sign the Geneva Agreement.” So who was going to implement the Geneva Agreement? So this put the Geneva Agreement into a state of grave, serious crisis. It was a life-or-death crisis for the survival of the agreement. So at that time we gave a warning to the two chairmen of the Geneva Conference, Britain and Russia. We requested that the Geneva Conference be reconvened, with all of the former participants in the conference plus the three nations that were members of the International Control Commission, to discuss the situation in Indochina. Russia agreed, but Britain did not. So in the end the two co-chairmen

requested that the two sides implement the agreement in practice – “de facto” [in English]. Therefore the International Control Commission continued to function. It continued to exist and it continued to function. And we wanted to implement the Geneva Agreement and we demanded that South Vietnam also implement the Geneva Agreement. Now, the most important element of the Geneva Agreement was for North and South Vietnam to hold discussions about unifying Vietnam, but Diem refused to meet with North Vietnam to discuss unification, and he turned South Vietnam into a separate nation called the Republic of Vietnam, which meant that our country was then completely split in half, so at that time the status of the Geneva Agreement was very grave, very serious.

I: During that period, did you transfer completely over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or what?

LVL: What?

I: Did you begin to work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

LVL: Yes. In June 1960 I transferred fully over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I: Oh, so before that you were still working for the Committee for the Implementation of the Geneva Agreement?

LVL: Yes, I was working with the component responsible for the Geneva Agreement. Then I transferred totally over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but I continued to be responsible for the implementation of the Geneva Agreement.

I: Now, I would like to ask your permission to go back for a moment to your family, because many students don't understand the influence that the family has, because cadres have to work very hard. What year did your family return to Hanoi?

LVL: In 1954.

I: 1954?

LVL: Yes. After North Vietnam was liberated and Hanoi was liberated, we returned to Hanoi and my family also returned to Hanoi.

I: So the family felt a lot more comfortable there, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: And life was easier there, because in the Viet Bac life was difficult. Back then, while the fighting with the French was still going on, the Viet Bac area was probably bombed constantly, right?

LVL: What?

I: French aircraft bombed the Viet Bac War Zone constantly, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: Was your family ever caught in one of the bombing raids? Was your wife or any of your children ever wounded?

LVL: No one in my family was killed or wounded in the war. But I lost my library several times – my private library – because of the war. When the French came back we had to evacuate. I left my library at home, and the books were scattered and lost. I regretted that very much, because I had many very valuable books. And the second time was when the U.S. began bombing. I lost my library again then, too.

I: Really? So your house was hit by a bomb?

LVL: Yes (laughs).

I: So your house in Hanoi was hit by a bomb?

LVL: Yes, in Hanoi.

I: What year did that happen?

LVL: In 1965.

I: In 1965? When the U.S. bombing first began, huh?

LVL: Yes.

I: Really?

LVL: So the history of my activities was as follows: I struggled against the French during the war and during the implementation of the Geneva Agreement, and after the French withdrew and the U.S. replaced the French in South Vietnam, I shifted to struggling against the American involvement and their violation of the Geneva Agreement.

I: And I believe you also participated in the Geneva negotiations on Laos, isn't that right?

LVL: Yes. I attended the Geneva Conference on Laos in 1962.

I: Really?

LVL: Yes.

I: Was that the first time that you had traveled abroad?

LVL: The first time that I traveled abroad was in 1958, when I accompanied Chairman Ho on a visit to India and Myanmar. That was in 1958.

I: How long did you spend in Geneva? How long did you work in Geneva?

LVL: I worked until the war was over.

I: No, when you went overseas to Geneva...

LVL: Oh, the trip to Geneva. I went to the Geneva Conference on Laos in 1962, and when the conference ended in July 1962 I returned home.

I: So you were there for a rather long time?

LVL: What?

I: Did you work in Geneva for a long time?

LVL: No, just for a few months.

I: Just a few months.

LVL: Just recently, in 2002, I went to Texas to attend a seminar at the Vietnam Center, and there I met this guy, what was his name? He had been an assistant to Harriman. We met each other again there.

I: I see.

LVL: Christoph or something.

I: Oh, Christopher?

LVL: Christoph.

I: Maybe Warren Christopher?

LVL: Um.

I: During the time you were in Geneva you probably met Mr. Harriman.

