Laura Calkins: This is Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I’m initiating an oral history interview with Dorothy Reese Bloomfield. Today is the twenty-seventh of June 2006. Both Dorothy and I are sitting together here in the spacious interview room of the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock. First of all, Dorothy, thank you very much for coming all the way out to Lubbock, for your time here today and also for agreeing to participate in the Oral History Project. We’re very grateful for that.

Dorothy Bloomfield: Well, thank you. I’m enjoying my visit. I haven’t been to West Texas before. Traveled to all but one state and I’ve been in fifty-nine countries.

LC: But never to Lubbock before.

DB: Right. It was interesting to learn that it’s a city of two-hundred thousand people and a wonderful university of fourteen thousand students. So, it’s a learning experience for me.

LC: Yes. It was for me when I first came out, too.

DB: Right. Right.

LC: Dorothy, our interview will encompass, I’m sure, many, many things, but just to give folks who might be listening to this first session an idea of how your trip to the Vietnam Archive arose, can you say a little bit about your experience in Vietnam?
DB: Yes. I went to Vietnam in February of 1952 and lived there for three years.
I went over as a single person, married a very interesting, exciting personality, Everett
Dixie Reese, who was killed in Vietnam on April 29, 1955. Of course, then I returned to
the United States. I have been back to Vietnam twice, once with my son, who was a one-
year-old when his father was killed. We went—we returned in 1997 and in the year
2000. So I have many—actually, I think I should say that my time in Vietnam were the
happiest years of my life.

LC: Wonderful. Well, we’ll talk in some detail about that, but as a precursor, and
to help people get a better sense of your career and how it led you to Vietnam in 1952,
can you start us off by telling us a little bit of biographical data? Where you were born
and when and something about your family?
DB: I was born in West Pittston, Pennsylvania, a small town between Scranton
and Wilkes-Barre on October 13, 1920. I was the oldest of five children. There were
four girls and my brother was the youngest.

LC: He was the baby?
DB: He was the baby. He was spoiled. I went to school there, primary school,
what we called junior high school, and senior high school, graduated.

LC: What year did you graduate from high school?
DB: I graduated in 1938, June of 1938.

LC: What kind of a student had you been?
DB: I was a good student. I think I ranked third in the class. I don’t think the—
there were probably about eighty-five students in the class. I grew up during the
Depression. We didn’t have any luxuries and getting five cents for an ice cream cone
was a real treat. But we had all the necessities of life. We did have good food and
clothing.

LC: What did your father do?
DB: My father was a cabinet-maker, but he worked in a—it was a woodworking
establishment and they made doors and frames for windows and that sort of thing. I
believe today all that’s manufactured probably not by hand the way—he was a real
craftsman. He made a lot of the furniture in our—and he designed our house.

LC: What was his name?
DB: Charles Erickson

LC: How do you spell Erickson?

DB: E-R-I-C-K-S-O-N. We had detailed molding in the dining room for the chair rail and the bookcases. He made bookcases with molding. We had radiators, this was steam heat.

LC: Right.

DB: We had radiators. He made radiator covers, which were very nicely made of wood and then the panels were some kind of a, like a mesh metal. So, he—and my mother was very—well, I remember her as being sick a lot of the time. Well, she was always having babies it seemed.

LC: Yeah, well that’ll do it, but—

DB: But, she was also a very talented woman. Neither of my parents had been to high school. I don’t know how far they went in school. But, my mother had done watercolor paintings, which we still have and treasure.

LC: Absolutely.

DB: We’ve had them framed. Sure, the one I have is a Dutch scene with a windmill and the water. I’m sure it was copied from a postcard probably, but still, it’s quite a nice piece of work. She also was very talented in sewing and made some of our clothes, later on did quilts and made Italian cut-work tablecloths with napkins, made five sets of those later in her life. Amazing woman. She even went into business for herself during the Depression.

LC: Did she? What’d she do?

DB: She took, she had a small inheritance and she went into the dress business. We had a dress shop. She had a dress shop for a few years. She would go to New York and make purchases, and then, and she sold them in the community.

LC: Where was the shop located?

DB: Well, it was in our home. It was in—we moved from our original house to a much larger house and there were many front parlors, two parlors, so to speak. She used one of those for that.

LC: Did she rely on you to help her with the children?
DB: I did quite a bit. I was really responsible for a lot because she had a serious—she had a serious illness. She had a tonsillectomy and the area bled. We thought we were going to lose her. She had direct blood—in those days it was direct blood transfusions.

LC: Can you explain what that is for someone who might not know what that is?

DB: Mother was in the bed and the person who was donating the blood, a neighbor, was in a stretcher next to her and the blood flowed from his vein into her veins. I hope they did a cross-check.

LC: Match and cross-check, yeah.

DB: Anyway, that was quite serious.

LC: It sounds like it.

DB: During that time I had a lot of responsibility for the running of the household and the family.

LC: How old were you, Dorothy, then?

DB: Well, let’s see. That was—I was probably about fifteen.

LC: Wow.

DB: Getting the meals and assigning the tasks. On Saturday the house was cleaned and each one had their responsibility. I did the cooking and planning of the meals and then they did the cleaning up. So it was—it worked out very well.

LC: The other children are separated from you by how many years?

DB: Well, about two years for the last one. Then Virginia was four years and the last one was about ten years.

LC: I take it your mother then recovered to a goodly degree. Is that right?

DB: Yeah, she did. She was amazing. She had so much energy and so many ideas.

LC: Well, I see where you get some of your energy, too. Your high school years, were there particular subjects that drew you?

DB: Oh, I don’t know. I had four years of Latin. I do remember that. I remember gym and I remember we had chapel every day. This was a public high school. We had chapel every day. We marched in, the band would be playing and the superintendent was in charge. We sang a hymn, he read from the Bible, and if there were any
announcements, we might have a program. You know, there were Jewish, not very many
Jewish students, Catholic students, Protestant students, everybody together. There was
no big deal made about the Bible or religion. I mean, this was accepted.

LC: Right.

DB: I think it’s distressful that people are so agitated about religion. I mean, religion is important. It is to me, but anyway, things worked very well.

LC: So, there wasn’t any kind of underground upset about Bible reading in the school?

DB: No, no, no. We had one black family in the community. This gentleman was a chauffer for one of the big, wealthy families. There was no—we didn’t associate with them because I don’t think they, I don’t recall that they had any children.

LC: I see.

DB: So, you know, but they were accepted in the community.

LC: There wasn’t any overt racism that you saw?

DB: No, no.

LC: Did you grow up with those ideas, then, of—

DB: No.

LC: Being more or less tolerant?

DB: Well, I guess so.

LC: Everybody was the same?

DB: Well, everybody was accepted.

LC: Everybody was pretty much the same?

DB: Right, right, right. So then I, after graduation from high school, I was interested—my mother was very, I had a beautiful garden and I helped with the garden.

Then I was in Girl Scouts. I became a Golden Eaglet. I still have the Golden Eaglet pin.

LC: Can you tell what that meant?

DB: Well—

LC: What you had to achieve?

DB: Well, I had to get so many merit badges

LC: Right.

DB: I don’t know how many.
LC: A lot.

DB: Tree-finding, star-finding, flowers—anyway, we had a, our Girl Scout group had a—what do you call it? A plot in town where we changed the flowers. We worked there so—I thought I’d like to be a horticulturist. I might go back to the religious aspect a moment.

LC: Indeed.

DB: Because every year we had a service in the Methodist church. In fact, we met in the Methodist church. I was Catholic. I think most of the people were Protestant but, you know, it was just accepted that you went and that you participated and so on. Well, then, when I came to making a career choice I thought horticulture would be interesting. So, there was a school of Horticulture at Ambler, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia, which subsequently became a part of Temple University. I got the catalog, but I don’t know what happened that I didn’t. Well, first place there wasn’t any money to go to college. So, Mother always thought that it would be nice to have a nurse in the family, to take care of her and whoever else was ill.

LC: Anything that might come up.

DB: I had had a cousin who was in medical school at Temple University at the time. His mother and father—his father was a physician, his mother a nurse and they had graduated from Temple. Mother had a cousin who had graduated from nursing school there. So, it just seemed somewhat of a natural place for me to go. It was very nice because my cousin, who was a senior, or a junior in medical school at the time, lived there with his family and his two young children. I was often with them. It was sort of a family, like a family for me. So, I spent three years in nursing school. This was a diploma program. In those days you had three months of pre-clinical experience, which were the basic sciences and fundamental, basic nursing. Then the remainder of your time you were on the wards, you went—six-thirty every morning you had chapel and you had roll call. Again there was a Bible reading. Then you went to breakfast at quarter-of-seven and at seven o’clock you were on duty. You worked seven to seven with two hours off. Sometimes you—well, later on in subsequent semesters you had certain classes and you had time off for classes. I think we had one day off a week.

LC: A lot of learning by doing, then, on the wards?
DB: Right.

LC: Would you circulate to different wards?

DB: Yes, right. I was fortunate. I only spent one or two weeks on night duty. You had medical and surgical and pediatrics and OB (obstetrics) and, you know, the usual special, clinical specialties. So, anyway, I had an instructor who was in the medical school whenever—she worked in physiology. She was somewhat of a mentor. She said, “Now Dorothy,” she said, “you want to get your degree.” I said, “Yes, I want to get my degree.” She said, “You have to decide whether you’re going into teaching, supervision, or administration.” So, I went to the university part-time and worked part-time.

LC: This the University of Pennsylvania?

DB: No, this was Temple University

LC: Temple University? Okay.

DB: It took me three years to get the credits to get my degree. When I was working part-time, I was in charge of student-health service for the nursing school. The school was participating in a tuberculosis study conducted by Dr. Carol Palmer, a physician and anatomist of the Public Health Service, and Dr. Lydia Edwards who was a graduate of Radcliffe, the first, one of the first women graduates of Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. So, they were visiting our school in connection with this study and testing the students and asked me if I wouldn’t like to join their staff. Well, at that time I was wanting to get my degree. So I turned them down. Timing wasn’t right. So, when I finished the degree, another friend of mine who had been a head nurse at the hospital, we became quite friendly. She later became an editor at Lippincott Publishing Company and was in charge of nursing textbooks, nursing and medical, actually. So she traveled around the country sort of, visiting schools and selling books, if you will.

LC: That’s alright.

DB: I don’t know if they still do that today—

LC: I think they do.

DB: Going to conventions and so on. So, her name was Helen Ott, O-T-T. Then she told me that there was an opening for a nursing instructor at Plattsburg, New York. Well, I should say that I didn’t like living in that small town so I moved to Philadelphia, of course, to go to school and then I thought, well, I would try this. This was at the, what
was called the Plattsburg State Teacher’s College. It’s now a part of the state university
system and is called the State University of New York at Plattsburg. It was just one
structure at the time, a small college. It was during the war. I had a room in a house
nearby. I had a hundred nursing students for lecture, lab and clinical with no assistant.
The first year I was just one step ahead of the students.

LC: I know that feeling, actually.

DB: It was a cold climate. It’s a beautiful place on Lake Champlain near the
Adirondacks, sixty miles south of Montreal. I thought three years of that was enough. It
was very cold in the winter. The snow was as high as I was tall, and I was 5’8” then. By
the way, when I went to New York State, they wouldn’t accept my license in
Pennsylvania. So I had to take state boards twice, in Pennsylvania and in New York.

LC: Dorothy, let me ask about the—just to stop you for a moment and ask about
the staff at the nursing college while you were there. How many other people were on
the staff, the faculty?

DB: Well, in the nursing, I think, there was the director and myself and the
science instructor. I think there were just three of us in the nursing department. But, of
course, they were going to be taking classes in all the other subjects as well.

LC: What years were you there?

DB: That was 1944 to ‘47.

LC: Let me ask you a little bit about the wartime ambiance. I mean, how closely
did you pay attention to the events of the war?

DB: Well, we didn’t have cars. There weren’t tires for the cars. There was food
rationing. I did not experience that because I lived in the hospital at the university and
then when I went to Plattsburg I was eating out. I wasn’t eating in the school cafeteria or
eating in town. So, I never had any need for the coupons. You had to have coupons, I
think, for shoes.

LC: Everything, practically.

DB: Everything. Then at Plattsburg, there wasn’t a—there had been, I think,
since World War I some sort of a military base. During the war there were Navy officers
there for some kind of training. So that made life interesting. There were dances and a
lot of social life there. So—
LC: How did you feel about the conflict itself? Was it, were you of the general mind that it was a war the United States should be in?

DB: Well, I remember Pearl Harbor day. I was in Philadelphia. It was Sunday, December seventh. I was, a friend of mine had had a baby and I was at the baptism. We didn’t know where Pearl Harbor was. Of course, it was alarming because people were, boys you knew were going off to war. I remember the medical school windows in Philadelphia were blacked out. We had black outs.

LC: Did they paint them black?

DB: Yes, yes they did.

LC: I mean Philadelphia would certainly. It’s right there. It’s right on the coast, major, major production area, very important shipping and transport area. Certainly would have been a target if any attack could have been launched against the East Coast. Was it worrying?

DB: I don’t know if—it was just a part of living that you had to accept this. We didn’t know about the Holocaust. We just knew we had been attacked. Of course, I wasn’t too aware of what was going on in Europe prior to that time. But I realized later, especially when I traveled there, how devastating it was in Europe.

LC: It’s almost unbelievable to think about. Yeah, I agree with you very much. It’s very, it’s very upsetting, very disturbing.

DB: I remember the day Roosevelt died, April 25, 1945. It came over the news at noon, sort of like one of those periods when something dramatic happens. That was more, seemed more devastating. Here was our wonderful, fearless leader who had been president for so long and who was going to fill the vacuum?

LC: Did you feel that sense of kind of destabilization? “What are we going to do? Who will be in charge?”

DB: I think I did.

LC: Yeah, I believe it, yeah. What about the, the, actually the end of the war and the use of the atomic weapons? Do you remember hearing about that?

DB: Well, that was in ’45. Well, first I guess was the end of the war in Europe and then VJ Day was in August. I was in Washington then because teaching in this college I was free in the summertime. I would go to Washington where my parents had
moved. I was going to be taking courses at Catholic University, at the School of Nursing. So I was— I do very definitely remember VJ Day because, VE Day, this war was still going on. It was in the Pacific. VJ [Day] was really exciting because that was the end. We all went downtown. Everybody was in the streets shouting and screaming and yelling.

LC: I believe you.

DB: It was bedlam.

LC: Whereabouts did you go?

DB: Well, I was down of F Street, right in the center of town.

LC: Sure.

DB: Then I had to go back to Plattsburg when I decided that I had had enough of the cold winters and teaching. I never enjoyed teaching that much. I think this, my voice probably had them. I was running out of steam.

LC: Well, you had to fill a room full of volume for a hundred students all day long, it sounds like—lecture, lab, clinical. That would tend to burn it out.

DB: A lot of talking, teaching.

LC: Yes, it is. It is.

DB: Well, they were good students and for many years I could remember all their names but, of course, that’s gone.

LC: But they were good students generally?

DB: Yes, they were.

LC: Very keen?

DB: Right. Asked good questions. Then I decided that maybe this was the time I should contact the Public Health Service about joining the staff there.

LC: How did that occur to you? Had you known anyone who had done that?

DB: Well, yes I knew Carol Palmer and Lydia Edwards. So I contacted them and they said, “Oh, great, come.” While I was still in Plattsburg, I had go down to Staten Island Marine Hospital. The Public Health Service started out as a Marine Hospital agency taking care of merchant seamen in this 1798. So, they were in, primarily in coastal cities, like, well, New Orleans, New York, Boston, et cetera. I went down. It was like taking state boards again. I had two days of written exams. I had a physical and I
had an oral exam given by three of the nurses and a physician. They asked me all kinds of questions, one of which I remember that I didn’t get right. They asked me how many institutions of higher education there were in the country. I don’t remember what I said, but I overestimated.

LC: That was probably the right way to go, though, if you’re going to get it wrong.

DB: I think that I made a hit with the nurses because I described—they ask me to describe the program I was teaching in. I said that they were really being prepared for school nurse teachers. Well, actually they were cadet nurses. This was a program of the government paid for their schooling, gave them uniforms and textbooks, but they were supposed to work on the home front or in the armed forces.

LC: They had a service obligation.

DB: Right. So, let’s see. What was I saying about that?

LC: Well, we were talking about your oral exam, and that you impressed those gals by—

DB: Oh, yes. Well, I said they’re, the school, eventually they were to go into school nurse, school nursing. I said, well, this disturbed me that in the curriculum we didn’t have any public health. Of course, that seemed to make a big impression on them that I realized that we should have had public health in the curriculum. So, then I finished school, the teaching in May and had the summer off. I started September 8, 1947, as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Public Health Service.

LC: Now, Dorothy, let me stop you there because it might be interesting to know what came with a commission. What kind of obligations and what kinds of benefits and what did being commissioned actually mean?

DB: Well, we did have uniforms. They’re like the Navy uniform, but I actually never wore one.

LC: Did you not?

DB: I had one for photographic purposes, but it wasn’t until Surgeon General Koop came along in the ’70s that he insisted on the uniform. But actually, it’s a quasi-military organization. We do have veteran’s benefits. Our pay schedules and personnel
policies are similar to the military. We have rank and have the same leave and sick leave and so on policies as the military.

LC: Did you have a ceremony when you were commissioned? Was there—
DB: No, no.
LC: Did you have to swear to—
DB: Oh, yes. I had to swear.
LC: Some kind of oath of allegiance to United States.
DB: Yes, right. Oath of office, right.
LC: What sort of service obligation did you undertake with your commission?
DB: Well, you serve twenty years or thirty years.
LC: So it was understood this would be your career?
DB: Right, right.
LC: When you were commissioned, were there others there commissioned at the same time?
DB: No.
LC: Just you.
DB: Right.
LC: Where did this take place? In Staten Island?
DB: This was in Washington.
LC: Oh, in Washington. Whereabouts? Did PHS (Public Health Service) have a headquarters?
DB: I don’t remember. Well, they did, but I can’t remember. It wasn’t there. The headquarters at that time was in a very lovely building on Constitution Avenue. That was the original Public Health Service quarters, but then during the war that was taken over by some other more important agency.
LC: Right. They were moved away.
DB: I can’t tell you where the headquarters was and I don’t remember where I reported. I do remember that I received a letter telling me to report, letter sent from Washington to Washington, air mail special delivery. (Both laughing) Sounds like Washington.
LC: It does actually, does indeed. You were ordered to report and you gave the
date as the eighth of September [1947]?

DB: Right.

LC: Is it similar to military requirements in that your dates of service would
always be dated from that time of swearing in?

DB: Right.

LC: Okay. What rank did you have, if you know, you can explain?

DB: Well, I was probably a second lieutenant. I rose to become captain, which
was the equivalent of Navy commander, I think. Here’s my—

LC: Oh, you’ve got your card here. Wonderful.

DB: It’s gotten me in a lot of places.

LC: I would say so. (Both laughing) You can’t tell us about all of them I’m sure.
Wonderful. This card reads “United States Uniformed Services” and it has a photograph
of you indicating your grade as captain, grade O-6, indefinite. So, it does not expire and
confirms your date of birth and your social security number and so on and was issued in
1987. So do you still get this out and flash it around as necessary?

DB: Oh, yes. Oh, well, when you go the commissary or the PX (Post Exchange)
you have to show this.

LC: So you can get into any PX?

DB: Right.

LC: Wow. I have to go shopping with you Dorothy. (Both laughing) That would
be great fun.

DB: When you come to Washington.

LC: Good to know. Fabulous. It’s a date. We’ll do that. You received this
letter and did it give you your duty assignment, your first assignment?

DB: Well, I don’t remember whether the letter did, but I knew that I was going to
the tuberculosis division.

LC: Do you know how that decision was made? Did it have to do with your
background and the—?

DB: Well, it was the fact that I made, had made, had this connection with Dr.
Palmer and he was recruiting me to join his staff. There were three nurses on this team.
that worked on this study. This study, at that time, tuberculosis was rampant, especially among medical and nursing students, because it was in the population—people had it. They were being hospitalized, but if they weren’t diagnosed they weren’t X-rayed. It was after that that they began to X-ray patients coming into the hospital.

LC: Did they have a good sense of the mechanism of transmission for TB (tuberculosis) at this time?
DB: Oh, I think so. Yes.
LC: I’m thinking they probably did, 1947-48.
DB: Right. So, in this study there were student nurses in a variety, a number of hospitals in ten cities around the country. We would go twice a year to these ten cities, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Minneapolis, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and a couple of others. We would test the students with four different antigens, skin tests, with—well, first tuberculin, histoplasmin, coccidioidin, and blastomycin. These were antigens to determine their sensitivity to the diseases caused by those organisms.

LC: Now, are these similar to what I might have had as a kid in the ’60s and ’70s, the scratch tests on the skin?
DB: Well, it’s not a scratch. It was a injection of—
LC: Well I think they had four. Did it have four little prongs on it or something?
DB: No, that was BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guerin).
LC: Okay.
DB: That was—that’s a vaccine.
LC: Oh, well, good. Whatever it was I was vaccinated for it. But how did the antigen tests work? You would do—
DB: Well, then you would go back two—we went back two days later to read them.
LC: This would be on their forearm?
DB: Yes, right. What turned out was—then they had X-rays at the same, the X-rays were shipped—these students had X-rays and they were shipped to Washington, read by our radiologist.
LC: These are chest X-rays.
DB: Right. Yeah, sorry.
LC: That’s alright.
DB: What was noticed was that some of the students reacted to the histoplasmin. They were primarily in two geographic areas of the country, Columbus, Ohio, and Kansas City, Missouri.
LC: Really?
DB: I forgot to mention those two when I was enumerating the cities.
LC: Okay.
DB: So they felt that this was probably an environmental thing—the water or the soil or something. Of course, coccidioidin, coccidiomycosis was prevalent in the valley in California, not San Fernando, but what’s that other one?
LC: Mill Valley?
DB: No, the middle of the state. I can’t think of the name, though. I’m sorry.
LC: Mill Valley, Napa Valley, I can’t either. I’m drawing a blank as well.
DB: Those people were more likely to test positively for coccidioidin. If they tested positive for tuberculosis, of course, they had to be watched very carefully because they could develop the disease, or some of them obviously didn’t have the disease at that time, but they had to be watched carefully. So, it was considered—that went on for I guess—it started before I joined the Public Health Service. It must have gone on for five or six years, a longitudinal study. Then when it finished, let me see, I was supposed to start the follow up study, or work on the follow up study. Well, then that was—no wait, somewhere in there I went to school. They sent me to school. I went to Yale for a year and got my masters in public Health.
LC: Was that paid for—
DB: By the government.
LC: By the PHS?
DB: Yes. There were a certain number of people were sent to school each year.
LC: While you were at Yale, did you do any—did you write any papers or make presentations of any kind that were related to the research that you’d been helping with?
DB: Not really, not really. We had no—it was a pass or fail situation. You had no exams, which was wonderful. However, we did have to do a master’s thesis and I
don’t know how I did this, came up with this idea, but I did a cost study, the cost of public, maybe it was school nursing in the health department. I guess that was because I had been involved in school nursing. Anyway it was, when I look at it now, it’s such a feeble attempt. I was never very good in statistics so—

LC: But at the time, you were, this was, I mean, undertaking an area that certainly would be of increasing interest as the size of the Public Health Service grew. Keeping costs under control would be an important element, I’m sure. Were you urged to go in that direction or did you come up with that on your own?

DB: I think I probably suggested it or decided on it myself. I had a hard time, I recall, making a decision, but it came to the point where I had to do something.

LC: I know. I know that feeling, too. You have to get on with it one way or the other. Did you enjoy that year at Yale?

DB: Oh, I did. I learned to drive there and I bought my first car. I bought the car and I didn’t know how to drive, but one of my classmates taught me.