LVL: Yes, I met him again.

I: During that period Vietnam's policy was not exactly, ah, it wanted to restrict the war. Vietnam wanted to restrict the war to Laos and Vietnam, right? Meaning that you wanted to prevent the U.S. from intervening further, right? Is that right?

LVL: I don't understand what you are asking.

I: I want to ask about Vietnam's policy during the period from 1960 to 1962, the period of the negotiations on the Lao problem. Vietnam's policy was to restrict the war and keep it from expanding, right?

LVL: That's correct. Our policy was to respect the neutrality of Laos and to prevent intervention by major powers [big countries]. So that is why we attended the negotiations in Geneva in 1962; we wanted to discuss the modalities of Laotian neutrality, and in the end we signed the agreement. At that time President Kennedy had reached an agreement with Khrushchev, and that is why Kennedy agreed to sign the Geneva Agreement on Laos.

I: During that period Khrushchev's overall policy was peaceful coexistence, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: And China did not agree, at least in part, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: So Vietnam must have been under outside pressure during the negotiations.

LVL: No, we did not have to endure pressure from other countries. We had our own independent policy.

I: Yes, I understand, but sometimes outside powers want to apply pressure, but Vietnam wanted to maintain its sovereign authority to make its own decisions, right?

LVL: Yes.

I: During that period, were your children grown, or were they still in elementary school, or in high school?

LVL: What?

I: During this period in the 1960s, were your children grown, or were they still small, or were they in high school, or...

LVL: No, they all attended college. And my eldest son attended "Romonsoff" [spelling] University specializing in the study of astrophysics. And he received his PhD. A PhD.

I: So he went to Russia and studied there for many years. He must have been very smart.

Ah, excuse me. ...[Interviewer tells LVL that it is time to end and switch to another tape.]



**Continuation of Oral History Interview of Luu Van Loi [Luu Văn Lợi]  
DVD 02  
4 June 2007, Hanoi, Vietnam**

I: Now, we talked about the agreement, I mean the negotiations in Geneva. Now, you wrote a book about secret contacts with the U.S. during the Vietnam War, right?<sup>9</sup>

LVL: Yes.

I: Did you take part in those secret contacts or...

LVL: No.

I:...or did you just monitor them or...

LVL: I did not participate in the contacts, but I did participate in the planning - just in determining the policy. At that time I was a bureau chief in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I: What bureau were you in charge of?

LVL: No, at that time I was the Chef d'Cabinet of the Foreign Ministry.

I: Ah, the Chef d'Cabinet of the Foreign Ministry.

LVL: And so there I participated in developing the plans for contacts with the U.S.

I: Yes. I have read in several Vietnamese history books that initially Vietnam's policy was that before direct negotiations with the U.S. could begin, Vietnam first had to develop the correct battle posture, a posture that was strong enough for negotiations, because Vietnam has a saying that goes, "We cannot win at the negotiating table that which we have not already won on the battlefield." Is that correct?

LVL: Yes.

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<sup>9</sup> Luu Văn Lợi and Nguyễn Anh Vũ, "Tiếp Xúc Bí Mật Việt Nam-Hoa Kỳ Trước Hội Nghị Pa-Ri," International Relations Institute, Hanoi, 1990.

I: Now, some Americans believe that during the initial part of the war the U.S. missed many opportunities to negotiate with Vietnam. What do you think of this idea? Is it right or is it wrong? Did the U.S. miss opportunities during the first years of the war, such as in 1964, 1965, and 1966?

LVL: From the first, our policy was that the U.S. must end its assistance to the pro-American government in South Vietnam and that we were prepared to establish relations with the United States. At that time the U.S. refused to withdraw and it continued to increase its involvement in South Vietnam. Initially it used American advisors and American weapons to help prop up Ngo Dinh Diem. But after the defeat of its strategic hamlet strategy, the U.S. increased its involvement by engaging in Kennedy's counter-insurgency warfare, the "special war."

I: The special war, what in English is called "counterinsurgency."

LVL: And when the special war failed, President Johnson expanded the war by sending U.S. troops into South Vietnam and bombing North Vietnam in order to stop North Vietnam from sending aid to South Vietnam. Now, in 1960, ah, 1964 - in 1964 the U.S. sent Mr. Seaborn, a Canadian, to North Vietnam to explore whether North Vietnam was strong and united, and secondly to transmit a threat: If North Vietnam continued to support the Front in South Vietnam, the U.S. would react strongly. It was a warning to North Vietnam; it was a threat. At that time Pham Van Dong said that all that was needed was for the U.S. to end its intervention, and then the situation would be fine. And Dong said that the U.S. must withdraw the American advisors. But the U.S. refused to listen, and Mr. Kennedy increased the number of U.S. troops involved in the special war; he sent additional advisors. And second, after the failure of the "special war," President

Johnson sent in troops. He sent in 500,000 troops, meaning that he expanded the war into a big war, and he began bombing North Vietnam.

I: During the period between what was called the Gulf of Tonkin incident, when the U.S. bombed North Vietnam in August 1964, and the time U.S. ground troops began landing in South Vietnam, circa March or April 1965, did Vietnam make any efforts to prevent the U.S. from deepening its involvement? Can you tell me about this?

LVL: After Vietnam signed the agreement on Laos, in which all sides agrees on a form of neutrality, a framework of neutrality, the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam suggested to the Saigon government that a government of peace and neutrality be formed, along the lines of that agreed upon in Laos. But they wouldn't listen. Naturally, at that time the U.S. would not listen, so they [South Vietnam] also wouldn't listen.

I: There are many rumors saying that the Diem government had secret contacts with the National Liberation Front. Is that true? In the U.S. there are many rumors that this occurred, and there are many overseas Vietnamese in the U.S. who say that this was the reason that the U.S. overthrew Diem. Were there any contacts with the Diem government?

LVL: What?

I: Did Diem have any contacts aimed at reaching a settlement on that issue? Contacts with the NLF to resolve the Vietnam problem in a purely Vietnamese context?

LVL: He refused. Diem refused.

I: So Diem absolutely refused. So those rumors are...

LVL: The Front suggested neutrality along the lines of the Geneva Agreement on Laos, neutrality along those lines, but Diem refused.

I: Yes. Now, after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964 when the U.S. bombed you [North Vietnam], it appears that there were a number of activities on the diplomatic front to prevent the U.S. from intervening more deeply. Is that right? I read in a book published by the [Vietnamese] army that the 325<sup>th</sup> Division postponed its date of departure for South Vietnam. They delayed it for two months in order to support the diplomatic struggle front. I don't understand, ah, there must have been some very special activity by Vietnam to prevent U.S. intervention, right? [LVL grunts]. Do you remember this situation? Why was the departure of the 325<sup>th</sup> Division for South Vietnam postponed? You don't remember that?

LVL: I never heard that story.

I: You never heard it? Often there are mistakes in history books (LVL laughs) and so I had to ask about that in order to clarify it. Now, according to Party books and to your own books, Vietnam's policy was "talk-fight," right? From 1967 on, right? That was the decision made in 1967, right?

LVL: Right when the war first began, when Johnson decided to bomb North Vietnam and to send U.S. troops into South Vietnam to fight, at that time we already had the intention of "talking and fighting at the same time." I wrote an article that was published in the newspaper *Nhan Dan*,<sup>10</sup> and I signed the article, "Commentator"[*Người bình luận*]. In that article I wrote that if the U.S. would agree to end the war, the two sides could begin talks. And recently, when I visited the U.S. and I met my American friend, the one who had been an assistant to Harriman, he said that he had read that article and that he had seen that idea, but in the end the U.S. would not agree, so it continued the bombing. They thought that the bombing would threaten and frighten North Vietnam and that as a

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<sup>10</sup> *Nhân Dân* – "People's Daily," the official newspaper of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

result North Vietnam would reduce its support to South Vietnam. That was the American calculation, but in reality their calculation was wrong.

I: The “talk-fight” policy initially became public in the interview Wilfred Burchett<sup>11</sup> did with Nguyen Duy Trinh<sup>12</sup> in 1967, right? He [Trinh] said that if the U.S. stopped bombing North Vietnam, North Vietnam could meet with them and negotiate, right?

LVL: In 1965 we announced that we were forming a diplomatic front to coordinate with and support the military front and the political front. So that is why we told Burchett that if the U.S. ended the bombing and all other acts of war directed against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, then the Democratic Republic of Vietnam could talk to the U.S. When we said that, they exploited the problem of the wording. We said that we could talk, but the U.S. did not believe us.