LC: You bought a car without knowing how to drive?

DB: Right.

LC: Fabulous.

DB: We went out—I got the car Thursday afternoon. We went out after school Thursday and Friday and Saturday we were out. I learned to back. Sunday I was out on the Merritt Parkway. Monday I took the exam.

LC: (Both laughing) That was a weekend.

DB: I was anticipating the examiner’s question. He asked me how long I had been practicing driving and I said, “Oh, about two weeks.” Whereupon he said, “Well, most people it’s two months.” So anyway I got through that.

LC: But you stunned him, right? (Both laughing) What kind of car did you buy, just out of curiosity?

DB: A Chevrolet.

LC: Did you pick it out or was it something that was—?

DB: Well, there wasn’t much choice. This was right after the war, there weren’t too many cars.

LC: Did you buy it new?
DB: Yes
LC: Wow, good for you.
DB: I think it was about a thousand dollars.
LC: Wow.
DB: It was red. It had a leak in the front, when it rained. So water would come in around, on the pedals. They did have automatic shift at that time, however, I thought, well, it would be good to learn on a shift car, in case I ever have to drive one.
LC: Very practical.
DB: So, I had asked the salesman if he would teach me to drive. No, he couldn't do that, they were too busy. But he said, “I’ll show you how the shift works.” So at night in my room I was going back and forth moving my arm and my legs practicing.
LC: Practicing putting the clutch in. (Both laughing) That was probably much less stressful than doing it in a car for real and having to listen to the gears grind. Good for you. Did you keep the car for quite a while?
DB: Well, no, because I shortly after—I came back to Washington. Let’s see, I graduated in May.
LC: Of, do you remember what year?
DB: Oh, I left out something.
LC: Okay.
DB: In 1949, I went to Europe for six weeks. I went to the International Congress of Nurses meeting in Stockholm, having been of—my paternal grandparents were born in Sweden. I had this Swedish grandmother. So I thought it’d be nice to go to Sweden. So, a group of us went. I went with the—well, there were several hundred nurses from the US who went. We had a tour before the meeting and a tour after. We went over on the Queen Elizabeth, not the present one, but an earlier one.
LC: Right, yes.
DB: We went on the lowest class. There were four bunk beds. I was in the top.
LC: You’re below deck somewhere?
DB: Probably. We landed at South Hampton. I still have the photos that I took with a borrowed Brownie camera and they have the date on the back and where they were.
LC: No kidding? Yeah the Brownies were great. Very, very important. You still have them

DB: I still have those in a cigar box, little cigar box, not temperature controlled.

LC: No, not archivally correct, but that’s all right. We can work on that.

DB: So we went through England first. We were in London. Of course, it was all bombed out and the food was terrible.

LC: Not much of it I would think.

DB: No. No fresh fruit or vegetables, it was cabbage and potatoes and soup, the same kind of soup. It was reddish, like tomato. We went from London. We spent a few days there and toured around and went up to Stratford and up to the lake country and up into Glasgow.

LC: Really, all the way up there.

DB: Where I learned that that’s where Drambuie was made and I should try that Drambuie. (Both laughing) Then over to Edinborugh where we were—oh, by the way, we had this guide on our bus. There were seven buses of nurses.

LC: What a blast.

DB: Our guide was Freddy, had reddish hair, a little short, little English fellow, couldn’t understand him half the time. But anyway, we got to [Edinburgh]. We had a free afternoon. We were let free on Princess Street, wandered into this pastry shop. We hadn’t had anything like that, and all these delicacies were presented to us. Well, that was with tea. That was just delightful. We indulged and found out that we paid by the number of cookies or pastries we ate. That was a real shock.

LC: Put a hole in the budget there.

DB: By the way, I think this trip only cost about a thousand dollars and I was gone six weeks.

LC: Goodness, imagine.

DB: It was just amazing.

LC: Just imagine that now.

DB: So then we went to, from there we went down to Newcastle and got on a ship and went across the North Sea to Bergen. I’d always heard that the North Sea was rough and it was rough.
LC: How did you do on that? Did you have your sea legs by then?

DB: All right. Well, I don’t know. I mean, I survived. I just remember that it
was not smooth.

LC: What time of year was this?

DB: This was in June.

LC: Even then.

DB: Then we went to Bergen up the Hardanger Fjord and into Oslo and from
there took a train to Stockholm, which was so incredibly beautiful. I was so impressed
with Stockholm.

LC: What about Oslo? Can you compare it?

DB: Oslo seemed smaller to me. It was nice, but I had this familial attachment to
Stockholm, a great love. I remember we were entertained at the ambassador’s residence
for a reception. I did know his name for a long time, but it escapes me now. He did, I
remember that he did—that he died a few years ago [H. Freeman Matthews]. Then we
started out on a bus trip of Europe. This was Linjebuss L-I-N-J-E-B-U-S-S. It was a
Swedish bus company. We went down to Denmark, down to Malmo and across and
down to Denmark, Copenhagen, which I just loved.

LC: Yes, it’s gorgeous.

DB: The mermaid, I have one of those Royal Copenhagen mermaid plates. I
showed that to my sister and I didn’t bring it here. Anyway, then from Germany we, or
from Denmark, we went into Germany. We had to have permission from the Army to go
into Germany because Germany was occupied, still occupied at that time. We slept. We
were—I guess we were half way through, probably, when we slept at this, in different
homes, in this small town and first time I ever slept under a down comforter. It was June.
It was cold. We ate our evening meal at a, I guess it was a restaurant in the town and we
went to the house where we were to sleep. Then in the morning got up had our, left and
got the breakfast in the same place and took off. That was—we had just one night in
Germany.

LC: Is that all?

DB: Yes. So we didn’t see any cities in Germany. It was just the Autobahn and
the Black Forest.
LC: Which is interesting in and of itself, but, yeah. Did you, would you have liked to have seen a little more of Germany or not so much?

DB: Well, I didn’t really have a choice.

LC: Some people feel quite happy to get out of Germany. I don’t know.

DB: I was happy to get out of England (both laughing) because in Scandinavia the food was wonderful, the breakfast were fabulous, and still are. Then we went to Switzerland to Basel, Ball or Basel, however you want to pronounce it. I don’t recall whether we stayed there or not. We went to a, oh, we went to Lucerne. We did the Jungfrau, went up to the top of Jungfrau, this is strictly tourism.

LC: Sure.

DB: Went to the end of Lake Geneva to, what is that, the Castle of Chillon.

LC: The very famous castle, yeah

DB: Didn’t get to, didn’t go to Geneva. Then we went down into Italy and did Florence, Rome. Oh, we had an audience with the Pope.

LC: No kidding!

DB: That was Pope, he was the one that has been so criticized for not doing things for Jews.

LC: Pious the Twelfth or—

DB: Yes, right. There were about—on the trip in Europe there were fewer of us. There was just one bus. There were about maybe nineteen. So we went and we had to wear mantilla and cover our arms. The Holy Father walked into the room and made a few remarks and spoke in perfect English and asked, and go around and spoke with each one.

LC: No kidding

DB: Asked us where we were from and so on and so forth and so that was kind of a highlight.

LC: What a great experience. What, did, what kind of—I mean, you only had a few moments, but what sense did you form of him?

DB: Well, I was kind of scared.

LC: Yes, I can believe it. I would be.

DB: I mean, there’s this very famous person. (Both laughing)
LC: Yeah, he’s not only famous he’s holy, right?
DB: Right, right. So well, he was easy to just talk with. He wasn’t formidable in that sense.
LC: Interesting
DB: But it was more my—I conjured up this, you know, impression of his importance and so on, but he was—we spoke easily with him. I thought it was very nice. I thought it was a very nice experience and he gave us a blessing.
LC: It’s amazing.
DB: Straight—I would expect to go straight to heaven now.
LC: That’s right, no stops. Well, a few stops on the way but (both laughing). Visit to Vietnam and so on, but, wow. Well, that’s amazing.
DB: Then we went up to Pisa and saw the Leaning Tower and on up to the French Riviera, Nice and Cannes. Then we went up to Lyon where they were having a festival of some sort. People were in native costumes, which was nice.
LC: How did some of the cities of France look to you? How did Lyon look to you? Like there had been any action there?
DB: No, no. I didn’t—well, we didn’t really see any in Italy, either. It was more, I guess, in more mountainous areas or I don’t know where it was but, I don’t recall seeing any devastation there. It was mainly England.
LC: London.
DB: London, right. So then we went from Lyon to Paris and spent some time there, for some reason. Then we went to the Eiffel Tower for lunch one day, a group of us, and it turned out that we didn’t have enough money to pay (both laughing) for the lunch. I don’t know how we got out of that escapade but, whether they just gave these crazy Americans their lunch.
LC: I was going to say so much for the idea that all Americans are rich. Did you encounter anyone who gave you kind of a hard time for being American on all these travels?
DB: No, they were very glad to see Americans and the money we had.
LC: America had a different, kind of, place in the world then.
DB: Oh, yes. We were respected then.
LC: Yes. It’s a little different now, a little more complicated anyway.

DB: Right, right.

LC: What a fabulous trip.

DB: I stayed on for a few days, I don’t know why, in Paris by myself. I guess I wanted to do a little more sightseeing. I remember I was in the hotel one afternoon when a knock came at the door. I went to the door and this gentleman said he wanted to wash the windows. So I let him in and he washed the windows, but I thought later how dangerous that was, to let a strange man into your room, but I guess in those days people were really a lot more honest. We didn’t have the terrible situations we have today.

LC: You didn’t have the expectation of disaster like we have come to have, I think now.

DB: Right, right. So then I came back on the Queen Mary. I was on a little upper class, middle class there. There were only two beds in the room. It was a much larger room. But it was when I got to New York and there was mail awaiting me from my mother saying that I had been accepted at Yale, I had forgot that I had applied before I went overseas.

LC: You’d completely put it out of your mind?

DB: I guess so. I thought, “Well, instead of going home to Washington, I’ll just go up to New Haven.” So I went up and met the—Ira Hiscock who was head of the program, it’s in the—public health is under the school of medicine there. Some places its an independent school. I made arrangements for where I was going to live and so on, so that facilitated things for when I went back in September.

LC: Dorothy, lets take a break there.

DB: Okay.

LC: This is Laura Calkins. I’m continuing the oral history interview with Dorothy Reese Bloomfield on the twenty-seventh of June. Dorothy, we were talking about your post-graduate study at Yale and how after that you had been asked to help with the follow up study on the TB cohort study that you described earlier.

DB: Yes. I did begin some preliminary work on that, however, this was September of 1950. Of course, the previous year, October 10, 1949, China had fallen to the communist. Of course, the American congress had appropriated many, many millions
of funds to the aid to China to prevent that event from occurring. But since it had
occurred and China was now communist, President Truman went back to Congress and
asked these funds to be reprogrammed for aid to Southeast Asia to prevent the
communists from further infiltrating the governments of the Southeast Asian countries.
So, a group of public health advisors was put together. They consisted of physicians,
nurses, engineers, health educators and so on. There were a group of fifty of us Public
Health Service officers, in December of 1950. We had two weeks orientation in
Washington because some of these people were reserve officers and were being called in
for this duty. In January, we reported to Harvard School of Public Health, which is
interestingly enough is located in Boston as compared with the university, which is in
Cambridge. We lived at the nurse’s home of the Boston Marine Hospital which was in
Brighton. We took the train or the subway or the streetcar down to Huntington Avenue
everyday, which is where the school was located. This program, there were, as I said,
fifty of us. It was organized and arranged by Harold Isaacs who had been with Newsweek
magazine. He had written a book. He had had some overseas experience and wrote a
book, I believe it was called Scratches on Our Minds. It had to do with the perceptions of
Americans about foreigners or foreign cultures. At that time, very few of us knew where
Southeast Asia was or Indochina was. We knew very little about these countries except
as whatever we had heard during the war. Japanese had been in Vietnam. So, he
gathered together as many people as experts on this area of the world. Previously it was
just the missionaries who had been to Burma and some of these places.

LC: Right.

DB: So, some of the speakers were—we had Jacques May, who was a physician,
a French physician. He had been in Indochina and was on the faculty at Tufts University.
We had Kenneth Landon who was with the State Department. His wife Margaret had
written the book The King and I. They were stationed in Thailand. He came up to
Boston and he said the night before The King and I had opened on Broadway. So he was
so excited about the opening and so on. We had a fellow by the name of McKahian, M-
C-K-A-H-I-A-N. I’m not sure of his first name. He was from Cornell and was a
specialist on Indonesia. We had Cora Dubois who was a noted anthropologist. She was
on the faculty, I believe, at Harvard. Those are the ones I remember. Then we had other
lecturers from the School of Public Health, but they covered, you know, as much as possible, the culture, the geography, the language, superficially of course, the languages and so on and so forth. So that was very, a very interesting time.

LC: The focus was on Indochina or more broadly?

DB: Well, the focus was on Southeast Asia, on—these teams were going out to Indochina, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Burma. We weren’t going into Singapore or Malaysia. That was the British territory, but these countries had just given up their, had just been given up by the colonial powers. The Dutch had been in Indonesia. The British in Burma. Thailand was pretty much independent, I think, all along. Incidentally, when we went back later, we took a trip, my son and I. We went from Bangkok to Singapore on the Orient Express. We went over the River Kwai and we stopped there and we saw where the action was. We went down the river on a boat and got off at another place, where the bus picked us up. There was a British cemetery there. It was the most beautiful cemetery I’ve ever seen. It was all—it was huge. It was all flat markers and then between each marker was a plant, I think like an azalea plant or something, growing in the ground. It was just very touching. So, anyway, what am I getting back to?

LC: You were talking about—

DB: Oh, Harvard. So, at the conclusion of that program, we went to CDC, Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta, for field experiences. We went out, malaria, malaria was a big problem. We went to see malaria spraying.

LC: Where did you go to see that?

DB: Well, that was somewhere in Georgia, I guess.

LC: So down in the swampy areas?

DB: Right. Then we went, the nurses, went to Mississippi, went into the Delta. We met with, I remember, we met with a group of black midwives. I didn’t remember this, but a friend always reminded me that I gave a talk to the midwives, a pep talk.

LC: A pep talk.

DB: You know, what great work they were doing and how important it was and so on. Then at the conclusion of that, that would have been April, May, and June, we came back to Washington and were sort of awaiting assignments. Well, my assignment didn’t come through. I was supposed to go to Indonesia first. So I was at the Foreign
Service Institute all summer learning Indonesian, which is a very simple, it’s a bit like, Tagalog and, very simple, no tenses or anything. I just remember a few words, but—so I spent the summer.

LC: Were you learning Bahasa Indonesia or what—?
DB: I don’t know, just—
LC: The principle language in Indonesia
DB: Right, I don’t know what it was.
LC: How long did you study that?
DB: Well, that was three months.
LC: Three whole months of that? Wow. Were you reading up on your own, Dorothy, about Indonesia and trying to learn a bit more, since that’s where you thought you might be going?
DB: I don’t really remember, probably not. (Both laughing) Then I was approached to join a VD (venereal disease) survey because they thought, “Well, while you’re waiting, we might as well have you doing something productive.” I was a member. There were three or four teams that went out to the Navajo reservation to do a VD survey. We flew to Albuquerque and picked up rations from the Air Force and then went on the Window Rock, Arizona, which was the headquarters of the Navajo nation, where we spent a few days in orientation. Then we set out to do this VD survey, and the group I—I had this—I was the nurse and there was a physician and an interpreter and a driver. We went first over to Kayenta and there were no roads. It was just kind of a trail through the woods.

LC: I believe you.
DB: We must have gone some place before that because at Kayenta we slept in a—I remember we slept in a schoolhouse one place. At Kayenta though, we slept—there was a motel and the food was delicious because we’d been eating these rations. Then from there we went up to Monument Valley and there we slept out under the stars.

LC: How wonderful. I mean, in some ways wonderful.
DB: Yes, it was. I don’t know if we were irradiated or not because there’s a uranium mine there.
LC: Right, the tailings from the uranium mine. That’s right. That’s right. It hasn’t done you any harm, Dorothy, I can say that, looking at you.

DB: I guess not. We would—there was some publicity ahead. It was worked out with the tribal leaders and all the Indians would gather at the appointed time at the trading post or wherever. Every Indian who came got a blood test and a shot of penicillin, whether they needed it or not. This was in the days before the, before informed consent.

LC: How cooperative were they? What was their attitude?

DB: Oh, they were docile. There was no question. They just—

LC: Did they have any understanding of what your group was there to do?

DB: I don’t know. I don’t know

LC: You couldn’t really tell?

DB: I don’t remember. We didn’t use—do any health teaching that I recall.

LC: How long were you there?

DB: Well, that was about three months.

LC: Golly.

DB: We went down from Kayenta we went down to Tuba City, went past Navajo National Monument and into Tuba City. The lady in Kayenta had made such delicious chocolate pie. I said, “Could you make one and I would like to take it with me?” We could have it for dinner when we got the next, to Tuba City. So we got to Tuba City and unpacked. Then we went out for dinner, I guess, and came back and the pie was there, but the pie was all pockmarked. There was a cat that had discovered the pie. That was gone.

LC: That was the end of that.

DB: Then we went across from Tuba City to the Mesa, what is that? Hopi, Hopi land and the Zunis, I think the Zunis were the ones that were up on the mesa. Maybe it was the Hopis. Anyway, we finally came back to, and then one weekend we went down to Phoenix to the Arizona State Fair. Phoenix at that time was just a really small town. That was 1951. Yes, 1951. So then I came back in about December the first.

LC: Did you have it in mind that the Southeast Asia experience was probably still going to happen or was it unclear?
DB: I should have said earlier. Of course, I’ve always been interested in travel because I lived in this small town. I wanted to get out of there.

LC: Yes ma’am.

DB: I think my interest in international health particularly came from Yale where we had physicians from, one from Turkey, Philippines, Mexico, Thailand and a nurse from Japan. They were mainly Rockefeller fellowship students. So I think and I saw the Thai physician, I saw her in Japan. I saw the nurse—or in Thailand. I saw the nurse in Japan.

LC: You saw them again, later.

DB: Yes. I saw the Filipino in the Philippines. The Mexican, I never saw him again, but he was in Washington. He became head of the World Health or Pan—World Health Organization for the Americas.

LC: Do you remember his name?

DB: Yeah, Hector Acuna.

LC: That sounds right.

DB: I never got in touch with him. I mean, that was years later and I didn’t know if he would remember me.

LC: Did the other folks when you—did you make an effort to locate them when you were in the various countries?

DB: Oh, yes. Yes.

LC: So you kept, you must have kept very good track of people.

DB: Well, I did for a few years

LC: That’s remarkable.

DB: In fact, I think I saw Prachi, the one in Thailand twice.

LC: Where was he?

DB: She was—

LC: Oh, I’m sorry. It’s a she. I said he.

DB: She was in Bangkok, in Bangkok, she was running a MCH clinic.

LC: MCH?

DB: Maternal and Child Health Clinic. I think that was my interest in international health. But I came back in December. They said, “Oh, you can go to
Saigon. We’ve got you cleared.” The problem was the French didn’t want us in there.
You see, all the other countries were more or less independent, but the French would not
give up Indochina. That was their source of rubber and their source of rice, their source
of minerals, or coal and everything.

LC: Were you—had you been instructed, or did you learn on your own by then,
Dorothy, that the French had set up these kind of quasi-independent governments but
really things were still being run, largely, at least in defense terms, from Paris?

DB: Well, yeah. We knew they were puppets and not—Bao Dai was the king, but
he was the puppet.

LC: Right. You were clear on that?

DB: Everything. Yes.

LC: So the French were resist—you were given to understand they were kind
of—

DB: They didn’t want American advisors in there. So, anyway, finally they got
me cleared and it was December. I said, “Well, look. I’ve waited a year to go. I’m not
going to go off until after Christmas.”

LC: That seems reasonable. Were you wanting to spend Christmas with the
family?

DB: Yeah, sure, and get myself really organized, but materially, and my
personnel effects and so on.

LC: Yeah. Dorothy, can I ask here, just as a matter of interest, you have this
very, very interesting career. You’re clearly off like a shot. What did your folks make of
this, and your brothers and sisters? How did they relate to you now? Because you’re kind
of a big shot, really, with a master’s degree from Yale and you’re a commissioned
officer.

DB: Well, I don’t know. They all got married. My sisters got married.

LC: Right away, as soon as when they were young?

DB: One sister went to junior college. My next, next youngest sibling, she went
to junior college. She was the secretary or administrative assistant to one of the
administrators of what was called, I think, Federal Housing Administration. It’s part of
HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) now. Then my other sister was
next youngest. She worked for the American Red Cross in Washington. They both got married young.

LC: What did they make of you? Did they look up to you?
DB: I don’t know. They lived, I’d say, kind of ordinary lives.
LC: Quieter, anyway.
DB: Yes, I mean, they got married and had children. I was into my career.
LC: Big time, it looks, it sounds like it.
DB: Well, I went in, you know, you could always leave, but you didn’t have any retirement unless you stayed twenty years. Then you’d get half of your base pay.
LC: What about your parents? Was both of your mom and your dad still around at this time?
LC: Oh, okay. Well, they lived on very full lives then.
DB: Right. My father was eighty and my mother was eighty-five.
LC: That’s good genes.
DB: I won’t live longer than my parents, but—so anyway, I don’t know. We were just friends and family, but we sort of went our separate ways. I realize now that being with my sister in St. Louis, two of my siblings are gone, and how important this relationship is now. I was thinking, you know, it’d be really neat if I moved to St. Louis because I’d have my sister and my niece and nephew and their children. I’d be closer to Alan. I thought well, maybe that’s not realistic thinking either.
LC: Family is important, though. I think I found as the older you get, the more it matters to you. I’ve very much found that.
DB: Yes, right. So, especially since I lost this special friend last October.
LC: This was your traveling companion?
DB: No, no, but, she was the sister of one of the people in this group that went to Saigon.
LC: Oh, is that right?
DB: We were together in Saigon.
LC: Wow.
DB: Then she was transferred to Indonesia. See that’s why Dixie and I went to
Indonesia. Well, of course, we wanted to go to Bali.

LC: Everybody wants to go to Bali, really, eventually.

DB: Right. Right. It was interesting. In those days, they were still bare-
breasted. The women were still bare-breasted.

LC: Right

DB: So, let me see where was I?

LC: I’m sorry. I interrupted you, but you said that you had been cleared—

DB: You were asking about my siblings.

LC: You had been cleared to go to Saigon.

DB: So, I finally, took, oh then they wanted me to go on Air France. I said, “No,
I’m not going on Air Chance.”

LC: Is that what you called it back then?

DB: Yeah.

LC: Did you really?

DB: It was Air Chance.

LC: I don’t think that’s changed, actually.

DB: So, I said I want to go on SAS (Scandinavian Airline System), because I
wanted to stop over in Denmark, because Lydia Edwards was there at that time, with the
World Health Organization. I thought, “How neat to be able to see Lydia.” So I spent an
overnight there.

LC: Now, was she, did you feel kind of yet your mentor in a way? Did you still
look to her or was it more of a friendship or colleague?

DB: It was more a friendship, I think, a colleague.

LC: Certainly she’s a very famous name people recognize.

DB: She was with UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation
Administration) during World War II in Yugoslavia. She wrote her memoirs, which were
very interesting.

LC: Yes, I’ve read them.

DB: Have you?
LC: Yes, I have. UNRRA just, for listeners, is the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, I think. That was the Western Allies aid organization. So I have read her. Yeah. I know she’s fascinating.

DB: She lived well into her nineties. I used to see her. Her cousin is a friend of mine. She’s actually a financial planner that I’ve been going to since 1977, Alex Armstrong. Alexandra Armstrong is a cousin of Lydia. I used to keep track of Lydia through her, but then, I was sorry I hadn’t seen more of Lydia before she died.

LC: She died at the age of 90, or -ish?