I: The U.S. focused on the word “could” [“có thể” in Vietnamese].

LVL: The U.S. said that the word “could” meant that it was not certain. But the truth is that Vietnam could not make it stronger, because the question of talks is an issue that involves both sides. Only if the other side agreed could we say something in a definite, “affirmative” manner.

I: And then in December 1967 Nguyen Duy Trinh announced that if the U.S. stopped the bombing of North Vietnam, Vietnam *would* negotiate.

LVL: In late 1967-early 1968 we said clearly that we would talk. We said we would talk, but the U.S. still did not believe us.

I: That announcement was intended in part to establish the correct posture, so that after the Tet 1968 General Offensive and Uprising, after that, the U.S. saw that you had

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<sup>11</sup> Wilfred Burchett, pro-communist Australian journalist residing in Hanoi.

<sup>12</sup> Nguyễn Duy Trinh was the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister.

already made the announcement, so only after they were attacked did they agree to negotiate and meet with you, right?

LVL: No. Ah, um, the U.S. told the British Prime Minister that they would agree to end the bombing in order to begin talks. But then they changed their minds. When Kosygin<sup>13</sup> arrived at the airport...

I: That was in 1967, right?

LVL: Initially the U.S. sent experts to draft a public joint statement. And in the statement it was stated clearly that we agreed that we would talk. If they ended the bombing the two sides would begin talks. But then the U.S. changed its mind. And that was why this agreement could not be carried out. This was during Kosygin's visit to Britain. Then the British government, at the request of the United States, had to go out to the terminal at the airport to take back the text of the statement (LVL laughs).

I: And there were also a number of contacts made through the Poles, using the Poles as intermediaries, right?

LVL: The Polish case was a different case. The Polish case was as follows: The U.S. agreed to meet with us in Poland. Vietnam appointed its ambassador, Tran Van Quang, to talk to them, and we sent a cadre from Hanoi out there to assist him [Quang] in the talks with the Americans. But the U.S. had initially agreed, but then they did not come to the meeting. They didn't show up for the meeting. And in this case the two sides had different explanations for why the meeting did not take place. The Vietnamese side said that the Americans had agreed to meet but then they did not come to the meeting, meaning that they did not keep their promise. But the U.S. disputed this. They said that

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<sup>13</sup> Alexei Kosygin, Prime Minister of the Soviet Union.

the two sides had not agreed on where the meeting was to be held. So the Americans sat in their Embassy and did not come to our embassy to talk with us (laughs).

I: When people read this, should they think that this was a misunderstanding or that this was something intentional on the part of the Americans?

LVL: In reality, the U.S. no longer wanted to meet with us. Because if they really had wanted to meet, it wouldn't have been difficult. Because if no arrangements had been made on where the meetings were to be held, all they had to do was to telephone the Vietnamese Embassy and ask where we should meet. That wasn't anything difficult. But the Americans did not want to meet us; that was all it was.

I: So at that time the Vietnamese delegation was ready to meet, but the Americans ...

LVL: We had sent a cadre over there, to Warsaw, to assist the Ambassador in conducting the meeting. So we were ready. But they said it was because the Vietnamese did not determine a meeting place, the place where the meeting would be held (laughs). That's what is so funny. It would have been easy, right?

I: Yes. I don't know, ah, all those procedural matters had to go through the intermediary, the Poles, so perhaps there was a misunderstanding on the Polish side, or on the U.S. side.

LVL: That's right. It went through the middleman, Michalowski,<sup>14</sup> who was Deputy Foreign Minister and Chef d'Cabinet of the Polish Foreign Ministry.

I: I think that Michalowski has written a book or a paper on this subject. Now, after the U.S. and Vietnam began meeting officially in Paris, were you still working in the Foreign Ministry? Were you still the Chef d'Cabinet of the Foreign Ministry?

LVL: Where?

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<sup>14</sup> Jerzy Michalowski.

I: In the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry. I mean, when the U.S. and Vietnam began to hold official meetings in Paris during 1968, were you still in the position of Chef d'Cabinet of the Foreign Ministry?

LVL: At that time I was Assistant to the Foreign Minister [trợ lý Bộ Trưởng Ngoại Giao].

I: Assistant to the Foreign Minister?

LVL: Yes, Assistant to the Minister.

I: And you probably were still in responsible for...

LVL: And I continued to monitor the meetings in Paris.

I: And you also monitored the secret meetings with Kissinger, right?

LVL: I followed the entire process, all the meetings between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger. And when Vietnam decided to end the war, I was the person who carried the draft agreement to Paris and handed it to Le Duc Tho, and Le Duc Tho gave the draft agreement to Kissinger. So the two sides discussed the issue of ending the Vietnam War, and it was planned that the agreement would be signed on 31 October 1972. In the end, however, ah, we had agreed to this already, but then the American side demanded further discussions. So Vietnam concluded that the United States had decided not to sign and that the U.S. only wanted to exploit this issue in order to get past the 1972 U.S. Presidential election.

I: Many Americans say that Kissinger exceeded his instructions from Nixon when he accepted the initial draft agreement.

LVL: Initially, Nixon was not in yet. Nixon was not in the White House yet. Before the 1972 Presidential election, Nixon had not yet been elected President [sic]. But at that



time Kissinger announced, “Peace is at hand!” So it is clear that an agreement had already been reached, and we had even agreed on a signing date for the agreement: 31 October 1972. But then they decided not to sign.

I: At that time the U.S. explained to the Vietnamese side that it could not sign because South Vietnam had made a number of demands.

LVL: That’s right.

I: Did the Democratic Republic of Vietnam believe that was the truth, that this was the real reason for not signing, or did you believe that the U.S. was involved in some plot? Did North Vietnam believe Kissinger’s explanation, which put the blame for not signing on South Vietnam, on Thieu, or did you think that Kissinger had some other scheme in mind?

LVL: It was true that Thieu had a number of issues that he wanted changed, but that was Thieu’s malicious intent. Because during their negotiations with Vietnam, the U.S. had kept Thieu fully informed about everything. This was not anything new. But what was new was that Thieu demanded changes -, he wanted changes in 69 different places in the agreement.

I: 69 places, that’s right.

LVL: 69 places (laughs).

I: Including changes in wording, such as the word “administrative structure” [cơ cấu chính quyền], That’s right. Now, in 1972 a committee was formed...

LVL: [Interrupting] But the main point was this: The U.S. calculated that if the U.S. withdrew its troops, Thieu’s forces would be tremendously weakened and that they would not be strong enough to stand up against the North Vietnamese Army and the NLF

army. Therefore Nixon decided to postpone the signing while they provided additional aid to Thieu. At that time they had a plan called, um, Increased Aid...

I: In English the plan was called "Enhance Plus."

LVL: It was called, um, ah, a plan to send additional military aid to South Vietnam. So at that time they sent a great deal of aid, primarily aircraft and tanks and ammunition. And after they sent this additional aid, Nguyen Cao Ky pounded on his chest and boasted that South Vietnam had the fifth most powerful air force in the world. Nguyen Cao Ky made that boast after the additional aircraft were sent to Thieu.

I: Right. Now, during the negotiations between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho from October to December 1972, the negotiations were very fierce, right? They were very tense, right? You personally participated in the negotiations during that period, right?

LVL: I participated from the very beginning. From the time we began discussing the agreement right through to the conclusion, until Kissinger and Le Duc Tho initialed the agreement. At that point my job was over and I went to South Vietnam. I went to South Vietnam where I served as the Deputy Chief of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's delegation to the Four Party Committee<sup>15</sup> to implement the agreement.

I: At Camp Davis at Tan Son Nhat.

LVL: Yes, it was at Tan Son Nhat. So I was in Paris throughout the entire time that the agreement was being discussed.

I: I read your book about the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho negotiations and I noticed that there were several times when things were very tense, right? And there was one time in the negotiations when Le Duc Tho exceeded his instructions...

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<sup>15</sup> The Four Party Joint Military Committee.