DB: She was in her nineties I’m sure. I should check that out.

LC: What a gal. Where was she living? In the Washington area?

DB: Yes. She lived—she had an apartment near the Shoreham.

LC: The Omni Shoreham in Washington.

DB: Yes, right, around the corner on 29th Street.

LC: Nice area.

DB: So, now let’s see. Where were we?

LC: Very interesting. Oh, I’m sorry. You said you were going via SAS.

DB: Oh, yeah. To see Lydia, and then we took off, the flight, we went from Denmark, Copenhagen, to Frankfurt. We were at the airport in Frankfurt when the king of, King George died. Elizabeth and Phillip were in a tree house in Africa somewhere.

LC: That’s right. That’s right.

DB: Then we stopped in Rome a couple of hours. The next place was Tel Aviv, where we stopped a couple of hours. The next place I recall we stopped was Calcutta, in the middle of the night, midnight. All I remember is seeing cows around. Then in the morning we were in Bangkok. One of the nurses who had been in this group was stationed in Bangkok. She came out to the airport to see me because I was just on the ground a short—actually, the flight ended in Bangkok. Her name was Lillian Gardner.

She was a nurse in the aide program in Thailand.

LC: That was very kind of her.

DB: Yes. I remember the airport was kind of all outdoors. There was some, like lattice work over the top, but it was all open and the birds were there, dropping and looking for food and so on. Then I took a French TAI (Transports Aériens
Intercontinentaux), I don’t know what that, remember what that stands for, French plane
from Bangkok to Saigon. Coming into Saigon it was so beautiful to see the palm trees
and the rice paddies and the little huts and so on. I was met there by the chief nurse of
our program, Margaret Denham and Charlie Bowman, the engineer who had been in our
group. They took me to the Majestic Hotel where I had a room and where we slept under
mosquito nets.

LC: Just like in the movies. Can you tell me a little bit about Margaret Denham?
Because she was the chief nurse, so her name does crop up, for example, in congressional
hearings that I’ve read.

DB: Oh, really?

LC: Because of her position, essentially as the administrator of the group or one
of the administrators of the group. What was she like? Do you know anything about her
background?

DB: She had been a regional nurse consultant in Kansas City. She, I think
came—I guess she was in that group of fifty in Boston. Well, off the record—
LC: Fair enough.

DB: Margaret was—she was the old school. We were young jerks.

LC: I believe you.

DB: She was clever and smart and knew what to do and everything and had a
vision for what we were to do and so on.

LC: Was she the right person for the job?

DB: Oh, I guess so.

LC: I mean, you had to have some hutzpah to take this on in the first place.

DB: Right. Right. She was kind of a missionary spirit, I would say. Ours was
more adventure spirit, Helen and I.

LC: Now, who’s Helen?

DB: Helen Roberts. We were friends. She came back to Washington. We were
friends. Our families were friends for fifty years. She moved into the same building that
she and her sister—that I live in. So her passing with, that—well, she died three years
ago, I think.

LC: That was tough.
DB: Then her sister, whom I knew all along, and I became much closer after Helen died. I really feel bereft since she’s gone. I mean, I know everybody in our place, you know, but there’s nobody that I feel really close to that I can confide in and so I feel—

LC: But Helen’s sister, you did feel that way?

DB: Yes, more so than even Helen in a way.

LC: Interesting. Was her sister a nurse as well?

DB: Yes. They were all nurses, two, both nurses from Peter Bent Brigham in Boston.

LC: Well, that’s not too shabby, good background.

DB: Then Doris went and got her PhD—got her master’s in public health from Minnesota and her PhD in epidemiology from North Carolina.

LC: Wow. She was a powerhouse, smart girl.

DB: She did a lot of work with WHO, was a consultant at WHO (World Health Organization) in Europe and in India and in Thailand. That was all in the ’60s.

LC: She sounds like a fascinating gal.

DB: She was, and just so nice, personally, really.

LC: Wow.

DB: So my life was certainly enriched by knowing them.

LC: Great friends.

DB: Yes, yes.

LC: Did Helen and you travel out together?

DB: Oh, yes. We traveled.

LC: So this whole bouncing all the way across Asia, you and Helen were together this whole time?

DB: Yeah, we went the—I was only in Saigon a week when Margaret Denham took me up to Nha Trang. Also, the first week I went to Cap St. Jacques and then Helen and I—that was February, in Easter. Helen and I went to Singapore. At that time, they had open sewers in Bangkok and Singapore, but it was really an adventure.

LC: I guess.
DB: We met a pilot in Singapore, maybe it was the pilot on the plane down. We were having drinks with him, I remember, at the Raffles.

LC: Well, Dorothy, I have so many things that I want to ask. Let me ask first of all about the Majestic Hotel. It’s still there, is it not? Did you see it?

DB: It’s been redone. In the old days it just had a very small lobby and then the people behind the counter were Vietnamese, of course. The elevator was the French elevator, open on the sides. There were little boys with Vietnamese costumes, the turban and all black outfits and the pajama bottoms, they were the elevator operators.

LC: Amazing.

DB: We slept under, as I said, mosquito nets. We had a room with a bath. The first room I was on, I don’t remember, I shortly got moved to another room. I don’t remember why that was. Larry Allen, the AP (Associated Press) correspondent, was across the hall from me.

LC: Were you and Helen kind of bunking together?

DB: No. She was down the hall.

LC: Oh, so you had your own room?

DB: Oh, yes. Yeah we had our own rooms. Also, this was the time when, well, Tillman and Peggy Durdin from the New York Times were in and out of Saigon all the time. I met Till once. Dixie knew him a little better than I. Dixie knew everybody who came into town. I mean, he just got around. He knew everything and everybody. So, the hotel today is much changed. The lobby is huge. It goes all along the one side of the— with clocks from every time zone and then a restaurant on the, kind of on the street side. What was the restaurant on the top floor—the top floor was where we ate all our meals, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It was huge. In the evening Jean Meyer the French, played the piano during dinner. It was all French food. It was very good.

LC: Lovely

DB: You got used to it. Of course, we worked from eight to twelve and two to six. So it was nice to have a siesta.

LC: You mentioned that basically upon arrival Margaret arranged for you to just go to Nha Trang. What was the—?
DB: Well, she was going up there, for, I don’t remember, you know, for a visit of some sort and thought she’d take me along.

LC: An inspection of some kind or something.

DB: Yes. Right or to meet with some of the people about the School of Nursing they were going to establish. We were going to get a nurse from the States to be assigned there.

LC: Okay. So she took you along.

DB: Right, kind of as an orientation to the country.

LC: Can you describe? Did you go by air?

DB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You couldn’t go otherwise.

LC: Yeah, you certainly wouldn’t go over land. Can you talk a little bit about Nha Trang as a town?

DB: Nha Trang was beautiful, the beautiful white beaches. It was just a gorgeous spot. The hotel was very nice. It was right on the water. We weren’t there—we were just there a day or two.

LC: Sounds divine, though.

DB: You know that area of Vietnam is another Miami Beach, you know, really

LC: Oh, yeah. It’s going to—I think that’s probably what’s going to happen.

DB: It’s definitely, it has started already around Da Nang.

LC: Yeah, I was just looking here on the map that we have.

DB: Oh, yeah. I had that map.

LC: Yeah, its right there. The old French city of Tourane, is that right?

DB: Yes. Well, Tourane is separate, I think, a separate place isn’t it? I didn’t get to Tourane and also there’s a Cham, a Cham museum or Cham relics, C-H-A-M relics there. I did not get to see those unfortunately.

LC: Did you ever get back to Nha Trang?

DB: No, no I didn’t.


DB: Well, we went to visit the provincial governor. In my letters home, I wrote that we had sent the pictures to—I had sent the pictures to the provincial and he was very pleased to get them, pictures of him and his family. We just spent the day there. It was
beautiful, palm trees and beach. That was at the mouth of the Saigon River. It’s a very
snake-like river.

LC: Many branches also, a delta basically. Yeah.

DB: Well, the delta’s more of the Mekong. The delta is more of the Mekong, which starts up in China.

LC: Yes, absolutely. Cap St. Jacques is what most Vietnam enthusiasts in America will recognize as Vung Tau.

DB: It has a Vietnamese name. Vung Tau, is that? Now I heard that Mobil is looking for oil or gas or something there. I don’t know.

LC: Not a surprise at all, right. That would be the jumping off point for all of this area and drilling rights in that area. That’s a pretty fast first week in Vietnam.

DB: Yes. You know, Hainan, I’m looking at the map. Hainan, that was a hotbed of activity. There were the communists who were there and you see how close it is to Vietnam.

LC: From my own study, this is absolutely correct, that the Chinese communists were having a very difficult time taking control of Hainan. They didn’t have the, at this time, in 1951 and ’52, they didn’t have the capability to do an amphibious landing which is what would be required. But Hainan Island, and looking here on the bigger map, you can see its strategic location is absolutely critical to the Chinese position in Southeast Asia.

DB: Quite a large area, too.

LC: It is. It’s enormous. Really, quite big.

DB: I didn’t quite realize all that.

LC: Yeah. It’s really something. You were—

DB: You know, I realize later how much history I lived through, especially in that part of the world.

LC: Have you done reading about it, Dorothy? I suspect you probably have, even if not recently.

DB: Well, I have read some. I have some library left. A lot of books I gave away.

LC: Yeah, you had to, as you were downsizing.
DB: Had to downsize, right. Right.
LC: That’s what we call it.
DB: I saved a few things.
LC: Let me just take a break there.
LC: Dorothy, let me ask you a little bit about the actual work that you were
assigned to do. How structured was it? How did you find out what it was you were
supposed to try to accomplish there?
DB: Well, it was Margaret’s idea that what we would do would be to—we were
assigned to the National School of Nursing. In cooperation with the ministry of health,
the Public Health division and the ministry decided on the way, the approach that would
be taken would be to set up a demonstration ward at Cho Ray hospital. Now, you can’t
teach nursing without clinical material, without patients. So we felt, she felt that it was
important to get this demonstration ward unit established. Well, it was be at Cho Ray,
which was, you know, out in Cholon, the end of Boulevard Galleini. First Margaret took
us out there to meet Dr. Cao Van Tri, C-A-O V-A-N T-R-I, who was the medical
director. He was very much the old school, very French. Of course, they all spoke
French.
LC: But he would be—was he French educated as far as you knew?
DB: I don’t know where he had his—probably.
LC: That would be my guess.
DB: Yes, he was very nice to us. The hospital was pavilion type. There were
one, two, three buildings and there were two stories and they were all open. The care was
given by the family, the families who were on mats out—they slept out on the balcony or
on the, I guess you’d call it the balcony or the portico. Then the patients were on these,
they were sort of beds. They were metal frames that they slept on. But our ward was
here in this building and then over here was the children’s ward. I don’t remember—
there was a tall Vietnamese physician who was in charge of that. He had been in the US.
I can’t remember his name. I don’t remember that there was an obstetrics department.
Then the building, first building when you entered, which was on the left, was Dr. Tri’s
office on the first floor. I don’t remember if there were patients on the second floor.
There must have been. There were a lot of—then adjacent to Cho Ray Hospital was a
French military hospital in Cholon. So, the game plan was that we would set up this unit. 
Well, we had to have equipment. We had to have water. So they had to get water up
there to that, it was the second floor. Equipment was ordered from Japan. In my notes of
July 20, 1953, we admitted patients to the ward. That meant that it was a year-and-a-half
that we didn’t have any patients. It was 1.5 million spent for construction and equipment.

LC: So it took a year-and-a-half to bring together the equipment, the plumbing
presumably.

DB: Right. Right.

LC: Also, to do training. Were you—?

DB: Well, yes, then we were training. We were having classes in a Quonset hut.

We taught what were called fundamentals of nursing. Now, the nurses at that time a lot
of them were male. Then there were the females, some female nurses, too. They wore
these, sort of like Mother Teresa thing, over their head and white pants and a white, like a
dress for a uniform.

LC: How were they selected? Were they from—?

DB: I don’t know. The ones that were in our group were selected for us.

LC: Okay.

DB: I don’t know how they were selected.

LC: Did you have a sense that they were French speaking?

DB: Oh, yes. They knew how to speak French.

LC: Would they have been Catholic?

DB: No, not necessarily. In fact, I kind of doubt that they were.

LC: Were there Chinese, ethnic Chinese?

DB: No. These were Vietnamese.

LC: These were Vietnamese. Right.

DB: My counterpart was Lam Thi Hai, L-A-M, T-H-I, H-A-I. She was
wonderful. Well, first in addition to teaching the nursing fundamentals, I would go back
at night and teach English, because USIS (United States Information Service) had
English classes, but they were oversubscribed. They all wanted—the nurses and doctors
all wanted to learn English. So, I wasn’t an English teacher, but I—they gave us—USIS
gave us this book *Anglais sans Peine.* “French without toil or”—
“English without pain, toil.” It was mostly conversational. So there was a good group. I don’t remember how many. It must have been fifteen or more. Then some of the doctors came, Dr. De. I continued that all the time I was there. Lam Thi Hai—of course, we had interpreters, but Lam Thi Hai got to the point where she was the interpreter. She learned English. I guess we were working on this when—she came to the United States in the fall of 1955. I saw her in Washington. We took her around and spent time together. She spent a year at Syracuse. We were then sending people, bringing people over.

LC: Yes

DB: Some of the nurses went to Canada, Montreal, because they spoke French. They didn’t have a sufficient English background. But Lam Thi Hai went to Syracuse and spent a year there. Then she really became the chief, according this history that I told you about that I had received in 1974 that she wrote, she became the chief nurse, I guess, of Administrative Health.

LC: So she climbed the ladder very effectively.

DB: Yes.

LC: It sort of began with her English lessons with you, it seems. They were very keen, the staff were, to learn English?

DB: Oh, yes.

LC: Was that based on short-sighted sense of the utility of English, or do you think they had a sense that the American presence might last longer and so it would be useful?

DB: Oh, I don’t really know. I suspected that they really just wanted to communicate more, better with us. I think that while they knew French there was—it was underneath sort of a lot of, if you want to call it hostility to the French. They had been so dominated by the French for so long, a hundred years. I just don’t—you can understand them having that attitude of being oppressed for centuries, first from the Chinese and then by the French. I think Americans to a certain extent represented a sort of an outgoing, liberality or something that was appealing.
LC: Attractive. Yeah, I’m sure that’s right. Can you tell a little bit about the—
you have described some of the hospital grounds, but what about the neighborhood in
Cholon? Was going through there kind of a different experience?

DB: Well, I should say one other thing, Laura, about the hospital. There were
cows and cattle all around, all kinds of animals, cats and dogs, mangy dogs and
everything, all kinds of animals. Well, we were on this street in Cholon where there must
have been a Chinese cemetery beyond because we had a lot of funerals going by,
marching. They were all in white and the music and so on and the artificial flowers. It
was mostly just cheap commercials kind of stuff, nothing beautiful. It was a Chinese
city. By the way, I should have mentioned the first week I was there, the first week or
two, I went with—Dixie and I went with Mrs. Bartlett, whose husband was, I think,
umber two in the embassy, to a leprosarium or a leper colony in Cholon. We went on a
Sunday afternoon and took food. We took bananas and fruit and so on and that was—no,
that was not my first experience with leprosy. I saw leprosy when I was in nursing
school. I was a station—had an experience at the Philadelphia, what was called the
Philadelphia Hospital for Contagious Diseases. We had at that time a lot of polio patients
and TB. We had one patient with leprosy. He was sent to Carville to the Leprosy
Hospital, conducted by the US public health service in Carville, Louisiana.

LC: You had seen this one case then. So you were—

DB: I had some, a little bit of an idea, but these were, these people were really
very advanced without fingers and toes.

LC: Like literally, their fingers were gone?

DB: Yeah, right and all kinds of lesions. It was really sad.

LC: This—

DB: We never went back there.

LC: Leprosy was something that was, I won’t say endemic, but one saw it
throughout Vietnam, or at least South and Central Vietnam in those years. So isolation
and palliative care was really all you could do?

DB: Right. Right. I don’t know who took care of them, whether there were
French nuns there or—

LC: Probably. That would be my guess.
DB: The other thing I should mention is when we were there, opium was legal. It hadn’t been outlawed by the United Nations. You’d walk down Rue Catinat and you could smell this opium coming forth in the evening, mostly in the evening.

LC: Had a distinctive smell?

DB: Yes.

LC: Somebody said to you, “Dorothy that’s—”

DB: That’s a no-no.

LC: That’s right. That’s a no-no.

DB: But there was an opium, a fancy opium parlor where distinguished guests were taken.

LC: I have no doubt of that.

DB: With a beautiful Chinese umbrella on the ceiling. The low beds and the square pillows that you put your head on, you had to remove your outer garments and put a sarong on. Then the boy would come in and make the pipe. I never could do it, because I couldn’t hold my breath, pull it in.

LC: Did you see it done, though?

DB: Yeah, I tried it.

LC: Did you? But no luck or did you—

DB: No luck. I didn’t—I didn’t get it.

LC: You didn’t inhale, as they say.

DB: No. We’ll cut that out of this script.

LC: Okay. But a very, very interesting experience. In Cholon, did you ever, did you sense any tension between the Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese living there, or did they seem to co-exist?

DB: They just, as far as I could tell, they co-existed. There was a wonderful nightclub called Arc en Ciel in Cholon. I suppose that was—oh, there was a lot of gambling, I’m sure.

LC: Oh, sure.

DB: I suppose prostitution.

LC: Undoubtedly.
DB: But this nightclub was, you know, really a nice place to go and dance. Oh, I remember Dixie and I went there when Josephine Baker appeared. We saw her.

LC: You’re kidding?

DB: I had seen her in Paris when I was there in 19—when was that, ’49. Yeah. So, I saw her again when she was in Saigon, came out to Saigon.

LC: What kind of—can you just say what kind of show it was? I mean, was it—

DB: Well, she danced and sang and had these fabulous costumes. She was a beautiful woman.

LC: Was she really? She would have been older at this point.

DB: Oh, yes. Well, I don’t know how old. I’d have to look her up in terms of her age and so on.

LC: But she was beautiful.

DB: Yes. She adopted children, you know, from all over the world. She was from St. Louis, I believe.

LC: I think that’s right. I believe so. I think that’s right. Well, I should ask you, since you’ve mentioned him a couple of times, can you say how you met Dixie, please?

DB: Well, that’s very interesting. It’s a good point, maybe. His office and my office were on the same floor. He was just down the hall from me, but I remember, I put in my memoirs that Helen had somebody she wanted me to meet. So, I guess I may have passed him in the hall or something, I don’t know. But anyway Helen arranged for us to meet. One of the reasons I wanted to meet him was that she knew that I didn’t have a record player. Of course, you didn’t have anything and no radios. Well, the radio was these shortwave things and were big instruments. I didn’t have one.

LC: A radio was a really big deal.

DB: Big thing.

LC: Big, heavy, clunky.

DB: Right. Right. So she said well Dixie had been to Hong Kong and he bought one because his hadn’t come. So now he had two and he wanted to sell one. She wanted me to meet him. So I met him and he showed me the thing and I bought it and wrote him a check for seventy-five dollars, which was a lot of money, I guess, in those days. That
was the beginning. Then, as I said, he had the most fabulous apartment right in the center of town. It had an air-conditioned bedroom, which nobody else had but the ambassador.

LC: That’s a selling point. Yes. Anyone who can get an air-conditioner, in Saigon, he knows he’s connected.

DB: Right. Well, you see, he knew French and he knew the French. So anyway, from then on, I mean, it was, I guess you’d say love at first sight. He was such an exciting personality. He knew—I was three years older than he, but he knew so much more than I did. I mean, he had been around and he had lived in Paris. He knew how to get things done and what he wanted. He didn’t always get along with people for that reason, the higher-ups. But, anyway, we went—right away he would, if he was going somewhere, he’d ask me to go with him. We spent a lot of weekends going to—we went to Can Tho. We went to Kompong Thom in Cambodia to a place where there was a forestry project. We went to Angkor on the mission plane. We’d go to Hong Kong on the mission plane. We went to—

LC: Now when you see mission plane, do you mean USA—

DB: That was CAT (China Air Transport). It was a Magoon, Earthquake Magoon.

LC: Did you meet Earthquake Magoon?

DB: Oh, yeah sure. We knew him and he would be at our parties. Oh, gosh.

LC: (Laughs) So this is the China Air Transport, I think, or whatever.

DB: Right, yes, started by Chennault.

LC: Right, exactly. In talking about Dixie first, let me ask about his—you said he had a fabulous apartment. Can you say, just say just for someone who might want to know where it was, where in Saigon was he living?

DB: Oh, yes. It was right in the center of town. It was at the corner of Rue Le Loi and Rue Catinat. It was a French apartment building, commercial on the first floor. We were on the fourth floor and it was in the corner. You went into a foyer and then into this huge living room, which was also the dining room. Then around that, wrapped around it was the balcony, which was all open. There were no screens or anything. The kitchen was—he had made the kitchen back there with—he had a stove. I don’t remember that we had refrigeration or any ice, but then it was pretty new. The cook
[Hoi] did every—he was a magician to cook for all these people all the time back there in the corner. Then the bedroom was quite large. Then Dixie had a bar made, which was a beautiful bar with bamboo and had running water in it. Then the bathroom was off the bedroom. That had running hot and cold running water because in the hotel, I think, we only had cold water.

LC: I believe you, yeah.
DB: For showers. This had hot and cold running water.
LC: Wow.
DB: A tub in the shower and other pertinences.
LC: Very luxurious, really, by standards then.
DB: Yeah, it was. Then we had servants, of course, which was very nice. He had two servants and I had one.
LC: Now, this would be after you got married.
DB: After we got married.
LC: Just to get some things in place, so that I can ask better questions, when were you married?
DB: We were married July 1953. We had been talking about getting married but I was sort of dragging my feet. I was away from home and then I wasn’t feeling very well. So I went up to Hong Kong. I was in the hospital for about two weeks. That was the time that Queen Elizabeth was crowned and all that was on the radio twenty-four hours a day.
LC: In Hong Kong, yeah
DB: There was no television. I thought, “Well, I want to get feeling good.” So anyway, then we finally got around to going up to—I didn’t want to get married in Saigon because Margaret Denham—she didn’t get along with Dixie and he didn’t get along with her. This is off the record. (Editor’s note: Text deleted)
LC: Sure. He sounds like a funny guy, though.
DB: I knew that she—I just didn’t want her to know. So anyway, I said, well, I thought, I had been to Da Lat. I thought, oh, Da Lat is so romantic and everything. We finally got around to going up and getting a license and then we had to go back later. So, it was July thirtieth, I think.
LC: You were actually married in Da Lat?

DB: Yes.

LC: Where in, where in the town?

DB: At the mayor’s office. It was a, you know, one of those French colonial yellow buildings.

LC: You had been up to Da Lat already at some other point?

DB: Yes.

LC: Had you been with Dixie?

DB: Well, I went with Oscar who was a colonel friend of ours. He was going up that—that’s this thing. We went on this trip.

LC: Described in a letter that is—let’s see.

DB: You may have that if you’d like.

LC: That would be terrific.

DB: That’s just off of my computer.

LC: Okay. Thank you. I will add this to the collection describing the trip to Da Lat in May.

DB: So we went up and stayed a couple of days and it was very nice. It’s cool up there. It’s in the mountains. I don’t remember seeing Bao Dai’s palace or anything or whether he was in residence then or not.

LC: He was probably in residence on the Riviera somewhere, I think, where he usually was.

DB: Right. Right. So then one time we went to Cambodia, or Phnom Penh for—we went several times to Phnom Penh. One time—he knew the people in the hotel. He knew everybody. Anyway, we went to the festival, the water festival. There was a picture in the paper recently of this on the river in Bangkok for the something anniversary of the king of Thailand.

LC: Thailand.