LVL: There was one time when Le Duc Tho became so angry that he pounded on the table. And after that this fact was leaked to the press in Paris and the U.S., and they printed stories saying, “Le Duc Tho Pounds on the Table.” Kissinger was very angry. Yes, that happened. But during the discussions of the changes that Thieu demanded to the October agreement, many of the changes just were irrational. There were some that we could accept, but some were just irrational. So [Le Duc] Tho said, “Either we revise the entire agreement or I will refuse to change anything.” Meaning that either we should agree to change the whole thing or else nothing should be changed. Tho raised this argument with Kissinger, and Kissinger realized that it made sense, so Kissinger recommended it to President Nixon, and at that time Kissinger asked to be allowed to resign. This was the time that he submitted his resignation, at this point, but Nixon refused to accept his resignation and told him to continue the discussions. From this point on, Kissinger’s attitude changed and he became softer and more flexible. He no longer used Thieu’s list of 69 changes.

I: Yes. Did you see a change in Kissinger’s attitude during the period when the U.S. carried out the B-52 bombing campaign? Before the bombing Kissinger was inflexible, right? But after the bombing he was ready to sign. What do you think was the reason for his change in attitude?

LVL: We were really angry about the B-52 bombing, because at that time there were only two points left. Everything else had been agreed upon. There were only two points left to be resolved. One was the issue of movement through the temporary military demarcation line, the de-militarized zone (DMZ). And the other was the procedure for signing the agreement. The only difference we had on the DMZ problem was this:

Kissinger suggested that only civilian movement should be allowed through the DMZ, meaning that military movement through the DMZ would not be permitted. Only civilian movement would be permitted. [Le Duc] Tho responded that we should use the provision from the 1954 Geneva Agreement, which said that there should be no movement across the temporary military demarcation line. We would take that provision from the 1954 agreement. That was the only difference. Kissinger wanted to add the sentence on “civilian movement” – “passage civil” [in French], but Tho said that we should take the wording of the 1954 Agreement. That was the only difference. So that was one issue. The second issue was the procedure for signing the agreement. The signing procedure was very complicated. Why was it so complicated? The agreement involved four parties, but the parties did not recognize each other. The U.S. had not recognized the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and it had not recognized the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG). And [Nguyen Van] Thieu did not recognize the PRG. So on the question of the signing of the agreement, Thieu demanded that the name of the PRG be erased and he did not want to sign anything that included the name of the PRG. So how should the agreement be signed? It was very complicated. In the end, the following agreement was reached. The official copy of the agreement would be signed by the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. And the text of that copy clearly stated that “the following countries are participants in this agreement,” and it included the name of the PRG in the list. The name of the PRG was included. And after the bi-partite agreement between the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was signed, the four parties would sign an agreement with exactly the same content but that did not include the first sentence listing which countries were participants

in the agreement. This was to avoid mention of the NLF, I mean PRG. And as for the problem of movement across the DMZ, Pham Van Dong sent a diplomatic note to Nixon saying that we should use the wording from the 1954 Geneva Agreement, and Nixon replied that he agreed. So this meant that there were no issues left to be resolved. And that is why Nixon said in his note that, "The agreement is considered to be complete." So in that situation, there was no need to use the B-52s. That should not have been done.

I: During the negotiations on the Paris Agreement in 1972 and 1973 there were a number of what were called "unofficial agreements." For instance, war reparations for North Vietnam, and what was called "adjustment of forces" in the north, etc. Apparently the two sides reached an unofficial agreement that the U.S. would withdraw personnel who were not military personnel but were civilians serving as military advisors or something like that. Now, there must have been extensive arguments over the unofficial agreements.

LVL: The 1973 agreement, the official agreement, differed from the October 1972 agreement in that there were a number of understandings on how the agreement would be implemented. Such as on removal of mines, and that ships of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet would not be allowed to move in close to the coast of Vietnam, etc. There were a number of concrete agreements like that, and on the prisoner of war (POW) issue, etc. So there were those additions to the agreement. But in truth, the 1973 agreement was really not much different from the 1972 agreement. And that is why Kissinger wrote in his memoirs that he did not know if the changes that were made were worth it or not, whether the changes had been worth the effort.

I: There was also a famous statement by Negroponte. Negroponte said that we bombed them to force them to accept our concessions.

LVL; [after laughing] That means that the changes weren't worth it.

I: Now, you participated in the Four-Party Delegation. How long were you at Tan Son Nhat? Several months, right?

LVL: Sixty days.

I: Sixty days. What did you feel when you participated in that job? Did you think that the two sides showed good faith? Did the U.S. display good faith?