DB: But, anyway, this was an annual festival in the fall when the river got high. They had all these boats out there racing. So we were on the royal yacht, all the Americans were invited. I was pregnant at the time so I was pretty tired. There was this—there were a lot of chairs there, but there was one that was very nice and was nicely
upholstered. Then I thought, “Well, I’ll sit down here.” Well, I hadn’t sat down very
long before I was asked to get up that this was the king’s chair, Norodom Sihanouk’s
chair. The story was going around Saigon about this American woman who sat on the
king’s chair, throne. (Both laughing)

LC: Good job, Dorothy.
DB: What a reputation.
LC: Best seat in the house. (Both laughing) Did the king show up that day to—?
DB: I don’t remember that he—I have a vague recollection of him being out on
the thing, but I don’t remember meeting him, just sitting in his chair.

LC: That’s great.
DB: His semi-throne.
LC: You mentioned—well, let me ask about how soon after you arrived in
Saigon did you meet Dixie? What it relatively quickly?
DB: Well, I’d say a week or two.
LC: So very soon.
DB: Yes, right.
LC: It was—this is all Helen’s fault, right? Just so we know where the blame
lies. You said that the two of you had offices on the same floor in which building?
DB: Oh, that was in Perchoir. That was one block away from where we were,
Dixie’s apartment was. It’s right at the corner of the Continental Hotel across the street,
the opera house and the big, Grand Magazine Charner, the department store on this
corner. Then this wide boulevard going out from the opera house, the wide boulevard.
They were so beautiful. We were right across the street from the Continental and that
was quite a watering hole, morning, noon, and night.
LC: For many years. Yes, for many years.
DB: Yeah, well, I guess Somerset Maugham and who was that other author, the
British author.
LC: Graham Green.
DB: Graham Green. He was there. I never met him, but I’m sure he was there in
the time I was—
LC: Undoubtedly. Yes, undoubtedly. I just pulled out Somerset Maughm’s travel book, where I think he’s traveling from Rangoon to Hai Phong, that book. He describes this very lucidly.

DB: You know I have—Dixie was quite a collector of books, too. He always wrote down his name and the date and where he bought them. There’s one that I still have that he had rebound. It’s called—I don’t know if it was *Travels in Indochina* or *Travels along the Mekong* or something, but I think it’s from the 1800s. I have a note in it that it’s not to be given away or destroyed or, you know, tossed.

LC: Very good, yes. He had acquired that while he was in Paris or—?

DB: Yeah. He would come back from Hong Kong with piles of books.

LC: Really? So, he was quite an avid reader.

DB: Yes. Let me see. *A Book on Travels in Indochina* I think it was called.

LC: Well, if I can I’d like to ask you a couple more questions. You stayed at the Majestic essentially until the very end?

DB: I stayed at the Majestic—I can’t remember how long, several months. Then the Americans got this apartment building on Rue Miche.

LC: Did it have a name, that building?

DB: No. It was just called Rue Miche.

LC: Was it built for the Americans?

DB: It was built, I think it was built for the Americans. I had a one-room apartment. It was the bedroom, the living room and dining room. I had a closet and a kitchen. No, I don’t think there was—there might have been a kitchen. I don’t know. Maybe. I know there was a bathroom. I don’t think there was a kitchen.

LC: Did all of the—

DB: It had a balcony. They furnished it, the embassy furnished it.

LC: So you could move right in, essentially?

DB: Yes. Right.

LC: Did most of the PHS people move into that facility?

DB: Right. Yes.

LC: Were there other American civilian employees also living there?
DB: Oh, yes. Yes, non-Public Health Service officers. The financial officer and
secretaries, and you know, all the many staff. Now Helen was very lucky. She got an
apartment off on the top floor somewhere on Rue Catinat, on the way up from the
Majestic Hotel. She had this apartment. It was kind of crude, but it was on the top floor.
See, Dr. Negerbaum had it. He was going back to the States and she was able to get it. It
was very nice. She had like a big area of plantings. I think you had to walk up though,
like about three floors. I don’t think she had a kitchen, though, but it was very nice.
Now our building, or the one—no, I can’t remember Rue Miche. I think I was on the
second floor, but I can’t—in the front and I had a balcony. I don’t remember whether we
had an elevator in there, but Dixie’s building had an elevator. It was the typical French
elevator on the fourth floor.

LC: His apartment was, it sounds like, kind of the social epicenter of American—
DB: Right, pretty much.
LC: Partying and such. You mentioned to me that he was quite avid in
entertaining and that he had people over.
DB: Right.
LC: Was that just kind of how he was?
DB: Yes. I mean, he would come home at noon and tell Hoi that he was going to
have ten guests for dinner.
LC: Hoi is the cook?
DB: Yes.
LC: The Chinese cook?
DB: Right. I said, “If we were living in the United States, don’t expect to do
that.”
LC: To Dorothy.
DB: ’Cause I’m not going to do that.
LC: Hoi would get it together for ten, for a group of ten or twelve in the evening?
DB: He’d have stuff or he’d go out to the market, or scramble around.
LC: Just to make clear—and this is something that I hope you and I can go into in
greater detail—but can you talk a little bit about Dixie’s job and who employed him?
DB: He was employed by the USAID (United States Agency for International Development) program. See, I was assigned to them from the Public Health Service. I was assigned to AID or the state—we were all under the state department. So he was employed by the department. His position was that of, well, training the photographers and people from the ministries of information of the three countries. Again, to do training, he had to set up this laboratory, this photo laboratory, which was the first air-conditioned photo laboratory in Indochina.

LC: Where was that located?

DB: Well, that was around the corner from Perchoir let’s see. Here’s the opera house. Then across, later across from the opera house was the Caravel. That was not there in our day. That was not there.

LC: The building itself was not there. It was put up later.

DB: (Editor’s note: Interviewee is referring to a map) This is the Continental. This is Perchoir, P-E-R-C-H-O-I-R. Then, this is Rue Le Loi. That’s Rue Le Loi and here was the pagoda where we had coffee and hung out in the morning. This was where the apartment was and this was the Jardin, the beautiful garden. Then up at the top of the street was the Cathedral. Then the lab was around the corner here. I guess—I was only there once. I sort of thought that was his territory. I didn’t get into—I was only, I think I was only there—it was on the second floor, I think, around the corner there. There was a travel agency in here, Havas, and commercial buildings. So this was all within a block or so. Now our offices were here in the Perchoir and then later, I can’t tell you when, they built another office building for us. I don’t think he was moved because he had the lab. They couldn’t move that.

LC: Right.

DB: But it was further out in town. We were picked up and taken to the office every day and brought back.

LC: By American or contract vehicles?

DB: No. These were American cars but Vietnamese chauffeurs.

LC: Employed by AID, presumably?

DB: That’s where I met my second husband. He was a friend of ours. He was sent out to Vietnam.
LC: What was he doing there? What was Mr. Bloomfield doing there?
DB: He was setting up the bank, separate banks. See, they had the Banque de l’Indochine.
LC: The French governed bank.
DB: At that time you see, they were going to be independent. So it was to be the Bank of Vietnam, Bank of Laos, Bank of Cambodia. Since he had been with the Fed in New York and had set up the Bank of Korea, they sent—well, first of all, I’m sorry. First time he came—he was there twice. First time he was with the Wilbur Commission. When President Eisenhower came in office in, I guess that was 1952, he sent these businessmen around the country to look, around the world, to look at these foreign aid programs. The one that came to Indochina was headed by Brayton Wilbur, is that what I said?
LC: Yes, Wilbur.
DB: Wilbur of San Francisco, who was a friend of the head of the Fed in New York. I’ve forgotten what his name was at the time. Brayton Wilbur was one and the head of the Safeway in California—I’ve forgotten his name—was another member of the team.
LC: The supermarket chain, Safeway?
DB: Yes, Safeway. Then Wilbur called his friend in New York and he said, “I need somebody, somebody who can write a report.” So, they sent Arthur. He was with them. They were there for two weeks. We met, we all met at this and anybody came. The ambassador always had a party and you always got to meet new people. That’s how I met the Nixon’s. Mrs. Nixon had come to the hospital, you know. Anyway, so then Arthur came back. I can’t remember—must have been—I can’t remember when it was. He was there for, I don’t know, it must have been three or four weeks or more. Maybe it was three months. I can’t remember. He was staying at the Majestic. He was riding to work in the car with me. He was always complaining about the food and how lonely he was and everything. So we used to have him to dinner. Then he often was on trips that Dixie was on. They’d see each other, be in Phnom Penh together and so on and so forth.
LC: Were they kind of pals? Did they get along all right?
DB: Not exactly. Arthur was older. He was an economist, a professorial type.
LC: They’re kind of different cloth.

DB: Different personalities completely.

LC: Let me ask, just to clarify about Arthur. His second and longer stay in Saigon, and evidently he also went to Cambodia, that was involved with setting up a new—

DB: Independent banks.

LC: Individual banks or the banking system? Do you know what? Or a bank for the Republic of Vietnam?

DB: Well, yes. They were to be independent banks of the three Associated States, as they were sometimes referred to.

LC: Right. I want to ask another question about your travel with Dixie. You said that you did get over to Cambodia and you talked a little bit about that, but you said you also got up to Angkor Wat? Can you talk about going up there with him?

DB: The first time we went, we went on the mission plane. It was the Fourth of July weekend, I think, of ’52. I don’t know. I guess we were there for two or three days, you know, the whole gang went. You developed a priority for the mission plane. When the mission plane was going somewhere, if you had priority, you could get on the flight. So, we got on that flight to Angkor Wat. Well, we went all around and then I think the second time we went, I can’t remember when it was, but he wanted to go to the Bayoun and to Angkor. There’s another one that’s more delicate work, [Bantay Srei] Angkor Thom is the main, big area, you know.

LC: The one that most people think of.

DB: Yes. There were these lagoons out front. Oh, he had some wonderful pictures of Angkor.

LC: These were pictures, photographs that he was taking for his own enjoyment rather than—?

DB: Yes. These were—

LC: These were your tourist, your time together photographs.

DB: Yes. Right. I can’t remember that other part of Angkor. Then, the second time, the second time we wanted—he wanted to go to this other part. He’d hire a car and we would go and take photographs. Some of them are in the book Requiem.
LC: Are those photographs still in the family?

DB: Well, I imagine they’re in the negatives that Alan has or were sent up to Rochester. I’m not sure.

LC: The Eastman House collection there. What did you and he make of Angkor Wat? Was it very much overgrown then or was it—?

DB: Yes. Yes it was. There was a lot of deterioration. The banyan trees would grow and crumble, cause the monuments to crumble.

LC: Sure.

DB: The French were in there with archaeologists even in that time working on restoration. Then I think during the war, of course, I believed that all stopped. Then after the American war, I think the Indians sent in—I read somewhere where Indians were in there doing archaeological research because the culture, the Buddha and all that, it’s Indian derivations.

LC: Very much so rather than the sort of Chinese influence from the other side. This is the Indianized influence.

DB: Right. Right, but it was just incredible. You think these were built between the 11th and the 13th century.

LC: It’s mind-boggling.

DB: There’s much more now to compare that with Pagan, there’s very little left in Pagan. Those temples or wats or whatever, they’re just like stubble in the ground.

LC: There’s just not the—

DB: Right. There are a few that are more or less monumental, but, generally they’re just not much of anything.

LC: Was Dixie interested in them from an historical point of view? Was he interested because of the beauty?

DB: Yeah. We collected books on Angkor and all the literature and so on. The big book was Angkor published by the Philosophic Press in Philadelphia. I had two copies, but I have only one now. I don’t know what happened. You know, you lend books and you forget. People don’t return them.

LC: Right. I know.
DB: But that’s a marvelous scholarly thing. I think he was at the embassy. I could look that up.

LC: Sure. Sure.

DB: The book on Angkor.

LC: You said the whole gang would go, if you could, if you had room on the flight, presumably. Who was the gang for you guys? Who did you kind of—?

DB: Well, the ambassador might go, or the head of mission or some of the secretaries. Anybody could go.

LC: For example, and I don’t know whether he was ambassador at this time, but Edward Heath was someone that you would—

DB: Donald.

LC: Donald, I’m sorry. I’m thinking British.

DB: Yes. Right—

LC: Donald Heath, I’m sorry.

DB: Oh, he was wonderful. What was his wife’s name? We saw them a lot. When he retired he was in New York and we saw him a couple—Alan and I saw him a couple of times in New York.

LC: What kind of bearing did he have? Was he kind of—could he be happy-go-lucky and travel about with everybody?

DB: Oh, yes. He was extremely personable. He mingled very much with the people. He was not a stuffed shirt.

LC: Really? That’s very interesting.

DB: No. He was very nice, and his wife was just charming and lovely. I can’t think—isn’t that awful?

LC: That’s okay. It’ll come to you. We can—

DB: Madam Heath.

LC: We can include it. It’ll pop up.

DB: Louise! That was Louise.

LC: Was it Louise?

DB: Louise Heath. Yes.
LC: You said that you actually did have a chance, you and Arthur had a chance to
see them later.

DB: Well, not Arthur—oh no, Arthur wasn’t there. That was before—that was
Alan and I. It was before I was married to Arthur.

LC: Oh, I see. Okay.

DB: I think by that time they had moved to California to be with their son and
then I don’t know which one died first, but they’re both deceased.

LC: Right.

DB: They wanted us to—he went to Lebanon from Saigon. After Dixie died,
they invited me to come to Beirut, but I didn’t go. Alan was small and I just couldn’t get
my act together.

LC: Right. Alan was only a year old when Dixie was killed.

DB: Right. Right. So I didn’t go to Beirut, but then I kept in touch with them.

They were very sympathetic and very nice. It took about six months to get the death
certificate out of the embassy in Saigon. That was like pulling teeth.

LC: You were trying to do this from the States.

DB: Yes. Right. I couldn’t get any benefits or anything until—you know, I
couldn’t get things settled in Social Security or anything until we had the death
certificate.

LC: Where were you living when this happened?

DB: I was living in Washington.

LC: Okay. This was in 1955.

DB: Right. Right.

LC: Just to make a note that Dixie was killed on April 29, 1955.

DB: Right.

LC: Let’s take a break there, Dorothy.

DB: Okay.
Laura Calkins: This is Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University continuing the oral history interview with Dorothy Reese Bloomfield. Today is the twelfth of July 2006. I am in the Special Collections building interview room on the campus of Texas Tech in Lubbock. Mrs. Bloomfield is speaking from her home, by telephone, her home being in Maryland. Good morning, Mrs. Bloomfield.

Dorothy Bloomfield: Good morning, Laura.

LC: Thank you for your time today. I wish we were sitting together as we were the last time we talked, but telephone is pretty good, too. Dorothy, I want to start by asking, if you don’t mind, for your impressions of what the Public Health Service wanted you and your team to accomplish in South Vietnam.

DB: Actually, our mission was very much tied with the foreign policy of the United States government at that time. China had fallen, I believe, October 10, 1947, fallen to the communists. There was grave concern in this country about the other countries in Southeast Asia becoming communist. President Truman had some funds that were designated by Congress for aid to China to be reprogrammed and to be used in providing assistance to the countries in Southeast Asia, Vietnam, or rather, Indochina, the Philippines, Burma, Indonesia, and Thailand. Our mission was, in other words, the Public Health Service was contracted by the State Department for us to carry out our mission in Indochina, which was to provide assistance, technical assistance. It was Special Technical and Economic Assistance, STEM. Ours would be, and that is in the Public Health division, that would be, of course, the assistance we gave in the health field. We had sanitary engineers who were concerned about malaria. We had—let’s see—physicians. Then our nursing group, our aim and mission was to work with the ministry of health and the National School of Nursing in developing nursing, what we might call modern nursing. That’s what I remember of it.

LC: Dorothy, can you say anything more about the personnel on the Vietnamese side with whom worked? When you were here, you mentioned the medical director of
the Cho Ray hospital, Cao Van Tri. I wonder if there were others, maybe in the ministry
of health or the school of nursing, maybe you recall their names and maybe not.

DB: Yes. Well, I think Dr. Marcel, Dr. Henri Marcel was the head of the
Ministry of Health. We met with him, not frequently I think. Probably it was a very
occasional visit. That was really the responsibility more of the chief nurse to meet with
him. I mentioned Dr. Tri who was head of the hospital. Lam Thi Hai was my
counterpart. She later became the chief nurse. She is the one who wrote this history of
nursing in Vietnam which I’m going to be sending you. She was a very, very
conscientious young lady—maybe not so young. I really never had any idea of her age.
But we, of course, worked with an interpreter in the beginning. Gradually by coming to
the English classes which I conducted and by working together, she learned English.
When I left, we did not require an interpreter. She understood me. The same year, she
came to Syracuse University to spend a year for advanced study. She was really a
shining star.

LC: It sounds like it, yes. We’ll be very, very grateful to have a copy of her
book, her monograph here in the archive.

DB: Unfortunately I didn’t—I did keep up with her for a while. In fact, I saw her
in Washington when she was on her way to Syracuse, but I don’t know exactly when I
lost track of her.

LC: That would have been in 1955?

DB: Yes.

LC: That you saw her in Washington?

DB: Yes. Right. The other name that I remember, Le Thi, Le—no, I can’t
remember her last name, but there was another one, Ngo Thi Hai, was one of the students
in the class. I don’t know. I think she was a maternity nurse. She was in the English
class. When I went back to Saigon in 1997, I went to the Cho Ray hospital which was a
very modern structure, constructed by the Japanese I was told, during the American war.
I went to see the chief nurse. I had at that time a list of the nurses that I had worked with.

LC: Really?

DB: She gave me—I went down the list. She said, “Well, this one is in Canada.
This one went to the States. This one died,” and so on. She knew of them all. Well, Ngo
Thi Hai, she said, “She’s still here.” So I said, “Well, do you think I could see her?” She said, “Well, I’ll try to get in touch with her if you come back tomorrow.” So the next day my son and I returned. It was quite a reunion.

LC: She was—she was there?
DB: Yes. She was there.
LC: Oh, my goodness.
DB: The chief nurse had called her. It was kind of overwhelming. We never really ever expected to ever see one another again. So, after our visit in the hospital my son suggested taking her to lunch at the hotel. Well, I’m sure she had never been to the New Century—I think it was the New Century, very modern hotel. In any case, she came with us in the car, but she said she would, through the interpreter, she said she would have to get an English-speaking nurse to come along to translate. So, anyways, she brought this other nurse. The other nurse came on her motorcycle. Then we had lunch and we were talking. I said—she told me she was eighty-three years old and she was still working part-time.

LC: My goodness.
DB: Then we had lunch. She said, well, she really had to go. She had to teach a class. So I asked her what the subject of the class was. I think it was something like how to turn a patient. (Laughs) I thought maybe things hadn’t moved much more in fifty years. In any case, we go out the door. The other nurse, the English-speaking nurse was there with their motorcycle. The eighty-three year old Ngo Thi Hai hops on the back of the motorcycle and off they go.

LC: Just like they do it everyday. They more or less probably do.
DB: Right. Right. Those are the two that I remember most.
LC: Can you tell me, did you recognize Ngo Thi Hai?
DB: Yes, I did. In fact, I have a photo that Dixie took of the nurses.
LC: Oh, how wonderful.
DB: I came across that, I think since I returned from my visit with you.
LC: How wonderful. Well, I hope that someday we’ll be able to see those.
DB: If I had it in front of me I would be able to perhaps give you some of the other names. I’m not sure that I still have that card with all of the names of the students.
LC: Well, would you kind of take us through the, the pavilion-type buildings? You mentioned when you were here earlier that there were a number of wards. Can you describe the wards themselves and what the design was? Had any improvements been made to them by American or French assistance that you could discern?

DB: You mean when I returned?

LC: Well, no, when—

DB: In the beginning?

LC: Yes, in the beginning when you were there.

DB: Oh, okay. Well, yes. The structures were two-story and there were three buildings, as I recall. As you entered the property, on the left was, on the ground floor, was Dr. Tri’s office. I guess there must have been some other wards on the first floor and on the second floor. We were never involved in any of that. Then there was a—to the right in the back, there was another building. That was also two stories as I recall. They were painted yellow. You know the French, all those French buildings were yellow. It was like concrete painted yellow. We noticed that in Hanoi and when we were there later. So, let me see. That was pediatrics, I think. Dr. De was in charge of that. He was a very tall, thin, Vietnamese, unusually tall and he had studied in the United States we were told. He wasn’t really associated with us and wasn’t particularly friendly, as I recall. So then, parallel to Dr. Tri’s office in that building was the medical—I guess you’d call it medical-surgical which was also a two-story building. These are all open pavilions, you know, air on both sides. They’re not enclosed. So when it rained, the rain would come in on the balcony. We had the second floor of this medical-surgical building, just one small unit. The balconies were full of mats on which the family members slept or did their cooking or whatever because they were the ones who took care of the patients primarily, any care that was given. The so-called nurses were mainly men. They followed the doctor around and wrote down what he said. They gave the medications. Then the nurses, well, they were the nurses. So then, we were on the second floor and the patients were on iron beds on a mat. It was very primitive. There was no hand-washing facility. So that was the first effort was to get water there.

LC: Was there running water to the hospital in any area of its layout?
DB: There must have been on the first floor. I really don’t recall, but we got the water onto the second floor and our first class was on hand washing. (Laughs) Still very important today.

LC: Absolutely. It’s fundamental.

DB: Right.

LC: Was there a surgery theater of some description?

DB: I do not recall surgery, no. There was adjoining Cho Ray hospital, a French military hospital. That was against the back of our Cho Ray property was this rather large French military hospital. I was never in that, but we would see, notice the patients. They seemed to be not in much better shape in terms of the facility. That is the facility didn’t seem to be in much better shape than Cho Ray. The patients were on these iron beds and some of them out on the balconies. I suppose there were a lot of French war casualties.

LC: How were the French casualties arriving at the hospital? Could you tell? Was it by some kind of modified four-wheeled vehicle, like an ambulance?

DB: I have no idea. I don’t really know. I never—see, this was the back of the French hospital. We didn’t see the entrance.

LC: You were never asked to go over there?

DB: No. No. No. There was, you know, you might even say hostility between the Amer—the French did not want us there. They tolerated us. But, they really did not—there was no real association with the French except that Dixie, who loved the French and spoke French fluently, and he got along very well socially with the French, not officially. Well, maybe somewhat officially in that he knew the French general and a lot of the French military.

LC: What about French nurses? Now, I know that Dixie had an interest in American nurses, particularly you, but were there French nursing personnel, female nurses there that you heard about or knew?

DB: I don’t recall any.

LC: Really?

DB: I don’t remember even seeing any. I think the nursing personnel were probably Vietnamese. I really don’t know.
LC: Well, shifting gears just for a moment, I want to ask a little bit more about Dixie and his career. We did talk a little bit about this when you were here and you certainly told some wonderful stories about him. I got a sense of his *joie de vivre*, but can you talk about his background? For example, if I had the chance to interview Dixie, what would he tell me, if you can remember, about his youth? Where was he born? Where did he grow up, that kind of thing?

DB: Well, I don’t have that bio in front of me that I gave you.

LC: Yes. I have that here.

DB: He was born in Houston, Texas, on October 25, 1923. His father had some city position. I don’t know exactly what it was, but his father was killed in, I think, an automobile accident when Dixie was about three or four years old, I believe. He had one sister, Gertrude, who was—actually, she was, I think, older than he. He was the second child, I believe, not sure about that. He went to school there, graduated from, I think it was Malloy High School. Then he was inducted into the Army. The year is in that biography, which I don’t have in front of me.

LC: That’s fine. That’s fine.

DB: He went to England and was a photographer. He must have had some photographic experience early in his, you know, when he was growing up. So, he served in England for, I don’t know, two or three years. Then about D-Day plus three or four, he went into France and slogged through France to Paris and was there for liberation. He was very excited always about the French and the French language and so on. So, when he left the Army—what do they call that—discharged from the Army, he returned to Houston and went to the University of Houston for a while. I don’t know whether that was full-time or part-time. But he also worked as a photographer for the *Houston Post*. I remember he was the society photographer. He was sent to all of these tea dances and coming-out parties and social events to take pictures for the society page. In the meantime, he had a great desire to return to France. So he continued studying French. Also he got, somehow or other, I don’t know if this required study, but he got some kind of a license, a steam-fitter’s license, to work on a ship. He worked his way back across the Atlantic to France. That must have been about 1947, I suspect—maybe late ’46. It may be ’47. So then he was in France. He went to—just took some classes at the
Sorbonne in French, of course. He got a job with the Marshall Plan, taking photographs. He traveled all over Europe taking pictures of the wonderful things the Marshall Plan and the aid was doing to reconstruct Europe after World War II. He was in Greece. He was in Italy. I remember some pictures of Norway. I don’t know about Germany because that was divided. We weren’t going in there very much.

LC: Right. They were in a different category because the military occupation had continued.

DB: Right. Right. So then in 1951, because of his French, knowledge of French, I think he was transferred to Saigon. That is where he spent the next four years of his life. As I said, he set up his job. His position was to train photographers from the ministries of information of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. He would bring them into Saigon for classes and actually in his laboratory which he set up, which was the first air-conditioned laboratory, photo lab in Saigon—maybe, probably in Indochina. That was a great labor of love. Dixie was a perfectionist and every thing had to be just so. The equipment had to purchased from Japan and Hong Kong, all the equipment, all the material and so on. It was—when that was finally accomplished it was really quite an achievement. Then, of course, in addition he did photographic work for all of the American agencies, MAAG, the Military Assistance Advisory Group, the USIS, the embassy, the aid program, all the programs of the US government. He traveled with Vice President Nixon when he came and Adlai Stevenson and John Foster Dulles and the whole, all of the dignitaries.

LC: Well, Dorothy, let me ask you a couple of questions about that. I mean, it’s really quite a fascinating set of experiences that he had even before he went to Saigon. Do you know, for example, what kinds of things he wanted to study at the Sorbonne? Was he taking art, photography, imagery classes or was it some other interest he was pursuing?

DB: As far as I know he was concentrating on the language, but he certainly had a great love of art and was very artistic in many ways.

LC: Did he talk to you at length about his time spent both in France and then traveling around in Europe and tell you stories about things that had occurred?

DB: Well, mostly it was about the social life in France and Paris.
LC: What kinds of things? Do you remember?

DB: Well, he had an apartment not far from the Arc de Triomphe. My son, when he went back to France, our son, I think it was when he was on his honeymoon. He tracked down this—I can’t remember the—Villa des Ternes, I think it was. It was very small but it was quite a social center for some of the young people. Apparently, they had some great parties there.

LC: I well believe it. Especially from what you’ve said about Dixie and his personality, people just seem to kind of be drawn to him.

DB: Right. Well, as I think about it later in life, he is like a friend of mine, she and he, they always have to have a lot of people around them. They’re very extroverted. I’m very introverted and more on the quiet side. I like my quiet time, but Dixie was always action, always action, moving around.

LC: Always busy with something.

DB: Right.

LC: The next thing coming. Well, while he was in Saigon and in the years before you met him, which at least would have been ’51, ’52 if I’m following the chronology. Can you tell me some of the things that meant the most to him in terms of his work? What did he feel was most important? Do you know?

DB: The setting up of the lab was really a crowning achievement, I think, because it provided the place where he could work and where he could bring in these students and teach them photography and more importantly and as importantly the development of the photographs, you know, having the right chemicals and the right temperature, everything. It had to be air-conditioned. He had all the parameters set out. He had a lot of frustration with the administration because he wanted everything perfect. He was always ordering more things. The bureaucrats he had not a lot of patience with.

LC: I believe it. I believe it and maybe the budget people, too, who usually like to chop things back if they can.

DB: Right. Right. I do believe that—plus, I think that he loved what he was doing and he liked getting out and taking pictures of the people and the places. I realize now how significant that was because it represented a period in history that was, at least in the south, there was a fair amount of—it was fairly quiet, although I noticed in my
memoirs here that the first letter I wrote home I mentioned that there had been a bomb
that went off near the opera house, which was right in the center of Saigon. So there
were these little events from time to time. They would blow up the ammunition dump
out at the airport in the middle of the night and so on.

LC: Was it understood, as you recall it, who or what organization was behind
these sporadic acts?

DB: Well, we called it the Vietminh in those days. It was the communists or the
group that was struggling for independence.

LC: Yes ma’am. So you were pretty well aware that this was the communist-led
Vietminh that would be doing these kinds of things?

DB: Right. One had to be careful. You couldn’t leave the city after dark. They
would mine the roads. The Vietminh would mine the roads at night. So the Vietnamese
would have to go out and clear the roads before people could travel in the morning. Then
we would have alerts from time to time when we were—we didn’t have to—we weren’t
required to stay inside, but we were asked to be very careful and not congregate and so
on.

LC: Is that right? Would those orders come through the embassy?

DB: Yes. Yes.

LC: They would ask you not, they would ask Americans not to sort of stand
around in the streets in groups?

DB: Right. Right, not to congregate in large groups. There weren’t too many of
us then. I would say when I went to Saigon there were probably about fifty or sixty
Americans. When I left there were about two hundred. So things really did escalate.

LC: Well, that’s for sure. It’s certainly an important period in the American, the
growth of the American commitment in Indochina.

DB: I mentioned the MAAG, Military Advisory Assistance Group. There were
Navy, Air Force, and Army officers who were stationed in Saigon for generally a period
of one year. They would go out and supposedly check on the French utilization of the
material that we were supplying to France through our aid to France. They would often
ask Dixie to go with them and take photographs of what was going on. That was mainly
in the North. That’s where most of the action was in the beginning, around Hanoi and
countryside thereabouts.

LC: Did Dixie tell you about some of those trips? Did you know what his
impression was of the North?

DB: Well, not in a lot of detail. I have all these notes Dixie, went to Hanoi and
he’s coming back in a few days or something like that. I don’t really have a lot of
information or recollection about the content of those trips.

LC: But it’s extremely interesting that he would be asked to go along by the
various American officers there, making, more or less, inspection tours.

DB: Right. Right. Well, he went with—he would go with the economic officers,
too, in the mission for example. I went with him one time. We went to see a forestry
project in Cambodia, at Kompong Thom, T-H-O-M. Everybody wanted photographs of
what they were doing, the mission and the staff and so on.

LC: How did you get over to Kompong Thom?

DB: Oh, we drove. I don’t recall whether—I think we had a mission car. We
were allowed to take it, as I recall.

LC: So you drove from Saigon all the way to what I’m guessing by the name is
probably in Central Cambodia? Kompong Thom?

DB: I don’t remember whether we made it in one day or not, whether it was a
two-day trip. It seems to me I might find that in my letters, but I have a vague
recollection that we stopped overnight in Phnom Penh on the way back.

LC: Wow. Do you remember being a little—well, how did you feel about taking
a car and driving when you also knew that some of the roads were certainly not said to
be, or said not to be safe at night?

DB: I don’t know. You know I had great confidence in Dixie. I just knew that
we’d be all right.

LC: You’re young so.

DB: That he would take care of me. The thing I remember about that place was
there was no hotel. We slept in this, I guess it was a village house. It was up on stilts. I
don’t remember whether we had mosquito nets or not, however, I remember being
awakened at four o’clock with the cocks crowing in the stall and other animals and
everybody coming to life at 4:00AM.

LC: It’s a little early. Yeah. Let me ask a little more about the security situation
in Saigon. Were you aware—well, first of all, let me ask about 1954. Do you remember
much about the installation of the government of President Diem and Dien Bien Phu, the
fall of the French fort?

DB: Well, they were changing presidents all the time. That was—I made a
reference to that somewhere in my notes. Every other day it was a new president. That
sort of went on, but in 1954—well, actually, let me go back to December of 1953. Dixie
was at Dien Bien Phu with Pierre Schoendorfer, a good friend of his who was a French
cinematographer. I don’t know if he’s still living. Pierre was a great guy. He wrote a
book later and he did a lot of films.

LC: How do you spell his last name?

DB: [S-C-H-O-E-N-D-O-R-F-E-R], I believe. Also, Brigitte Friang, F-R-I-A-N-
G, was there. I had a picture of the three of them at Dien Bien Phu. That was Christmas
of 1953.

LC: Now Brigitte Friang was who?

DB: A French correspondent.

LC: Do you know what paper she wrote for or which group of papers?

DB: No. I don’t.

LC: Okay.

DB: I remember Dixie describing the seven hills, and the French being encamped
in the valley, which was set up for defeat really. There was a colonel who was, I think,
originally the French commander out there in Vietnam, in Indochina was de Lattre de
Tassigny. Then he was recalled and there was a colonel in charge. I can’t remember his
name right now, but I do remember that he, I think he, I’m sure he was captured at
Vietnam or at Dien Bien Phu. That battle started, I believe it was March 13, 1954. He
was captured as well as Pierre Schoendorfer. They were released. They had to walk
through the woods. They didn’t get much food. I don’t know if they were mistreated. I
don’t know too many of the details, but it was pretty rough, I guess.

LC: Did Dixie catch up with Pierre at some point?
DB: Well, then, yes. When Pierre—when these prisoners were released we had a big party. Dixie was a great party giver. We had a great party for Pierre. Oh, he was so thin I hardly recognized him. This colonel who had been made a general was invited and he came.

LC: The colonel who had been in charge at Dien Bien Phu?

DB: Right. I can’t remember his name. Anyway, we had a great celebration when they were liberated. But I do remember also the time of partition. That must have been in ’54 also.

LC: Yes ma’am it was.

DB: When the Americans sent ships to Haiphong to bring down all the refugees. Those people had a choice. Citizens of Vietnam had a choice. If they wanted to go from the South to the North, they could. There was a free transfer back and forth, but mainly the exodus was from the North. We would go down to the river, the Saigon River and see these refugees coming off the boats, ships, Americans ships just carrying whatever they could take with them. It was really pitiful. The American aid set up tent cities to take care of the refugees, feed them, I suppose clothe them. There were clinics set up. One of the nurses on our staff was assigned to the tent city, but I wasn’t involved in that. That was 1954, I believe.

LC: Yeah. You said that these, in effect, refugees from the North were in a pretty bad state. Can you describe? Was it your sense that they were carrying everything they owned?

DB: Oh, definitely. Yes. They could only take what they had, could carry.

LC: To your mind, was there enough in the way of help being given to them upon arrival? They step off the ship and then what happens to them?

DB: Well, they were transported to these tents cities which were mainly on the outside of Saigon, on the periphery. Something else I was going to say about that and it kind of escapes me at the moment. Maybe it will come back to me.

LC: But they were in pretty hard shape.

DB: Well, they looked—oh, I know what I was going to say. Well, they you know—how would you feel if you could only take what you have? I suppose the Katrina victims might be a similar modern example of refugees today.
LC: Feel pretty terrible.

DB: Pretty desperate. But most of the people who came from the North were Catholics, the Catholics. There were always more Catholics, I think, in the South than in the North, but as I recall a good many of the refugees were Catholics and were fleeing the communist regime.

LC: Did you have any sense that the security situation in Saigon was deteriorating, either because the refugees were arriving or because the partition was taking place and there was some jockeying for position?

DB: I was beginning to be concerned about the security situation. I was personally very discouraged. The word was going around. Everyone was quoting MacArthur, you can’t win a land war in Asia. It seemed—I had a quotation somewhere. I may have given it to you, about the fact that the French were really not up to doing what had to be done. They weren’t using the equipment properly or they weren’t training people.

LC: For military service?

DB: Right.

LC: Did you kind of pick up some scuttlebutt, too, that the French didn’t seem to be using what the Americans had given them in terms of military equipment in the best way?

DB: I think they were using them but maybe not so efficiently. That was sort of my impression. It was kind of—I sort of felt it was going to be a desperate situation. How, you know, Vietnam with these millions of people and they can get along with so much less and do so much more damage without equipment and so on that—I was frankly kind of discouraged, personally, and wondered if we should leave. That is, Alan and I should leave.

LC: Alan was born when? Just to refresh.

DB: He was born at the time of Dien Bien Phu, March 14, 1954.

LC: I’m going to guess that Dixie did not go back up to Dien Bien Phu after that.

DB: No. I don’t know whether he made any other—I don’t think he—I think that was his one and only trip, but there were some wonderful photos of Dien Bien Phu from the air. Those are in the collection, I think, which my son has.
LC: How fabulous, wonderful, absolutely wonderful. I hope that those will go
into the public domain, as you know, so they can be seen by researchers and students.
DB: Right.
LC: Let me ask, and again, just to sort of clarify, where were you—where did
you deliver Alan?
DB: I went to Hong Kong. I didn’t have much respect for French medical care.
So I made periodic visits to Hong Kong.
LC: What hospital did you go to there?
DB: It was Mathilda Hospital. It was a British hospital—British hospital with
British nurses and Chinese nurses an American patient and an Austrian obstetrician—
kind of an international group.
LC: That’s right. Alan came in in a very interesting cosmopolitan way, I
suppose.
DB: I was, for a long time—well, I went to the hospital early. I went up early
and I stayed at the hotel. We always stayed at the Gloucester, Gloucester Hotel, which
was right in Hong Kong, not on Kowloon. The hotel was, I think was seven dollars a
day.
LC: My goodness.
DB: I moved up to the hospital because they didn’t have any patients in OB. I
think it was five dollars a day there.
LC: This was actually a money-saving move.
DB: I remember they used to wake me up in the morning after I had delivered,
wake me up in the morning and giving me the tea at five o’clock in the morning. I
remember thinking, well, I can’t nurse this baby on tea. Hey, I paid extra to get milk.
LC: How very British that is.
DB: Yes. You would appreciate that, Laura.
LC: Absolutely, yes I do. I’ve spent some time in British hospitals. Not in the
OB ward, but yes, I get the picture.
DB: Well, I had been at that hospital earlier in the medical-surgical. That
pavilion was very nice and modern. The OB was—we went back to Mathilda Hospital.
LC: You and Alan?
DB: In 1997 and it had changed quite a bit. But I do remember one time I was there, they were having a water shortage in Hong Kong. My room looked out on the reservoir and one could see the water declining. There was actual rationing in Hong Kong. The water supply would be turned off for as much as four hours a day. So that was a severe time.

LC: Goodness.

DB: They were bringing, pumping, trucking in water from the mainland, but even so, that was not adequate to meet the needs. So they had to have the outage, water outage.

LC: When was this?

DB: Oh, I don’t know. That might be 1953 perhaps.

LC: So they were trucking in water from the mainland?

DB: From the mainland.

LC: Wow. Well, that must have been a little dicey, too, given the politics.

DB: Pardon?

LC: That must have been a bit dicey given the politics of the situation, but the British being the diplomats that they are, they probably found a way around. Let me just ask about whether Dixie came over to see you in Hong Kong, or was he busy with work?

DB: Well, actually he was in the United States. He had come over to—he had several interviews lined up. He was looking to see what his future would be.

LC: Looking for a job in the States?

DB: Yeah. I remember he had an interview at Time, or Life Magazine. He had a lot of visits he wanted to make. He hadn’t been home in about five or six years. So I said, “Fine.” This was his future. I was alone and I was fine. I had no problems.

LC: Dorothy, that’s quite a testament to your courage because there aren’t a lot of people, not a lot of women who would have wanted to be in that situation in Hong Kong by yourself.

DB: Well, I felt at home in Hong Kong. We had been there so many times and I had friends. So, you know, it wasn’t any big deal. It was like my second home, really.
LC: No kidding? Wow. Were you thinking that you would stay with the Public Health Service?

DB: Well, that was sort of up in the air. It depended on what was going to happen with Dixie. Then Ambassador Heath moved to—he went to Lebanon and was ambassador there. He wanted Dixie to come to Lebanon, to Beirut. Dixie didn’t, I don’t recall that he pursued that, but he had several options. I was going to, of course, wait to see what was going to happen with him. So I did continue to work. I had maternity leave. I continued to work. We had a baby amah. The hours we worked were eight to twelve and two to six. I was home during the lunch period. I had lots of time with Alan.

LC: When did Dixie come back from the States?

DB: That was, actually, that was—he did a little touring around. I remember he went back to Paris and then stopped in, he was in Turkey. He was in Egypt on the way back. I was getting very annoyed by that point.

LC: What was he up to?

DB: Well, he was just, well—

LC: Being Dixie.

DB: Doing photographs, photographic, you know? In Paris, connecting with some of his former friends.

LC: Oh, sure.

DB: So, I was writing, sending him these cables and telling him how awful things were in Saigon and how awful I felt and that Alan was sick and so on. So, he kept sending his friends in to check on me. They found out I was really fine, was really fine. It was just a ruse. I think it was the end of April when he came back.

LC: So that would be April 1954?

DB: Right. Yeah, ’54.

LC: Okay. Well, let’s take a break there.
Laura Calkins: This is Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
University. I’m continuing the oral history interview with Dorothy Reese Bloomfield.
Today is the twenty-first of July 2006. I am in the Special Collections building on the
campus of Texas Tech in Lubbock. Mrs. Bloomfield is speaking from her home in
Maryland by telephone. First of all, good morning, Mrs. Bloomfield.

Dorothy Bloomfield: Good morning, Laura.

LC: It’s a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak with you again.

DB: Well, I’ve enjoyed our conversations. I hope that they’ll be somewhat
useful.

LC: I’m certain that they will. I’m certain of it. First of all, one of the things that
you mentioned in our last session, and also when you were here visiting, is that, partly
because of Dixie’s personality and also because of his position, he came in contact with a
large number of people whose involvement with Indochina issues turned out to be quite
significant as the years went on. Also people who came through Saigon on various VIP
tours and one of those, I think you mentioned, was Mr. and Mrs. Richard Nixon. I
wonder if you can tell a little bit about their visit and what you remember of it.

DB: Well, I have some notes about the Nixon visit. I said the biggest event in
Saigon. This is November seventh, which is following the visit. The biggest event in
Saigon recently was the visit of the Nixons.

LC: What year was this?

DB: This was in—well, actually they arrived in Bangkok—let me see. They
arrived in Bangkok I would say about October twenty-six or twenty-seven.

LC: Of 1952?

DB: 1953.


DB: This was 1953. Dixie flew to Bangkok to join the entourage. Then I said he
went with the ambassador’s party to Siem Reap. Oh, here it says where they met Nixon’s
party. They visited the King in Phnom Penh and visited the Angkor Wat ruins. Then I
said, Dixie rode in Nixon’s Constellation from Phnom Penh to Saigon. (Editor’s note: Interviewee is reading from husband’s journal) “It was really lush, he said, the same plane that took Dr. Milton Eisenhower to South America last summer.” In those days, the Constellation was probably—for this was pre-jet. The Constellation was probably the largest plane in existence. “Just as the plane landed in Saigon, a rainstorm came up and everyone getting out of the plane and all of the troops were drenched. Mrs. Nixon looked very sweet, exactly like her pictures. Madam Heath, the ambassador’s wife, brought her out to the hospital on Monday morning to see the children’s ward which the American women have started. I took them up to see our demonstration ward. She gave the patients candy, asked questions and seemed quite interested. When she left she said she knew that I was doing an excellent job. Ha-ha. That night the Heaths gave a reception for them. Mrs. Nixon said, ‘Oh, you look so different from this morning,’ because I had a uniform on in the morning. ‘In fact, you look absolutely beautiful.’ Then she turned to the Vice President and said, ‘Dick, Mrs. Reese works at the hospital where I visited this morning and she’s doing a superb job.’ Dixie has a very nice picture of Nixon which Nixon autographed for him. Sunday they flew to Da Lat to see Bao Dai and came back Monday morning. Tuesday morning they went to Laos and on to Hanoi. They left Thursday morning from Hanoi to Hong Kong. I also said Joe Alsop has been around town in-country, too, and I won’t say what I said about him.” (Laughs)

LC: Perhaps not that he looked sweet, just like in his pictures. That’s probably not what you had to say about him.

DB: Alsop. I said he was a pretentious character.

LC: Well, I think he might’ve even agreed with that, actually.

DB: Right. Right.

LC: Do you in your own mind now, as you think back on that visit, do you remember being at the hospital with Mrs. Nixon?

DB: Oh, yes. Yes, I do.

LC: What was her—what kind of impression did she give to you? Did she seem authentically interested in the effort?

DB: Yes. She really was in my view a wonderful person and how she tolerated that husband of hers is something I never would understand because I met her in 1973 at
the White House. She was just as sweet and charming. Someone asked around, at the
guests, if anyone had met her before. I said, “Yes, I had met her in Saigon in 1953.” So
that word was passed to her and she came up and spoke to me again. We reminisced
about that time. Really, she was lovely. I can’t describe how sweet she was, just very
personable and sweet.

LC: Did she seem to you, when you met her again in 1973 and had a brief chat
with her, did she seem the same person to you or under stress at that time?

DB: She—excuse me—she seemed quite relaxed despite all the turmoil around
her.

LC: Dorothy, what was the occasion in 1973 for you to be at the White House?

DB: Oh, I was with the Division of Nursing, Public Health Service at that time.
The regional nursing consultants from the ten regions were in Washington having a
conference. Somehow or other, it was arranged that they would go to the—consultants
and the local Washington staff would go to the White House for a reception with Mrs.
Nixon. So, it was most pleasant.

LC: Now, it sounds like back in Saigon in 1953 that you were at the reception or
perhaps a dinner that evening.

DB: No. It was a reception. There was no dinner.

LC: Okay. The Nixons were there. Did Mrs. Nixon kind of—it sounds like she
did introduce you to the Vice President.

DB: Yes.

LC: What was your take on him and what was Dixie’s take on him? Do you
remember?

DB: Well, he was very cold.

LC: Really?

DB: Yeah. He just said, “How do you do?” as I remember it, and that was it.
Then I moved on the line.

LC: Kind of brushed, just kind of brushed by.

DB: Yes. Right, right. Quite in contrast to her. I felt she was genuine.
LC: Do you think it was—people have remarked that she just had a very, kind of, warm, engaging glance. When she looked at you, you knew she was actually looking at you. With him, perhaps not quite so much.

DB: No. He was just anxious for you to move on. (Laughs)

LC: Get to the important people or something.

DB: Right. Right.

LC: Did Dixie feel more or less the same way?

DB: I think so. Let’s see. It was a comment here that people in Dixie’s crowd much liked Stevenson much better than Nixon.

LC: When you say “Dixie’s crowd,” can you—

DB: Well, I think the reporters, you know, *Time* magazine, John Meklin was there at the time. I guess Larry Allen was still there and Tillman Durdin from the *New York Times*. I’m not sure Til was still there at that point, but, you know what I mean, he hung around with the reporters and the photographers and so on.

LC: Did they become your friends, as well? Were you friends with them as a couple or—?

DB: Yes. Yes. We were. We entertained them.

LC: Right. That part I think I’ve got. That Dixie was like a walking party. Wherever he went, that’s what was going to happen.

DB: Right. Every Sunday morning we had brunch and John Meklin would wander down the street and come up and knew he could get a wonderful breakfast.

LC: So, were you doing that work or did you have some help at home?

DB: Oh, I didn’t do anything. We had a cook and a maid and they took charge.

LC: (laughs) Well, were you kind of the meet-and-greet or were you—

DB: Yeah.

LC: Would you kind of hang around with these guys and sort of keep up with them?

DB: Mainly when they came to the apartment. I think they spent a lot of time with Dixie in the lab and around town.

LC: When Mrs. Nixon was there and she went out to the hospital, that’s certainly something that would have been pre-planned, her itinerary, I’m sure.
DB: Oh, yes.

LC: Was it the embassy that planned that visit? Do you know?