LVL: The U.S. displayed good faith, but they also did not display good faith. They displayed good faith in withdrawing all of their troops. That was correct. And they strictly carried out the cease-fire provisions. They did not drop bombs and they did not send their fleet in close to North Vietnam anymore. That was correct. But what was not correct was, Nixon sent a letter to Thieu, and later we captured a copy of that letter. In the letter, Nixon said that the U.S. would react strongly if North Vietnam violated the Paris Agreement. He said they would support [President Nguyen Van] Thieu. That is what Nixon wrote. Nixon's plan was as follows: he wanted to turn the war of aggression into a civil war. Before it was a war between the U.S. and Vietnam, and now, after the U.S. withdrew they helped Thieu to continue to fight, meaning that North Vietnam would be fighting against South Vietnam. So it would be a civil war. That was the idea behind Nixon's so-called Vietnamization plan.

I: But at that time North Vietnam knew nothing about the promise made in that letter, the promise that was made to Thieu in that letter. Or did North Vietnam discover that Nixon had said this?

LVL: We captured that letter after April 1975 [after the fall of Saigon]. We captured the secret letters – 28 secret letters that Nixon sent to Thieu. 28 letters from Nixon. One of the letters said that the U.S. would intervene if North Vietnam violated the Paris Agreement.

I: That's correct. That's correct.

LVL: But the main foundation of this was that previously the U.S. had sent over additional aircraft and tanks to allow South Vietnam to continue fighting against North Vietnam after the U.S. withdrew. This was a miscalculation on Nixon's part, because after the U.S. withdrew its troops and withdrew American air and naval support, Thieu was left in a very weakened position, and he could not stand up against the PRG. So that was a miscalculation by Nixon. That was a key element of the Vietnamization plan. The intent was to turn the war of aggression into a civil war.

I: During the negotiations between the U.S. and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, was there any outside pressure on you? Some people say that the Russians put pressure on Vietnam to make some concessions and that the Chinese did the same thing.

LVL: No, there was no pressure. The only pressure there was involved the U.S. trying to exploit the conflict between the Soviet Union and China to get the Soviet Union to reduce its aid to North Vietnam. But in fact the Soviet Union did not reduce its aid. It continued to supply weapons to Vietnam. And in truth there was no other pressure.

I: Now, did France make things easy for North Vietnam in terms of your working arrangements and your contacts in the negotiations?

LVL: Working on what?

I: Did France have a policy of helping you to participate in the negotiations? Of helping North Vietnam? Did it want to do whatever it could to arrange for the war to end?

LVL: To participate in what?

I: Naturally, France gave its permission for Paris to be used as the site of the negotiations. Did they grant North Vietnam and special favors or conditions in order to help end the war?

LVL: Who?

I: France.

LVL: No, France didn't.

I: So France maintained neutrality?

LVL: France stayed neutral, that's all.

I: Back then North Vietnam had good relations with France, right?

LVL: France did not take part in encouraging, pushing the war. De Gaulle himself proclaimed that South Vietnam should be neutralized.

I: France had harbored that idea for a long time.

LVL: De Gaulle called for the U.S. to withdraw and for South Vietnam to become neutral.

I: They advocated that right up until 1975.

LVL: No, this was in 1964, when De Gaulle visited Cambodia. He issued that statement in Phnom Penh.

I: The Vietnamese government established a special committee to handle the negotiations, right?

LVL: Yes.



I: It was called CP-50, right? Were you a member of that committee?

LVL: Yes, I was a member of CP-50. It was a top secret committee set up to study the American war, and it studied the statements made by the various American Presidents, and it monitored the military situation, the fighting in South Vietnam, and it conducted research on reaching a settlement to end the war. CP-50 was a very important organization.

I: When was CP-50 established? Was it in 1972, or before that?

LVL: What?

I: The CP-50 Committee. What year was it established?

LVL: After 1965.

I: After 1965. Oh, then it was in operation for a long time.

LVL: It was after the war expanded in South Vietnam and U.S. troops arrived and after the U.S. began bombing North Vietnam – after all that happened.

I: And you were a member of CP-50 for that entire time?

LVL: Yes.

I: Really. Because I read a little about CP-50 in a book...

LVL: But we must admit that Johnson had his own such organization. He announced, "I have an organization to guard the peace, an organization with 200 people." That is what Johnson wrote in his memoirs. He wrote, "I have an organization to guard the peace." It had 200 people. So it was the same kind of organization as CP-50.