DB: Oh, yes. I’m sure.

LC: Did they send someone along with her?

DB: Well, I’m sure there were. I was trying to recall. There must have been Secret Service personnel also. But I don’t really recall specifically. I know there were people from the embassy.

LC: She went to the children’s ward you mentioned.

DB: Yes, I had forgotten that. Some of the American women had helped to set up this children’s ward at Cho Ray hospital.

LC: These were non-nursing personnel, just civilians who—

DB: Right. These were the wives of the embassy staff.

LC: I see. Did you spend much time down there? You, yourself?

DB: In the children’s ward? No, I didn’t.

LC: Not very much?

DB: No. In fact not any. Our work was concentrated in the adult wards that we were setting up.

LC: Right and the training, which you’ve described already. Did Mrs. Nixon say anything about the conditions in the—?

DB: No. I don’t recall her saying anything, making any remarks about that or—she must have asked some questions, but I can’t recall what they were.

LC: As you see though, it’s quite useful to have the letters so that you can kind of put them together. It unlocks a few things. Well, there were certainly other—well, let me ask first, did you ever meet President Nixon, again, as he later became?

DB: No. No.

LC: You didn’t ever see him again?

DB: No. I did meet, as I mentioned, I met Mrs. Nixon.

LC: Yes. That’s most interesting that you had a chance to speak with her again.

DB: Yes. In fact he’s the only—no, I did speak with one other president. I was at, I guess it was the Federal Executive Institute. I guess that was also, that was during the Carter regime. I did meet President Carter. Those are the only two I ever met.
LC: That would have been—
DB: That would have been in—let me see.
LC: Well, he just had the single term.
DB: Yes. That would have been—
LC: Late ‘70s at some point.
DB: Right. Right.
LC: Was it at the White House that you met him?
DB: No. That was in the Executive Office Building, which adjoins the White
House. He had, President Carter had had a press conference in that Executive Office
Building. Word was that he’s coming down the hall. So, of course, class was sort of
dismissed. We stood waiting for him to come down. He just shook hands with us. That
was about all.
LC: What do you, what did you make of President Carter? I mean, in general,
not just that brief meeting, but in general? Did you think that he was a good chief
executive?
DB: I don’t really know. I can’t really comment. I mean, he got caught up in the
hostage crisis.
LC: He sure did. It was very difficult.
DB: That was a difficult time.
LC: Yes, it was.
DB: I really don’t feel that I could make a judgment one way or another.
LC: That’s fine. Some of the other folks who came through Saigon—
DB: Yes. I have a note here that—and this is the same letter in which I spoke
about the Nixons’ visit. I said, “There is a constant stream of generals, admirals, senators
and congressmen here. Senator Margaret Chase Smith is due on the fourteenth and the
Judd Committee on the twenty-seventh.” So they were all coming out to see what was
going on, and let me see.
LC: The Judd Committee would be a reference to Walter Judd from Minnesota?
DB: Yeah. Right. Right. He was very interested in the Far East. Let me see,
there were some other citations—oh, well, Anna Rosenberg. That was November 16,
1952. “Anna Rosenberg arrived today on her Far Eastern tour.”
LC: She was the—
DB: She was the deputy secretary, I think deputy secretary of the defense for manpower.
LC: Yes. Now this was 1952 that she arrived. I think you have a photo of her that Dixie, actually, Dixie’s in the photograph that I saw.
DB: Right. Your office made a copy of that.
LC: Yes. That’s right.
DB: Then December 21, 1952, I sent a clipping from the Saigon paper, which was a photo of Henry Luce that was taken by Dixie.
LC: Did you happen to meet him?
DB: No. In fact, I had even forgotten that he was there. Let me see, it was April 4, 1952 when Stevenson was there. In Hanoi, they had dinner with Governor Tri. The next night with General Linares, L-I-N-A-R-E-S. They flew to Angkor for an hour-and-a-half. Then went to Phnom Penh and had dinner at the royal palace with the prince regent. The king was in Europe and Dixie was quite impressed with Stevenson. I did see Stevenson later when he was at the United Nations. Our son Alan was going to go to camp in Massachusetts. I would take him up to New York. Then a bus would take the group of campers from New York City up to Lennox, Massachusetts. So I had written to Senator, or Ambassador Stevenson and mentioned the connection with Dixie and asked if my son—I said I would like my son to meet him. So the secretary replied that Mr. Stevenson was having a very busy day, but he would work us in. She gave us a time to come to the office. Then she said, “Well, Mr. Stevenson is quite busy,” but she said, “You may ride with him up. He’s going up to see the Egyptian ambassador somewhere up on Park Avenue.” She said, “You and your son may ride with him.” So, we did have a few minutes to chat with him. He was very nice, very patrician. It was a very brief encounter, but I thought it was important for Alan. Then the driver said he would take us anywhere we wanted to go.
LC: Where did you go? Do you remember?
DB: I can’t remember. (Laughs)
LC: Does Alan recall that? Does he remember it now?
DB: I’m not sure. We haven’t talked about that in a while.
LC: About how old would he have been then?
DB: Let’s see.
LC: Twelve or fourteen, maybe not even that old.
DB: Well, I can’t remember when he was an ambassador to the United—I’d have
to look that up.
LC: Yeah, 1962 or ’63, somewhere in there?
DB: Probably.
LC: Yeah.
DB: On the fourteenth, on the eighteenth of April, 195—we’re in 1953—Dixie
went to Hanoi with a visiting congressman. Then he went on to Hong Kong. On the
fourth of May, he went to Laos where he was in the thick of things in Vientiane and
Luang Prabang. On the eleventh of May, he returned from Laos. He had taken pictures
of the king before he left for France. May 14-15 he was in Haiphong until the twenty-
first of May. The sixth of June, he met Senator Magnuson and Senator Dirksen, who
were en route to Saigon. Then, the eighth of August he had been in Phnom Penh all
week. Then September 8, 1953, Senator Noland arrived from Hong Kong. Dixie left
with him and his entourage Saturday morning to visit Laos and Hanoi. Then he went to
Singapore on business October fourth. Then on the eighteenth of April he went to Hue
and Touranne. Then it was the Nixon visit.
LC: I’m scribbling down notes. This is almost sounds like there was kind of a set
jaunt for VIP visitors.
DB: Oh, yes. Yes.
LC: That Dixie would go on, more or less, each of these rounds.
DB: Oh, yes. Right.
LC: To take the official photographs of the visit would be my guess.
DB: The Nixons were also in Da Lat. They went up to Da Lat to meet Bao Dai.
LC: Yes, you mentioned that. Did you ever see Bao Dai yourself?
DB: No, I didn’t.
LC: Did Dixie? Do you know?
DB: He didn’t hang around Saigon.
LC: No. He didn’t hang around Indochina, really.
DB: No. He was on the Riviera.

LC: Yes, which I could actually see that, but it didn’t do him much good politically to be on the Riviera. But perhaps it was more entertaining.

DB: But that’s where he was. When he came to Vietnam, he was in Da Lat where it was cool.

LC: Yes, he would stay up there. Do you know whether Dixie had a chance to photograph him or meet with him ever?

DB: I don’t know. I don’t remember. I don’t think we have a picture of Bao Dai, although Dixie was with them when he went there. So he must have had some. There was in Phnom Penh, I have a program. The king, what was his name, Norodom Sihanouk gave a dinner for the Nixons on the thirtieth of October 1953. I have the program.

LC: You do? Wow. Is it in French?

DB: There’s one section in French and one section in English. There were four ballets. Dixie was, you know, with the Nixons for that event.

LC: Do you have it right at hand there?

DB: I have it in my hand, yes.

LC: Can you go ahead and read at least the English sections, just so that we can get a sense of—

DB: Of the dance—

LC: Sure, and of the program, and maybe what was for dessert.

DB: Well, I don’t know if I can pronounce these things right. It’s Preach, P-R-E-A-C-H. This is the title, “Chinavong’s Legend. His studies being over, Prince Preach Chinavong takes leave of his teacher, the great hermit, who presents him with a magic sword before his coming back home. Overcome with fatigue after a long walk in the forest, the prince falls asleep under a tall tree. While sleeping, he is robbed of his magic sword by a white monkey. When he wakes up, he discovers the disappearing of his sword. Desperate, he starts in search of it.” That’s the first paragraph and it’s a whole page.

LC: Wow. So they explain in great detail. This was the principal entertainment, then, it seems, from the program.
DB: Right. Right.
LC: Is it embossed with Mr. and well, Vice-President and Mrs. Nixon’s names?
DB: It says, “Danses Khmeres executee parla troupe royal in honor of son
excellence Monsieur le Vice President des Etats-Unis d’Amerique etde Madame Richard
M. Nixon.”
LC: That’s quite something to have. That’s an amazing artifact. The date was
the thirtieth of October 1953, part of that visit. You mentioned from your letter that the
Nixons did have an opportunity, it sounds, to go up to Angkor Wat, as well.
DB: Well, they all trouped by Angkor Wat. That was the thing to do in addition
to checking out the military situation.
LC: Right.
DB: That was kind of incidental.
LC: How American, hundreds of millions of American dollars are being spent
and then, of course, you’ve got to go to Angkor Wat. I think last time we talked about
you yourself having made visits over there.
DB: Having made what?
LC: Visits to Angkor Wat, you and Dixie together with many others, I’m sure.
You went several times, did you not?
DB: Yes, I think I was there three times.
LC: I can’t recall whether I asked you this last time, but, can you sort of describe
the state of it then? Was it very, very overgrown? I know there are different complexes
but thinking about the main wat there.
DB: The main wat—that area, that was not overgrown. I’m just looking at a
photo of it right here on my shelf.
LC: One of Dixie’s photos?
DB: Uh-huh.
LC: Wow.
DB: I think that one was Dixie’s. Then I have a couple that are Werner
Bischof’s, not Werner Bischof but the other fellow. I can’t remember his name, from—
he was [Swiss]. I can’t think of his name.
LC: Who did he work for?
DB: He was passing by.
LC: Okay.
DB: But, when you got into Bantay Srei and some of the other more distant monuments it covers a tremendous area.
LC: Yes.
DB: I don’t know if it’s something like thirty square miles. I would have to check that. The best book on Angkor Wat, I think, is the *Ancient Khmer Empire* by Lawrence Palmer Briggs. That is a very scholarly tome published by the Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, in—let me see, what year was that—1951.
LC: The title again Dorothy? *Ancient Khmer—*
DB: The *Ancient Khmer Empire* issued as Volume 41, Part 1, of the transactions of the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for promoting useful knowledge, Independence Square 1951. This is a very scholarly tome. It was illustrated with pictures and great detail about the whole thing.
LC: Did you acquire that here in the States, your copy?
DB: I had a copy of my own, but this, I don’t know what happened to it, this copy was Dixie’s. He was a great collector of books. He always wrote his name and where he bought the book and the date. So this is signed Dixie Reese, Hong Kong, 1952. He bought a lot of books every time he went to Hong Kong. He’d return loaded with books, but these pictures do show the overgrowth. There was restoration going on at that time. The French—let me see—there was a French—it wasn’t [Henri Marchal], but a rather famous French archaeologist was there about that time when we were there. Then, of course, as things deteriorated in Cambodia, there was very little done. Then after, I remember reading, the Indian archaeologists were in there. I guess now there are perhaps many, many nations, many nationalities archaeologists working on continuing the restoration, which of course, they suffered, I’m sure, enormously during the Cambodian War. That was really a bad time.
LC: The Khmer Rouge?
DB: Then, of course, there have been, I understand there have been artifacts removed from Angkor.
LC: I’m sure that’s true.
DB: I have two photos here that I’m looking at that on the wall that Dixie took. One is two young men in one of those places. They just have little trunks on. One has a scarf around his neck and the other one is, I think, it’s the same little boy in front of one of the apsaras. Dixie had a photo of the apsaras which he had made into note cards that we used back then.

LC: Well, Dorothy, the letters that you have and the dates you’ve given for the various trips that Dixie took.

DB: I’m having a hard time hearing you, Laura.

LC: Okay, let me just see if I can change—how’s that? Better?

DB: That’s better. Thank you.

LC: Dixie, let me ask about another VIP whose visit you mentioned at one point, and that’s John Foster Dulles. Do you recall his visit?

DB: Well, I don’t have anything in my notes about John Foster Dulles, but I do recall that he was out there. He had a huge entourage. They went to Laos and there was no place for them to stay. That’s my main recollection of that now. That must have been—let’s see. He was under Eisenhower.

LC: Yes.

DB: So that was somewhere between ’52 and ’55.

LC: I would well believe it.

DB: I don’t know whether Dixie was with him on that or not. I can’t remember.

LC: For the congressional committees, and you’ve mentioned some of the senators, Everett Dirksen and so on, Margaret Chase Smith, did you meet any of them as they came through?

DB: No. No, I didn’t. No, I was working.

LC: You were busy. Yes. Well, one of the other things that I wanted to ask you about involves the storm that took place, the typhoon.

DB: Oh, yes.

LC: Do you recall that? This is October 1952.

DB: Right. I do. I have notes on that. It was Monday, October twentieth, 1952. “We had an unusual rainstorm, which began at 4:00AM. I’m writing this now at 11:00PM. It’s still raining. We have winds of terrific velocity. I was told that this will
probably last another day.” Then, that was Monday. Then Tuesday I wrote, “The
typhoon did great damage. About half the trees in Saigon appear to be down. There are
no telephones, no electricity. Air traffic is at a standstill. It’s still raining, but the wind
has subsided. The roof blew off Helen’s kitchen last night. We couldn’t go to the
hospital. Auto traffic is impossible. Many cars were damaged by having trees fallen on
them. There were supposedly three thousand trees down. There was a flood at Bien
Hoa,” where the pottery is made. “Phan Thiet, a hundred miles northeast of Saigon had a
tidal wave. The population of Phan Thiet was about twenty thousand with five hundred
drowned, bridge out, hundreds of huts destroyed. Dixie flew up on the mission plane
with relief supplies. A Catholic cemetery was uprooted and bones were everywhere.
Hospital patients were evacuated by air to Saigon and women and children were also
evacuated to Saigon.” That’s all I have on that.

LC: Do you, as you think about it now, recall, remember the storm?
DB: Oh, yes, definitely.
LC: Where were you?
DB: I was in—I had lived in the hotel first. Then the French, I guess it was the
French, built an apartment house for the Americans. It was on Rue Miche, 6 Rue Miche.
It was very small. It was one room with a bathroom, a kitchen, a closet and a little
balcony. So the bed was in the room and the table and a couple of chairs. That’s where I
was.
LC: Was it a pretty frightening experience? Do you recall?
DB: Well, it was a little scary. I mean, you never know what’s—well, I felt,
actually I felt safe in that building. It was as compared with a lot of the structures, I think
it was concrete block. It seemed to be well constructed.
LC: One of the things that you mentioned when you showed me the photograph,
again, an aerial photograph taken above the presidential palace in Saigon before the storm
showing all the trees, large groves of trees, right around the building. I remember you
mentioning—
DB: Saigon was so beautiful, the wide boulevards and the many thousands of
trees. It was a beautiful city. When we went back in 1997 and 2000, of course, it had
changed somewhat, but to me, it never had the small-town charm and beauty that it had in the early ‘50s.

LC: Was part of that the destruction during this storm?

DB: Well, yes. I don’t know. Things looked kind of seedy. It didn’t look as if things had—the streets weren’t maintained very well. It just didn’t look very good.

Although there were, of course, a lot of new buildings—the Caravelle Hotel which was sort of famous during the war I guess because all the correspondents stayed there, but that was not there in our day.

LC: Yes. That was built well after you left Saigon.

DB: Yes.

LC: With all of the visiting and all of the traveling that Dixie did both before and after you were married, did you miss him when he was away?

DB: Oh, yes.

LC: Did he write to you or, usually he wasn’t gone—

DB: He wasn’t gone that long. He would cable me. We had—you couldn’t call home in those days.

LC: Right. No cell phones.

DB: From Hong Kong, you had to make an appointment for a radio call. So there was no telephone communication and letters took at least a week.

LC: He’d be back by then, usually.

DB: Yeah. So everything was cable. We would cable each other.

LC: Where would, cables for you, where would he have them directed? To the hospital or to your home?

DB: Oh, no. No. I don’t remember whether it was to—it was probably to the apartment.

LC: To the apartment? Would they be left for you or how would you call for them?

DB: I don’t remember how I actually got them whether they were delivered or what. I don’t recall that detail. I just remember how happy I was to get them.

LC: I’ll bet. I’ll bet you were, especially given some of the places that he was going. Did he tell you his impressions of Laos or did you ever get up there yourself?
DB: Yes, I did. I was determined to get up to Laos. So, we went in—let me see, was that January or might have even been March of ’55. We flew up to, well, I had been to—let me see. I had been to Vientiane one time with Dixie. I don’t have a notation of when that was, but before I left in either January, early ’55, we flew up on to Vientiane, no, Luang Prabang on a French military plane with a lot of the natives and the cows, not the cows, the chickens and the ducks and everything else onboard.

LC: Sure.

DB: Luang Prabang is in a deep valley. It was enshrouded in clouds. So we had to circle down to get to the airfield. I was scared to death. We spent a couple of days there. There was no place to stay except the mission house. That was a big log house with, you know, the animals underneath. Then, the men slept in one end of it and the women slept in the other end. Then we took a pirogue and went up the Mekong to that cave where there are thousands of Buddhas on the left side and—

LC: Were there thousands of—

DB: I noticed—pardon?

LC: Were there thousands of statues of Buddha?

DB: Yeah. You had to climb up to get into the cave. I notice now that on some of the trips that I read about, I get the Yale University trips. I noticed that one of them they were going up to this cave [Pak Ou]. I’ve forgotten the name of it. But Dixie took pictures of the king then and he had been, King Sisavang Vong had been in office shall I say for fifty years. There was a special, a very beautiful stamp issued. I was collecting stamps. In fact, last evening I just happened to be looking. I’m amazed at the collection I have.


DB: They’re not terribly well displayed. They’re just in little glossy envelopes, but we bought all the stamps that were available of this special commemorative issue. I have those in the safe-deposit box, because I think they may be quite valuable.

LC: It’s possible, yes. I would think so, yes.

DB: That was my one and only trip to Luang Prabang. It was a real Shangri La. I mean, it was so primitive. I guess the story was told, this would have been in Vientiane when the American aid first gave the first check to the, I don’t know, prime minister or
whoever was in charge. He rode up to the embassy building, which wasn’t much of a
building, on his bicycle. The next day, I may have told you this, he called and said
“What do I do with this check?” (Laughs) I don’t know how true that is, but that was the
story that was going around. Carter De Paul was head of the mission at that time. I think
he was the one who reported that story.

LC: I believe it, actually. Speaking with another—

DB: You’re getting very weak again.

LC: Speaking with another person who spent some time in Laos, he said that it
was sort of like going back to the 12th or 13th Century.

DB: I wasn’t there then, but I’m old, but I’m not that old.

LC: It gave him that sense. It gave him that sense that there really were very,
very few modern improvements. He was there—

DB: It was primitive, to say the least.

LC: Were you admitted to the king’s presence?

DB: No. No. I didn’t go to the palace. I don’t remember—I think I was not—I
think Dixie may have asked and the request was declined.

LC: I would believe that. How many—can you describe kind of the layout of
Luang Prabang at that time? Where was the—

DB: There wasn’t much to it. I do remember the palace was right on the river.
We had some wonderful photos of the palace from the air. But, I really can’t—you
know, dirt roads just like being out in the country somewhere.

LC: How many people? Very crowded or not so?

DB: I don’t remember. I don’t think it was as—it was not I’m sure as well
populated as Vientiane, which was the administrative capital whereas Luang Prabang was
the royal capital.

LC: What was your impression of Vientiane?

DB: Well, it was rather nice. I don’t remember where we stayed there, but there
was an important wat, temple, or something you had to go and see. I’m sure I have
pictures of that. That was the thing to see in Vientiane. I think I was there early on and I
really don’t remember too much about it.

LC: Dorothy, let’s take a break there for a minute.
Now, Dorothy, I want to ask you about the security situation in Saigon during 1955. This is something that, early 1955, many writers have spoken about this, in the secondary sources, as if it was a relatively easy feat for President Diem who was in office with US support to eliminate some of his foes in the Saigon region. Is that how it seemed to you while you were there?

DB: It was—I wasn’t there. I was in Hong Kong from late January until probably around the first of April. But, of course, I was reading the headlines in the Hong Kong paper about the tense situation in Vietnam. Of course, on the fourteenth of March, I believe it was, the battle of Dien Bien Phu began. Then that ended on the seventh of May.

LC: Right. This is 1954.

DB: No. Oh, yeah, 1954. Oh, okay. So you wanted ’55. Okay let me see. In ’55, yes, let me think. I was—I have to shift gears here.

LC: That’s okay. That’s okay. That’s fine.

DB: In ’55, January ’55.

LC: I think you were telling about—

DB: Oh, yes. We went up to Laos.

LC: Right, exactly.

DB: Yes. Things were getting kind of scary. I was wondering about sending things home and wondering if we would be evacuated. Then I did leave the twenty-fourth of March. Alan and Dixie and I went to Manila to visit friends. Then we went to Hong Kong and had some time together. Then Alan and I left for Hawaii. Well, we stopped in Japan, went to, for a few days, and went to Hong Kong, Hawaii. I was going to take some home-leave. Let me see now. So anyway—

LC: You said you wondered if American personnel might be evacuated. Did that word kind of come out from the embassy that people should at least be prepared?

DB: No. No. It was just in a tense situation you just wonder because there were a fair number of Americans there at the time, and families, because originally they couldn’t bring their—people couldn’t bring their families but later on they were allowed to as more housing became available. So anyway, we left Dixie at Hong Kong. I had a—I don’t know if I should say this or not—I had a very strange feeling. The feeling I
had, it was somewhat intuitive, I don’t know, that we would never all be together again, but I had the feeling something was going to happen to Alan and to me. Instead it was Dixie. There was a picture. He was killed on April 29, 1955. There was a picture in, I don’t know, I think it was a Washington paper. I had a picture at one time of the day before he was killed. He was on the street and there was all this smoke from gunfire and so on. He and Howard Simpson, it was taken from the back, from behind them, but they were out in all this gunfire and all this warfare, so to speak. I was, of course, very concerned and really frightened then. Of course, I hadn’t seen that picture until later, but, you know, the news was not good. When the news came that an American had been killed, my heart sank because I just knew it was Dixie. Well, the official word didn’t come for several days because it was, I believe, three days before they were able to recover the bodies of the—he was in a French, a small French plane that was just the pilot and himself. They were shot down by the Binh Xuyen in the Binh Xuyen territory of Cholon on the far side of the Arroyo Chinois. Of course, that was an extremely traumatic time for me. I was just numb for months, but I was fortunate in that Public Health Service allowed me to stay on the payroll and gave me some what they called administrative leave. Then there was a position available for me. That was very good that I had something to occupy my mind, but I remember going to the ladies room one day and meeting one of my colleagues. She said—oh, I’ve forgotten the expression she used about how sad I looked all that summer, which was—well, I certainly had justification for it.

LC: Absolutely.

DB: So, what else would you like me to say about—?

LC: I just wonder how did you actually—how were you given official notification, Dorothy? Can you say how that came to you about his death?

DB: Well, actually, it was a telephone call from the Division of International Health of the Public Health Service.

LC: By telephone, they called you?

DB: Yes. I don’t remember getting any written. It took months to get the death certificate. I think it was October before the death certificate came. It was Randy Kidder was in the embassy. He was I think the number two man in the embassy. The Kidders
were friends of ours. I had written to Randy. It was only through his intervention that we finally got the death certificate because nothing could be settled until that occurred.

LC: So you have all that hanging over your head as well.

DB: Right, anxiety and frustration and so on.

LC: Did you know who the Binh Xuyen were?

DB: No. We were aware of these sects, you know, the Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai and the Binh Xuyen and apparently they collaborated. There was a theory which a friend of ours had said that really it was the French who were behind this, getting these sects to try to get Diem off, out of there. I found that at first preposterous, because I said, “I don’t know how they could be after Dixie. He was such a Francophile.” He just loved France and French and so on and the French pilot, but that—I don’t know. It’s just you don’t know how much is fact and how much is fiction.

LC: That’s right.

DB: In those situations.

LC: Well, right, and especially since you weren’t there.

DB: I was glad I wasn’t there. I think it would’ve been worse for me.

LC: Yes. I could imagine that it would have been. In some ways, he also knew that you were safe on the other side of things. He knew that you and Alan both were safe in the US. Now, Dixie’s service and him losing his life in the service of the country has been honored in several different places. I think, Dorothy, it would be very useful for people who might be following this story via this oral history interview with you, to know some of the locations where his name has been included as someone who served the country and lost his life in the process. Can you talk about some of those memorials?

DB: Well, yes. The first one was the, his name was inscribed on the Memorial Wall at the Department of State here in Washington, D.C. That was in, I would say that was in March of 1973. It was the time the American ambassador, the state department had not had a memorial wall until this ambassador in Guatemala had been murdered. It was strange. I received a call one evening that this, my husband’s name, from the state department, my husband’s name was on this memorial wall and they were having a ceremony the next day in the state department to which I was invited. So naturally I
went. Secretary Kissinger was there at the time and also President Nixon was there. I didn’t meet him personally at that time.

LC: But they were both present?

DB: They were both present and they both gave a talk. Dixie’s name had been inscribed on the wall. There were only about, oh, I’d say half-a-dozen, ten or twelve at the most, names at that time. We were back—I took Alan back there in December of last year, 2005. They have so many names that they have two walls with names. I mean, it’s just phenomenal. The Foreign Service is truly a hazardous occupation today. It’s such a dangerous world. So the second place that his name was inscribed was the Journalists’ Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. This was a part of the Newseum, a museum of news, which was established by the Gannett Foundation. The Newseum closed two years ago. They are constructing a new one down on Constitution Avenue in Washington across from the National Gallery of Art. The current, what do I call it, the current—what am I trying to say?

LC: The memorial?

DB: The memorial is a beautiful glass and steel spiral with, they are plates, glass plates on which are inscribed the name, the year, and the place of the death. It’s international, any newsperson, anywhere in the world. It starts, I think, in the 1860s with a Baltimore newsman who was killed. I guess that was during, around the time of the Civil War. Each year there is a memorial service the first week in May. It’s a rededication with the names of the additional persons who were killed during the past year. Now there are so many that the memorial is practically full of names. So in the new establishment, the memorial wall will be two stories high. It encompasses a large area, but it certainly won’t have the beauty and the charm and the grace of the current one because it’s on a, the site is on a high point. When the sun strikes it, you get all this reflection of colors and it’s just beautiful, truly. I hope that they’ll be able to maintain that as well as the new one.

LC: That’s what I was going to ask, are they going to leave the initial one that is in Arlington?

DB: Beg your pardon?

LC: Are they going to leave the initial structure that you described?
DB: Well, I keep asking about it and they always say they haven’t made any
decision. They won’t give you any information about that. So I don’t know. But the
new one is supposed to open, I think, I guess it’s in ’07, next year.

LC: This will be also called the Museum of News, as far as you know?
DB: Yes, Newseum, N-E-W-S-E-U-M.
LC: Right. I remember that. Yeah.
DB: Now, actually, the Newseum, Dixie is in there because of his freelance
work, not because of his government service, because government employees are not
supposed to be included in the Memorial Wall. So he’s there because of his freelance
work. The third place is the AID, Agency for International Development, building which
is in the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C. That was dedicated in May of
19—last year, 2005. I was there, of course, for that. So those were the, those are the
three, that’s not a nice memorial. It has the AID logo which is sort of a handshake in
black. Then there are the tiles on the wall with the name, I think the place and the year.
To me, it’s not an attractive design at all. It’s functional, not any great beauty to it.

LC: Dorothy, were you consulted about the inclusion of Dixie’s name on any of
these memorials?
DB: No. No I wasn’t. It was sort of, in my view, spontaneous. It just happened
and I was notified.

LC: Does it help you and has it helped Alan at all to have these kinds of public
spaces where his name is inscribed and his—
DB: No. It’s very nice to know that he was recognized for his work and that he
gave his life, really, for the country, really, and not in a military sense.
LC: That’s correct. Yes
DB: But as a civilian. It’s very nice to know that that tribute has been made and
that his name will be there for generations, hopefully.

LC: Yes. You mentioned to me while you were here that you and Alan decided to
go to Vietnam together. This will be the first time that he had been back since being just
an infant. How did you two come to that decision?
DB: I had been wanting to return to Vietnam for a long time. I was in the
Philippines. I was in Guam in 1967. I went on to the Philippines and Hong Kong and
Japan, but I didn’t go to Saigon because things were quite dangerous at that time. They
were shooting up the Pan-Am planes at Tan Son Nhut Airport. So I, having lost my
husband there I didn’t want Alan to lose his mother there. So I didn’t go there in 1967.
But in 19—so I had been wanting to return. Of course, I wanted to take Alan, but I did
not want to go until we had diplomatic representation, until we had an ambassador in
Hanoi. So, I think that occurred about 1995. I’m not sure of the exact date.

LC: I think you’re exactly right. It was 1995.
DB: I’ve forgotten the name of the ambassador. He had been a congressman
from Florida. His name escapes me.

LC: Pete Peterson?
DB: Well, I’m not sure.

LC: I’m not sure if he was the first ambassador, but he had been a POW (prisoner
of war). He was later made ambassador.
DB: Well, but he, that could be correct. I’m not sure.
LC: But you wanted to wait until—
DB: Until things were a little more stable. So, in 1997, it was very interesting
that the—we were planning to go in November. I was thinking of the rainy season
should be over by then. At that time the book Requiem came out. Requiem is a book that
was put together by Horst Faas and Tim Page. It’s a tribute to the 135 photographers
who were killed in Indochina. It’s a beautiful book with an introduction by David
Halberstam. Dixie’s pictures are in the beginning because they represent a period of
relative tranquility, particularly in the South, where the action was in the North. So then
it goes into the pictures of Larry Burrows and all the war photographers who were killed.
I can’t remember all their names right now.

LC: Of course. Sure.
DB: In fact, Katherine Leroy, she was a French photographer who went out there
when she was twenty-one. She just died two weeks ago. Last year she had published a
book called Under Fire: Writers, I think it’s Great Writers and Photographers in
Indochina. I got the book, but I was very disappointed in it. The pictures, the photos are
mainly from Requiem. They have some photos by photographers who made it out who
are still living. So, let me see, where am I now?
LC: You were telling about the decision to go back in November.

DB: Oh, we went, we flew to Hong Kong first. I wanted to take Alan to Mathilda Hospital where he was born. We saw a friend of my second husband, Arthur Bloomfield, there. He was a Chinese banker who had been a colleague of Arthur in the pre-communist period. Then we went from—we flew from Saigon—from Hong Kong to Bangkok. We spent some time there doing the touristy things for about a week. Then we took the Orient Express from Bangkok to Singapore with a stop in Penang. That was a wonderful trip, enjoyed that so much. Then from, in Singapore, which I had been in several times and then the beginning, of course, in Bangkok—in ’52 in Bangkok and in Singapore, there were open sewers, it was, it was really rather primitive, too.

LC: Yes.

DB: Then we spent time in Singapore—no, we didn’t go to Singapore. We went to—let me see. Yes we did go to Singapore. We stayed at the Ritz-Carlton and from there we flew to Hanoi and we stayed at the Planet Hotel. Talk about going from the sublime to the ridiculous. That Planet Hotel wasn’t very much. It was on a corner and outside the traffic in Hanoi, you know all the cycles and bicycles and motor scooters and the noise, it was terrific. Then they had on the light poles, they had the speakers, you know. So the communist could pass the message and the news and so on and so forth. So we spent, oh, I don’t know, three or four days there I guess.

LC: Long days, probably.

DB: Yeah. We had a feeling we were being followed. There was a lady who seemed to be everywhere we were. Of course, we did have a guide. This was a tour that, the Indochina, or the Vietnam part was a tour. I think it was a thousand dollars for the two of us. There were two other men on the tour. So there were just four of us, but it was, they were good company. Then we went to Hue and did the Imperial Palace and so on. We were waiting for the car to pick us up in the lobby and they had a television there with Larry King Live. It seemed so incongruous.

LC: I’ll bet. Yes. That’s very strange. Yeah.

DB: Then we went over the—we went by car to, went over the mountain. It was a beautiful trip to, I think, whether it was—I think it was Da Nang and we went to that
ancient city, Hoi An. Actually, I didn’t go there. I was so tired. We had been to Marble
Mountain and I had climbed Marble Mountain.

LC: Oh, my goodness.

DB: Of course, it’s not that high.

LC: Well, right, but it’s the heat and everything else. Right.

DB: I didn’t go to Hoi An, which I regret. Alan and the men who were on the
trip went, but I stayed in the car and sort of dozed. Then we went on down to Saigon
and, of course, that was very thrilling to me. In fact, you know Vietnam was the—those
were the happiest years of my life. So, we wanted to—of course, the street names had all
been changed from French names. We wanted to find the place where Dixie was killed.
We had letters from friends who had described the situation and the location. We were
looking for maps. I did recall that there were maps in the post office. So I went there and
we took photos. I took them down to Uri Center and I believe they made photos of them,
the maps that were in the post office. We found some other old French maps, which
again, I think I copied. So we went out to Cholon. I think it was Rue Gallieni at that
time, to the circle in Cholon. You go around the circle about three-quarters of the way
and turn left, or turn right from there. You go over the bridge which was over the Arroyo
Chinois. We turned. We didn’t know where to go from there, but we turned left at the
first street, which is just a dirt road. Well, we went down there a way and there were just
a lot of huts on both sides of the street. We thought, well, this looks like a dead end. I
had noticed however, there were two old men sitting in front of one of these huts. I
suggested to Alan and the interpreter that they go and talk to those men, and see if they
knew anything because they looked old enough to have been there or have known
something about it in 1955. Well, they came running back saying they know about it. So
we piled out of the car and spent about two hours with these men who—we tried not to
tell them. We just asked questions. Did they know about anything that happened around
this time? Was there ever a plane shot down, those kinds of questions. They said yes,
that a plane had been shot down. There were two, two people in the plane. That it had
taken three days to uncover the bodies. That it was action of the Binh Xuyen. This
fellow had been in the Binh Xuyen.

LC: He had a been a member of it or a—
DB: Well, he said he wasn’t there that day. He was somewhere else. I don’t know if he was fighting or what, but he wasn’t there that day.

LC: But he had been associated with the Binh Xuyen?

DB: Right. So he said—he gave us some Cokes, or we had some drinks and visited and met his family who were in the back. Then he said, “Would you like to see where it was?” So, of course, we did want to see. He took us down the street and we turned right and then by some fishponds and some other huts into a wide open space. He pointed to the far end and said that’s where it was. So, we meditated there for a few minutes. It was an emotional experience.

LC: Yes, ma’am. Yes.

DB: But one that we very much wanted to have. Then, we left and we had a pic—we had photos, of course, of the man and the site and so on, which I believe I showed you.

LC: Yes, you did. Yes.

DB: Then in 2000, we wanted to go back because that was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon, April twenty-ninth. Incidentally, Dixie was killed on the twenty-ninth of April 1955. Saigon fell April 29, 1975, which always seemed to me to be quite a coincidence.

LC: It’s a very strange thing. Yes.

DB: But in 2000, the Requiem exhibition, the book *Requiem*, there were exhibitions which traveled in Europe and Asia, Japan and all over the United States. One of those exhibitions was being given to the government of Vietnam in Hanoi. So we went. Alan and I went March 1st in 2000 to attend that dedication. We were there a few days early. This time we were staying at the Metropole Hotel, which pleased me so much because Dixie always stayed at the Metropole. It was the French hotel, sort of, perhaps comparable with the Continental in Saigon.

LC: Had you stayed there yourself with him?

DB: No. I had never been there. I had been to Hanoi a couple of times, but I stayed with the nurse consultant in her apartment.

LC: But you were able to stay where he had stayed this time?
DB: Yes. Of course, we were in the new section. There was new section which was very nice, but still you absorb the sights and smells and ambiance, which was nice.

LC: Yes. Sure.

DB: So then, we were there a few days early. So we went up to Sapa which was on the China border. We took a train, a night train to—it was supposed to be a tourist train, but I’ll tell you, it was the oldest clap-trap, oldest train. We got to the compartment and there was a guard from the embassy with his girlfriend. They were in the two beds and then Alan and I—they were upper and lower. Alan and I were on the other side and the bathroom facilities were awful. I mean, it was terrible.

LC: I believe you.

DB: It took all night. We got to Lao Cai. It was right on the border. The Chinese were there, “No pictures. No pictures. No pictures.” From there we were taken in a, not a Jeep, a station wagon or something, up to—it was about a half-an-hour or forty-five minute ride up to Sapa. It was a beautiful spot and they have snow up there.

LC: No kidding? I didn’t know that.

DB: Yeah. They had had snow the week before we were there. The pictures I have, there are no leaves on the trees. They hadn’t come out yet. We had a modern hotel there. It was very cold and I had only summer clothing. So I was freezing. The market was interesting, with the Black Thai and the Red Thai were in that area. Of course, they have different dialects and the market was just fascinating. Then Alan took a trip, a walking trip through a valley there that was just beautiful. I stayed in the car and sort of watched them from on high. There are some lovely pictures of that area. It’s really beautiful. So then, well, I developed bronchitis. I was really sick. When we went back to Hanoi, I went to the doctor, some local doctor and got some medication. We attended the dedication of this exhibition. All the famous generals, I guess, all the communist generals that are still living were there. I can’t tell you who they were. Then we went from there directly to Saigon that time. We didn’t do Hue and Da Nang and all again. I never got to Touranne, although I did go a couple of times to Nha Trang. So then we spent the rest of the time in Saigon. Again we went back to this place in Cholon and this time, in 2000, we were looking for the man. Fortunately we had the picture of him.

LC: Sure.
DB: We walked—we drove down the road and didn’t see him anywhere. Finally Alan got out of the car and showed the picture to a gentleman on the—oh, somewhere along there, and asked through the interpreter if they knew this man. They said, “Oh, yeah.” So they took him to this place where this man was, the man whom we had met three years previously.

LC: Do you remember his name, Dorothy?

DB: I don’t know if I even have his name.

LC: Okay. That’s okay.

DB: I may, but I don’t know. My things are in such a state of disorganization. So anyway, Alan comes walking out of this alley with this man. It was like, old home week. We embraced each other. He was so surprised to see us again. We spent some time with him and went to the site again. This time they were constructing a building back there. He said it was going to be an apartment house. So anyway, we—

LC: On the site, on the crash site, or right near there?

DB: Yes. It was very muddy and all, but I suppose from the rain. Then, anyway, Alan had taken, gotten—we had stopped in Cholon at one of the Chinese temples. He had gotten some incense sticks. He knelt down on the ground and lit those and sort of meditated, I guess prayed for a few minutes. He said it was absolutely—it was astounding. The construction workers all stopped. They just paused what they were doing until Alan got up.

LC: Just by seeing him, noting that he was involved in some kind of contemplation.

DB: Right.

LC: They stopped the work on the building and construction work?

DB: Yes.

LC: Wow.

DB: So that was a moving experience.

LC: Very much so.

DB: So then that was our second trip. I don’t know if we’ll ever get to go again or not. It’s a long trip for me at this point.
LC: Well, you’ve been terrifically brave and, I think, wonderfully kind to take Alan there on two different occasions and show him, not only Vietnam now, but your Vietnam.

DB: Yes.

LC: How fortunate he is to have you in order to do that.

DB: You know, without having had a father, it was terribly important for me to have him sort of relive some of our experiences in a way and to have that background knowledge and experience.

LC: Yes, absolutely. I would think it would be very fulfilling for him and help him understand, too. Let’s take a break there Dorothy.
Laura Calkins: This is Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I’m continuing the oral history interview with Dorothy Reese Bloomfield. Today is the twenty-eighth of July 2006. I’m in Lubbock and Mrs. Bloomfield is speaking by telephone from her home in Maryland. First of all, good morning, Dorothy.

Dorothy Bloomfield: Good morning, Laura.

LC: It’s a pleasure to speak with you again.

DB: Thank you. I’m glad to bring you up to date on a few other things in our interview about Dixie and Vietnam.

LC: Very good.

DB: I’ve certainly dredged up a lot of memories in these last few weeks and have been going over many of the letters and communications back and forth between Dixie and myself and also between me and my family. So those are really the sources, plus what memory I have.

LC: Yes ma’am.

DB: Have been the sources of this information. Well, I did want to speak, perhaps a little more in, not so much detail, as to give you some dates regarding Dixie’s visit to Dien Bien Phu.

LC: Yes, please.

DB: You know, in those days there, we didn’t have any telephone communication, either within the country or even abroad. The only telephones we had were within Saigon itself. So, the main way Dixie communicated with me when he was in the field was by cable. I have two cables from Hanoi from Dixie dated December 18, 1953 and the other one is December 20, 1953. Also, I have a letter written by Dixie on Sunday, December 20, 1953 from which I quote, “I leave at seven tomorrow morning for Dien Bien Phu. I don’t know how long I shall stay, but shall try to be back for Christmas. If I can’t make it back, I shall send a telegram,” end of quote. So, those were the specific dates. Of course, he did not return for Christmas, which made me very unhappy.

LC: I’ll bet.
DB: Then, I did tell you there are some fantastic pictures of Dien Bien Phu taken from the air. There was a photo, which perhaps Alan has. I may have given it to him—a picture of Dixie, Pierre Schoendorfer and Brigitte Friang, a French journalist, that was taken at Dien Bien Phu. Incidentally, I looked up Pierre Schoendorfer on the— the Internet is so wonderful.

LC: Yes.

DB: I looked up Pierre Schoendorfer and I was amazed at all of the things he’s done in his life. He’s just an amazing, an amazing fellow.

LC: Was he someone that you met?

DB: Oh, yes. He was a very close friend. He and Dixie were bosom pals. Oh, Pierre was—when he was in Saigon he was always around. Then I think I told you we had a big party for him when he was released from Dien Bien Phu. He had been taken prisoner there. So anyway, I regret that I haven’t kept in touch with him. I did call him once when I was in Paris in the early ’80s, but I really haven’t had any contact with him. But on the subject of other people who were there, I did mention John Meklin from *Time Magazine*. Later, he became chief of USIS in Saigon and wrote a book entitled *Mission in Torment*. Jack Dowling from *Time Magazine* was also around. Jack died, I think, about a year later. His name is also on the Journalist’s Memorial. John Rich was there with NBC (National Broadcasting Company). He married D Lee. There were a lot of marriages in this period. He married D Lee. I can’t remember her last name. She was secretary to Jim Hendrick who was chief of the mission in Hanoi. I had some contact with them for quite a while. I visited them once in I think it was 1967 when he was stationed in Japan. In the late ’50s—I don’t know—I think they were living in the New York area. John arranged for me to have an exhibition of Dixie’s photos at the Overseas Press Club in New York.

LC: Really?

DB: That was very nice. I can’t say exactly whether that was ’58 or ’59, somewhere in there. Then Werner Bischof, the Swiss photographer, I don’t know if I mentioned him.

LC: I don’t believe so.
DB: He was—that was August of ’52. He was in Saigon. He was a wonderfully perceptive photographer. He did several books, one in Japan, which is just priceless. He was killed the next year in South America. But, speaking of Warner reminds me of how generous Dixie was. I mean, as a host he was completely generous. To use the quotation, I don’t know if this quotation is still au courant, but he would give you the shirt off of his back. I remember he invited Werner. Werner didn’t have a hotel room and he stayed with Dixie. Dixie said, “Well, you can be my guest.” So it was just another example of his generosity to everyone, at least everyone he liked.

LC: Which it sounds like was most everyone.

DB: Right. Then there was another author who—I’ve got to go to the library somewhere. He wrote a book, a rather definitive book on Vietnam, which was the basis for the PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) film several years ago, PBS film entitled Vietnam. He, rather recently, within the last four or five years he wrote a book Paris after the War. He lived in the Washington, in Potomac nearby here. He married one of the secretaries in the embassy. I cannot bring up his name [Stanley Karnow]. But, anyway, I didn’t know him there. I remember his wife and also I remember Jim Patton. He was in the, young man in the embassy and his wife was Mary. They came back to Washington. He was a lawyer and was in the law or the firm Patton and Boggs which is probably one of the most powerful lobbying groups in Washington. I understand through mutual friends that they have retired and moved to Arizona. But they were among the people that were around. Then just sort of following up, I don’t know if I mentioned the first week I was in Saigon, there was a bomb set off at the opera house which was right in the center of town—not in the center of town but the center of the activity and that I had gone to Cap St. Jacques and Nha Trang the first week.

LC: You did mention those trips, but—

DB: Did I mention the leper colony?

LC: Just very briefly. This was—

DB: I don’t have any more information on that.

LC: Okay.

DB: The trip to Phnom—Kompong Thom, the sawmill project. I think I mentioned that.
LC: The sawmill project?

DB: Right.

LC: I don’t—can you say a little bit more about that?

DB: Yes. Oh, let’s see. That was April 30, 1952 to May fourth. Dixie had an assignment to photograph the American Sawmill Project. So, Dixie and I and one employee drove to Phnom Penh in the mission station wagon over a terrible road with rough spots, narrow. It was 150 miles to Phnom Penh. It took about five-and-a-half hours because it rained part of the time. The European hotel, which was the Hotel Royale in Phnom Penh, was full. So we had to stay at a Chinese hotel which wasn’t very good. Then on May first we left at 7:15 for Kompong Thom, arriving at eleven at the sawmill deep in the jungle. The compound where the men worked and ate was a large enclosure with barbed wire fence and four armed guards posts. One American works there. His family was in Phnom Penh. The men were cutting trees and sawing wood. Then we were there—let’s see. Kompong Thom, I said, was ten to fifteen miles from the sawmill. We had to go back and forth that night to stay in Kompong Thom. Then we went Friday to Phnom—Friday we returned to Phnom Penh and Sunday to Saigon. Then June first we went to My Tho. The roads were closed at 6:00PM so we could only travel in the daytime. On the second we continued to Bavat, B-A-V-A-T, a remote village where his assignment was to check on the program for repatriation of people from the Viet Minh. The compound again had a large fence enclosing it with many guards. Then I—lets see—the next thing, I said on June 19, 1952, this is sort of a commentary on the political scene. “Vietnam suddenly got a new president and cabinet. Things happen overnight. There are no elections. The new president lives at the end of the block where I am living.” I suppose that might have been when I was on Rue Miche. “The former president has not yet moved out of the palace.” Then on the twenty-fourth of June, that was ’52, Dixie left Saturday morning for central [Vietnam].” He worked day and night. Sunday’s and Saturday’s didn’t make any difference. He left Saturday morning, the twenty-fourth. Well, I wrote that on the twenty-fourth. He left Saturday morning for Central Vietnam. The Fourth of July we went to Angkor. August of ’52 was when Werner Bischof was there. Then we went into the storm. 11-01-52, we went to Phnom Penh for the Water Festival and watched the boat races from the royal barge.
LC: Right. You described that in interesting detail.

DB: Right. Then on Monday, October 10, 1952 was Bao Dai’s birthday. So we had the day off.

LC: Everybody had the day off?

DB: Oh, yes. We had so many holidays. We had the Vietnamese holidays, the French holidays, which were religious as well as political holidays, and the American holidays. There really wasn’t much time to work.

LC: Was that true at the hospital as well?