I: I wonder whether Johnson's organization was something that only existed for the sake of outside appearances (LVL laughs). But Vietnam had an official organization like that.

LVL: Yes.

I: Now what do you think about the entire process of the contacts with the Americans, from the beginning of the war to the present?

LVL: I followed the progress of the war from the beginning, from before the U.S. began the bombing and before they sent troops into South Vietnam, from the time that the U.S. installed Ngo Dinh Diem as Prime Minister under Bao Dai. I followed it beginning way back then.

I: Since you followed it for so many years, what is your opinion about the future of relations between the U.S. and Vietnam? We have now improved relations, and we now have good relations? And in the future do you think the relations will be closer, or what do you think?

LVL: In 2002 I visited Texas to attend a conference on Vietnam. I presented a paper there. I said that the Vietnam War could have been avoided if people had behaved properly. And I concluded my paper with this statement: "I came here with two messages. One message is for my American friends. That is to forget the war and look to a future of peace and cooperation. And my second message is to my Vietnamese friends who now live in the U.S. That message is to contribute to strengthening the peace and to building up our country of Vietnam." Those were the two conclusions of my presentation. I went there and I met with all our American friends – professors, scholars, and journalists. I met them all. And in particular, I met Professor Larry Berman. He wrote a book titled, "*No Peace, No Honor.*" That's the book he wrote. And he had met me even before my trip to the U.S.

I: What did you think of the book by Robert McNamara?

LVL: I know that book. It is a good book. I should also add that the city of Lubbock [Texas] awarded me the title of “honorary citizen.” (laughs) I am an honorary citizen of that city. That is right, because I have always advocated that there should be peace and cooperation between Vietnam and the U.S.

I: So this year you are 94 years old. During your life Vietnam must have changed a great deal, right? It has become much bigger and stronger. When you first joined the Viet Minh movement could you have imagined that Vietnam would develop to the level it has reached today?

LVL grunts.

I: Could you?

LVL grunts and nods affirmatively.

I: You could?

LVL: Vietnam has developed very well for the past 20 years.

I: After so many decades of pain and hardship, after the war....

LVL: After the war we resolutely carried out a policy of integrating ourselves into the world community and of establishing relations with all countries if they wanted to cooperate with us. Therefore we can say that today Vietnam has relations with almost all of the countries of the world.

I: As for the Frenchmen that you and your organization recruited, won their sympathy and support, do you still have contact with them? People like Borchers?

LVL: Sadly, all those people are now dead. They died a long time ago.

I: They died long ago? They are all dead, huh?

LVL: Yes. Borchers, Shroder, they're all dead. So I am the last survivor of my generation (laughs).

I: There are only you and Vo Nguyen Giap. You are the only two left (LVL laughs). So we are now probably over our time limit.

LVL: So what do you think? Are you happy with the interview?

I: I am very happy. You're still in rather good health, aren't you?

LVL: Yes. So now you have met a living witness to two wars (laughs).

I: Yes. And there is an article that describes you as the living dictionary of the diplomatic service (both laugh). I would like to thank you for answering my questions today.

LVL: I was also very happy to talk with you.

I: Thank you very much. Now, do you still have family left? Is your wife still living, or has she passed away?

LVL: Who?

I: Your wife.

LVL: My wife died the year before last, two years ago.

I: Please accept my sincere condolences. Are your sons and daughters still living?

LVL: I have a paternal grandson [the son of my son] who is studying in a school, um, I don't know if it is in Washington or not. He is a very good student.

I: Really? He's studying in the U.S.?

LVL: He went there both to study English and to study new subjects, like American history, the rights of American citizens, etc. These were all brand new subjects for him, but after studying for only six months he received his Level 3 diploma, high school level. And six American universities have offered him scholarships.

I: Really! So he will continue his studies in the U.S.?

LVL: Yes, he will continue his studies there.

I: I congratulate your family.

LVL: On the 5<sup>th</sup> he will return to visit our family.

I: Probably the entire family is anxiously awaiting his return. How many grandchildren do you have?

LVL: I have one, two, three, four – five grandchildren. Three are the children of my sons and two are the children of my daughter(s).

I: Now, I would like to thank you very much, and we will end the interview here.