DB: Yes. Yes.

LC: No kidding?

DB: Then we went to another village, January 9, 1953, that was fifteen miles from Saigon on the way to Phnom Penh. It was a relocated village of four thousand. It was an unsafe area, but within the compound the people, the women were weaving mats and they were cutting and drying tobacco. It was a lot of tobacco grown. Of course, rice and rubber was—rubber plantations were prominent, prevalent.

LC: Did you visit one of the French plantations ever, Dorothy?

DB: Not really. No. We would see them as we drove by.

LC: Sure. Yeah.

DB: But we weren’t really in the plantation.

LC: Did you see people working, I mean, as you were driving by and, of course, some of them—

DB: Oh, yes. They’d be out in the fields, you know.

LC: They’d be out tapping.

DB: With their coolie hats and so on in the lovely rice fields.

LC: You mentioned that the village that you were visiting, it was a relocated village. What did that mean?

DB: Well, these people who were supposedly, you know, not communist would be brought together in a protected area to keep them from the Viet Minh, the communist Viet Minh.

LC: Were you, yourself clear on how widespread the Viet Minh influence was?
DB: Oh, yes because the roads—we couldn’t travel at night. The roads might be
mined. There were always—well, ammunition dump was blown up 8-31. That was ’52, I
think.

LC: Where was the ammo dump? Do you know?

DB: That was the out at Tan Son Nhut, at the airport. That was between 2:30 and
6:30AM. However Helen Roberts and I were in Bangkok at that time. So we missed it.
We missed the excitement—like fireworks, I guess.

LC: Golly, I guess. It was—

DB: But there were always incidents—what is it? A grenade. Grenades were
always being thrown. You had to be very careful.

LC: Do you think Dixie was quite careful around these things, or was he kind
of—?

DB: I think he was fearless.

LC: It sort of sounds like it.

DB: I always worried about him.

LC: You must have. You must have especially because he’s traveling all the
time and so many trips.

DB: I began to think about his other responsibilities. You probably wonder with
all this travel, but he did have, he recruited a staff member from France. A lot of the—he
did sort of the leg work for the people, for the photographers from the other ministries
coming into Saigon. Then his other staff in Saigon were the ones that did most of the
instruction and teaching with Dixie’s supervision.

LC: So that he could go out and actually be doing photography.

DB: Right because all of the agencies in Saigon were, if I may say, after him or
wanted him to document what they were doing. The USIS, the embassy, the MAAG,
Military Assistance Advisory Group, and, of course, the aid program which was entitled
STEM, S-T-E-M, Special Technical and Economic Mission. That was the group, the aid
group that I was with.

LC: They were all kind of pulling at Dixie’s sleeve trying to get him to—

DB: Right. They were always trying to book him for something or other, for
some project, documenting some project or other.
LC: Or a visit of the VIPs and so on.

DB: Yes.

LC: Which we talked about last time.

DB: Well, let’s see—let me see here. Let’s see. (Editor’s note: Interviewee referring to journal) After Dien Bien Phu, that was December of ’53. January 20, 1954 is when Dixie left on home leave. I went to Hong Kong shortly after that to have the baby. I don’t have the exact date I went, but I think it was sometime in January, late January or early February. Then I mentioned the battle of Dien Bien Phu which I believe began the thirteenth or fourteenth of March and ended with the Geneva Accords on May seventh. Then July tenth I have a notation about the refugees from the North arriving in Saigon, where tent cities were set up outside of Saigon for the refugees. These were mainly Catholics who fled from the communists in the north. It was really pitiful, when you think of the refugees today in parts of the world like Africa and certainly now the Middle East. It’s so distressing. There’s one youngster who’s been indelibly engraved in my mind. I can still see him carrying his violin case, just could bring whatever they could carry with them. The American ships made many trips back and forth. I don’t know. I think there were about two-hundred thousand brought from the North. I remember, I think, it was said at the time that it was about the size of the city of Minneapolis. I don’t know what Minneapolis was at that time, but I think there was, they said about two hundred, it was quoted as about two-hundred thousand.

LC: I think that sounds about right. You remember this one little boy?

DB: Yes. Yes. I can still see him. Let me see. One thing I want—you know I’ve been going through boxes and drawers and finding all kinds of things. One of the things I encountered, uncovered, is an envelope which has maybe fifty or more invitations which I or Dixie, mainly I, received for parties and receptions. I thought, well, you know, they might be of interest to you because—

LC: Oh, yes.

DB: They were mainly for the military officers who were rotating in and out. It would give you some idea of what the military, how many of the military were going. They only stayed a year. So when they came there was a reception for them. When they left there was another reception.
LC: That would really very much be of interest. Yeah.

DB: When Alan comes at Christmastime, I’ll ask him about that.

LC: Okay.

DB: I don’t think he would mind if I sent those on to you, but I’ll wait until Christmas to ask him about that.

LC: All right.

DB: You’d even have the names of the officers and so on.

LC: Exactly. Yeah. I mean, it would be terrific. For example, one of the things that you left here was a photocopy of a set of invitations, a list for issuing invitations for one of Dixie’s parties.

DB: Oh, yes.

LC: It’s fascinating. I see Dorothy Erickson included prominently, but you were—

DB: I was at the bottom of the list.

LC: Yes. I know you are at the bottom of the list, but there you are anyway, in and amongst many of the hoi polloi of Saigon. But yes, that kind of list, or the invitations that you are describing are enormously useful because one can tell who was there and for example, who was on their way in and out and what dates they were coming and going, extraordinarily useful for researchers. Yes, those would be of terrific interest. We’ll wait to see what Alan says about that.

DB: Let’s see. I have “10-12-52 back from Hong Kong and Macau.” We must have gone to Hong Kong and Macau around that time. Then October thirteenth was my birthday. Dixie had a big party for me. He had rented a piano and all of Saigon was there.

LC: Is that right?

DB: He gave me a beautiful lacquer which I have hanging in my living room. It was done by Roger Mignot, M-I-G-N-O-T. It’s blue flowers on a brown background with some beige and white. It’s really, it’s very pretty.

LC: It sounds beautiful.

DB: Something I really treasure. He was always giving me perfume, French scarves, most of which, I, scarves I still have. He was so generous.
LC: Well, it sounds great.
DB: Let me see. What else? Then we went to Bali February 15, 1953. We were there about, well, we went to Jakarta, Bandung, and I think I touched on that. Did I?
LC: Just very briefly. Were there security issues involved in getting over to Bali?
How did you go? Do you remember?
DB: We flew to Singapore and then took Garuda Air to Jakarta. We were just there in transit. No, we might have stayed there overnight.
LC: To Jogjakarta?
DB: Then we mainly we were going to Bandung to see Helen Roberts who had been transferred to Bandung. It was just after, there had been a SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), S-E-A-T-O, conference in Bandung. The thing I remember was eating wonderful Indonesian food, sate. We went up to the—there’s a volcano there.
LC: At Bandung or nearby?
DB: We went up to the volcano. Then we flew to Bali where we spent about a week and that was really wonderful.
LC: Were you on the ocean or where were you in Bali?
DB: Well, there were no hotels on the ocean in those days. We stayed in Denpasar at the Denpasar Hotel and had the— it was quite primitive. You had the Dutch bath which was a cement area, area cemented in the corner of the room with a bucket of cold water. That was your shower. Dixie and I had to stay with—I stayed with a Filipino woman. I don’t know who he stayed, or remember who he stayed with. The rooms were, you know, were scarce. There were no resort hotels at that time.
LC: Sure.
DB: We traveled around one day. He hired a car and we went around the island, went to Mas, M-A-S, where we were told the best carvers were. We bought I don’t know how many of the really fine statues, beautiful. Some are rosewood. Some are ebony. Of course, I still have them and treasure them.
LC: Oh, I would think. Yes.
DB: Let me see. Oh, then we would go in the evening to the monkey dance or whatever dances there were. Covarrubias, the Mexican, had written a rather definitive book on Bali which was and still is, for me, a resource about the country and the area and
the civilization and so on. Of course, Bali was Hindu whereas the rest of Indonesia is Muslim. So there’s that religious difference and subject of conflict actually—the Balinese in Indonesia. Of course that was when Indonesia had just received it’s independence from the Dutch after three hundred years.

LC: Did you—

DB: Then, I have here April of ’53 the big offense—I don’t know if I told you this, mentioned it. “The big offensive in Laos has been expected for some time. It’s not to good militarily speaking, just an extension of the same old thing. In spite of all the aid we are giving the French, they don’t seem to be effective in using it. They lack leadership, training, et cetera.” I probably got all that from Dixie. I’m sure it wasn’t my idea.

LC: Well, but you were also, Dorothy, at a number of parties where people certainly would have been talking about this and watching the situation, probably, very closely. So that might have been several different people that kind of gave that impression.

DB: Right. I believe I did speak with you about the drive I took to Da Lat. I think I mentioned that last time.

LC: Yes, you did.

DB: I went into quite a bit of detail on that.

LC: Yes. It sounded fascinating.

DB: Well, let me see. You wanted to know more about the war later and I was here when the Vietnam War escalated.

LC: Sure. I’d like to ask you about that in a minute. First of all though, can I ask you one question about you’re trip in 1952, and this was the first of several that you told about today, but the trip where you went to the sawmill project over in central Cambodia at Kompong Thom? Do you remember that now as you sit there? Do you remember going out from—?

DB: Oh, yes.

LC: Where did you stay in Kompong Thom? Do you remember? What kind of accommodation was there for you?
DB: Well, it was a primitive hotel. It was up on stilts. It was very small. Of course, we slept under mosquito nets.

LC: Well, sure.

DB: When it got dark, there wasn’t any electricity. You had to go to bed.

LC: Right. Right.

DB: There wasn’t much to do. Then you were awakened at four o’clock by the birds and the animals underneath the—they have these houses and the same kind of thing in the Philippines out in the villages. You’re up on stilts and the animal’s homes are underneath. So that was—I definitely remember that.

LC: Were you with other Americans on this trip? Were there—?

DB: No. Well, it was Dixie and I and one of his staff members.

LC: That was it?

DB: Yeah.

LC: No security with you?

DB: No.

LC: Did you, Dorothy, did you feel afraid at all?

DB: Not with Dixie.

LC: Not with Dixie.

DB: He was big and strong.

LC: Right. He was tall. I could tell that from the photograph.

DB: He was 6’4”.

LC: Yeah.

DB: Had beautiful black hair, wavy hair. I came across—I can probably—I haven’t Xeroxed all those things I’ve promised to send you, but I’ll get to it one of these days.

LC: Oh, sure.

DB: Anyway, my cousin lived in Pittsburgh and she sent me a couple of articles from the Pittsburgh Post or Pittsburgh Press or something. Anyway, unfortunately there’s no date on them. but they must be around the time that Dixie died because it was all about the fighting and about his death. There’s a picture of him. I’ll get around to doing that sometime.
LC: That would be very welcome as part of the record that we’re building here about him.

DB: First, the real war. It was most distressing. During that period of time I lost contact—I didn’t communicate with the nurses.

LC: Now this is during the ‘60s?

DB: During the ‘60s, during the American war, so to speak. I found I had a lot of letters from the nurses and doctors at the hospital, but they were earlier. They were more in the ’50s. But it was very distressing. It was—today it’s sort of déjà vu all over again.

LC: How do you mean?

DB: I mean, this war in Iraq. It’s the same situation. We never learn from history.

LC: Dorothy, can you explain some of the parallels that you see between the two?

DB: Well, going into the country without really knowing very much about the culture or the language or the customs and also underestimating the desire for nationalism. We have this grandiose idea that we can tell the world what to do and who they should be and why they should be democratic and that they should be just like us. I don’t think we’re any great model the way we treat people. But I probably shouldn’t have said that.

LC: I think it’s okay. I think it’s okay. Sometimes you’re right. I mean, we don’t—the United States in the 20th Century has a very difficult record. I think the 19th century even, even more so, in terms of equality and democracy so.

DB: Knowing people who were being killed over there in Vietnam. The nurse I knew in our Public Health Service clinic, her son was a captain and was killed in Vietnam. It’s nice that we have the Vietnam Memorial here in Washington, which is a small way of giving, paying tribute to the fifty-eight thousand who lost their lives. Of course when Saigon fell April [29], 1975, there it was twenty years later and all those twenty years of, might as well say, of fighting. It showed the persistence and the strength of the Communist Party. Of course, just like Russia, I think Russia has changed somewhat, apparently, but Vietnam, that’s changing rapidly in terms of economy and the exposure of people to the Internet. We’re such a small globe today, when you think of
not having telephones fifty years ago that communicated—you could [not] communicate from Saigon to Hanoi by telephone. Today when we have instant communications in the visual image, it’s really fantastic.

LC: Do you think, though, although technology communications has improved, our ability to kind of take in the fact that other people elsewhere are different hasn’t really kept pace? You mentioned that the United States has to some degree underestimated nationalist feeling and the desire for independence both in the case of Vietnam under Communist Party leadership as it happened, but also in Iraq.

DB: I’m having difficulty hearing you, Laura.

LC: Okay. I was just asking about the—you were reminiscing about how communications technology in the 1950s was not so good and you and Dixie had to communicate by cable, but now, of course, people anywhere can send an email to someone else anywhere and instant television pictures and so on. But have people’s thoughts and ability to assess each other and understand kept pace, do you think?

DB: Have people what?

LC: Has people’s ability to understand each other and accept people’s differences, has that kept pace with technology?

DB: I don’t know. I really don’t. I think we’re each in our own little world, unfortunately. You see these things on television and you, you feel powerless. I mean, what can an individual do other than pray? That’s, pray for peace. I suppose there’s always been and always will be conflict between peoples.

LC: Well, and also we see it more immediately now. Certainly when you were in South Vietnam and Saigon and on your various trips around the country and in Cambodia, there was conflict going on, as you’ve described, but most Americans did not have any clue about it, not a clue.

DB: Well, when something was reported, they made a lot of it in the press here, but we kind of just came to accept the grenades. It was a part of life.

LC: Yeah. One thing that you mentioned earlier, Dorothy, that I want to ask you a little bit more about was in one of the letters from June 1952, you talked about a trip to Bavat and that there were people who were being repatriated apparently after having left the Viet Minh.
DB: Well, whether or not they had been with them, they were exposed to them or
they were in an area where the Viet Minh was trying to take control.

LC: Dixie was taking photographs of the compound where they were being kept?
DB: Right.

LC: Do you remember walking around that day?
DB: No. That day I don’t recall.

LC: Not so clearly.
DB: I remember the time we went to Can Tho. We went from My Tho—I
mentioned we went to My Tho. I don’t have it right in front of me right at the moment.
We went to My Tho. We went down to Can Tho. We stayed at a French, with the
French military. See, Dixie had a press pass. He could go on French planes or American
planes or any—let me see. Oh, that trip to My Tho, and then we went to Bavat. I don’t
have any record of Can Tho here, but I do remember going to Can Tho, C-A-N T-H-O
and staying at this French military place. I did say in one of my, in my letter describing
it, which I don’t have in front of me, that I was the only woman, white woman, there and
I was dancing with all of the French officers, all of the French military.

LC: Well, that was probably a lift for Franco-American relations which were a
little rocky as you’ve observed. Did you fly down to My Tho or Can Tho?
DB: Oh, no. No. No.
LC: You drove.
DB: Right. We’d go as far as say My Tho one night and then we had to go
across—it was on the other side of the Mekong.

LC: Yes, absolutely.
DB: It’s very wide, very wide there in the delta.

LC: What was the bridge like? Do you remember?
DB: Oh, it wasn’t a bridge. We went by boat.

LC: So you had to drive the car onto the boat?
DB: No. I think we left the car. I really can’t remember that part of it.

LC: Interesting though.
DB: That was, golly, that was how many years ago?

LC: A long, long time. Well over fifty years.
DB: Well, do you want to take your break?
LC: Sure.
LC: Dorothy, let me just ask you, if I may, to give us some information about your own career as it continued with Public Health Service after you lost Dixie in 1955. You mentioned earlier in our previous session that you were able to take some home leave when that disaster happened. Then you were able to stay with the service, that they had been very accommodating. Can you talk about the rest of your career? What happened? How did you go?
DB: Well, actually, my career spanned the years from 1947 to 1977. I was thirty years in Public Health Service as a career officer. When I returned in 1955—and for seventeen years I was in the division of nursing. Margaret Arnstein, a notable nurse, was the head of, the director of the division and Lucille Petry Leone was the chief nurse officer at that time. First assignment I had was to develop a nursing, training manual for nursing aids in nursing homes. The situation in nursing homes in the ’50s was more deplorable than one can imagine. Then I was involved in working with others on state— we were doing statewide surveys of nursing needs and resources and also utilization studies of nursing personnel. At that time nursing staff were involved in housekeeping details. When a patient was discharged, the nurse had to clean the bed and clean the room and serve the meals, the dietary responsibilities, all of those which could and is now, of course, being done by lesser paid personnel so that a professional nurse can concentrate on the care of the patients.
LC: How important were these surveys, do you think, within the PHS to making that happen, making that transition?
DB: Well, the surveys were important in projecting the needs, I mean, the goals for say a thousand—a million nurses by a certain date and so on and so forth. We had statisticians on the staff, Eugene Levine and Faye Abdellah were writing up this for the literature and so on. They were very prominent in nursing at that time. Then I—1965 Public Law 88-129 was passed in fiscal year 1965. That was the Health Professions Educational Assistance Act which provided for, among other things, construction grants for schools of medicine, nursing, dentistry, et cetera, et cetera. For seven years I was head of that program for the nursing, construction of nursing schools. It was a very
interesting and exciting time because I had nurses and architects and engineers on the
staff—well, engineering consultants and audio-visual consultants and so on. We made
site visits to, I would say, oh, probably close to two hundred campuses around the
country to visit nursing schools that were applying for construction grants. These were
matching grants. The federal government would match the local fund. The schools had
to increase enrollment and were obligated to use the facilities for which they were
constructed for a period of ten years. So that was really—I really enjoyed that. I mean,
one could see the results of one’s work when you went back for the dedication of the
buildings.

LC: Dorothy, what were some of the schools that benefited from this program?

DB: Well, the first one I—the first site visit was Bill Seldin. We had consultants
and then we had review committees and a national advisory council. First site visit was
to Case Western Reserve, I remember. Oh, I’ve been to Marycrest College, University of
California at San Francisco, Boston University, Ohio State University, Munsey State,
Indiana University. Let me see. University of Washington was a big project. They
had—their application was for the school of medicine, nursing, public health, library and
dentistry. That was a site visit. There was about twenty-seven site visitors. Let me see,
there were some in Texas, Texas Women’s University, I remember. Faye Pannell was
the wonderful lady who was the head of the nursing program. Let me see, University of
North Carolina, oh—

LC: All over the place.

DB: Yeah.

LC: Wow.

DB: We had one project in the Virgin Islands and had one in Guam. So it was
really very satisfying. Then I moved from the division of nursing in 1973. I was for a
few months in the Secretary HEW (Department of Health, Education and Welfare) office
on the Women’s Action program. There was a woman named Sandy, forgot her last
name, who was a young whippersnapper who was in charge of this program. It was sort
of the Women’s Lib era and not that I was a women’s libber in terms of bra-burning, but
I did feel very much that women were not appreciated, did not have the same
opportunities and particularly nursing personnel. We’re sort of in a slot and you couldn’t
move. You could move in nursing, but you couldn’t move sideways or upper—some of the upper echelons. That changed later when more nurses had their doctorate degree.

LC: Yes.

DB: But, anyway, let me see. What was I saying?

LC: You were in the HEW office.

DB: Oh, yes. Well, we were looking at statistics of the staff and things like how many women were in dentistry in the US and how many in medicine and so on and so forth. Really it just astounds me now to know that, and I think in medical schools, more than half of the students, or at least more than half of the applicants are women.

LC: I think that’s right. Yes.

DB: About forty percent of practicing physicians are women. There are more women in dentistry. So I think there was an awareness—we began certainly within the department and in terms of the awarding of grants, the importance of reaching out to qualified women. So that was only about three or four months, but it was a very interesting experience. Elliot Richardson was head of the department and some of the other, some of those other assistants, I forgot their names, had some interaction with.

LC: Did you have any interactions or meet with Elliot Richardson?

DB: Not personally. I mean, he met with us as a group.

LC: Did you form an opinion—how much of a backer was he of what you were trying to do?

DB: He, well, actually, if it weren’t for him, we wouldn’t have had it.

LC: Is that right?

DB: I mean, he was very, for being this patrician Boston, Beacon Hill.

LC: Yes, absolutely.

DB: He was supportive of what we were doing and pushed us all the way. When you’d call the different agencies and you were from the secretary’s office, that carried some weight. You got an answer.

LC: Yes ma’am. That’s Washington.

DB: Right. Then having decided that I’d made my contribution in nursing, I moved to the Bureau of Health Manpower which was the next—Division of Nursing was a part of that. I worked first with—well, I worked with Doug Fenderson, a PhD from
University of Minnesota who was on—you know they used to have these people who would come into government, Inter-Agency Government Act, I think it was called. Where people from governmental agencies or universities would come into the government for a year and then go back to their position. So anyway, Doug was in charge of the Office of Interdisciplinary Affairs. That was an interesting assignment because we had some authority in this. One of the Health Manpower acts was called, HMEIA, Health Manpower Education Initiative Awards. These were awards which were not specific. It gave a word—I’m searching for it—gave us latitude in terms of grants. But they were in areas such as the physician’s assistant training, nurse practitioner program, computer technology in medicine, and a concept called area health education centers. For computer technology I remember we went to the University of Minnesota, or I mean, University of Missouri to visit—oh, what’s his name? [Donald Lindberg] Isn’t that awful? He’s now or for many years has been head of the National Library of Medicine. Well, I can fill his name in—


DB: He showed us these floppy disks. That was the first I’d ever seen or knew what this was all about, but we did have some people with us on the sites, some consultants, who knew what it was all about. So that was interesting, the computer technology.

LC: Right. Yes.

DB: In medicine.

LC: Of course, it’s revolutionized everything now.

DB: Yes, down to these little things which have all your medical records on a—

LC: A chip, on one chip now.

DB: Right. The Physician’s Assistant Program, it was really—that was started by, oh, his name I can’t think of [Eugene Stead] at Duke. We picked up on those and had grants for that. So that was ’73. Then in ’77 I decided after thirty years I should retire. So I had worked collaboratively with one of the physicians in the division of medicine also that was in the Bureau of Health Manpower by the name of John Mather. He was a Scottish born, British trained physician, very dynamic individual. He had moved from the—let me see—from the Public Health Service to the Veteran’s Administration. So he
wanted me to join his staff there. I retired in the spring, April, May first of 1977. Then in September of 1977, I joined the staff of the Veteran’s Administration central office where I was in the—it was the Office of Academic Affairs. Bill Mayer was the head of that. He had been with regional medical programs in Public Health Service and later became the dean of the first school of medicine in Norfolk, Virginia. I think it’s called Eastern Virginia. Then subsequently the head of the Office of Academic Affairs was Don [Custis], he was a chief medical, he was a Navy physician. I’ll have to fill in his name.

LC: That’s fine.

DB: After that it was Dave Worthen who is an ophthalmologist, a wonderful man. They were all really outstanding people. Well, I started out with—and this office supported a variety of education. It really is not known how much educational support the VA (Veterans Administration) gives, provides. Everybody knows about the GI Bill, but in medical education, the VA supports residency training throughout the country to the tune of many millions of dollars every year for physicians in hospitals that are affiliated with the medical schools and with the VA. The residents rotate through the VA hospitals and the VA supports the funds for those. They also have in-service training. They have centers, regional centers, for training of VA staff. Our office—let me see—I forgot what ours was called. Anyway, we were—the first program that I was involved which was really a seminal program. John had—the VA had just done a study on the aging veterans late, early, mid-'70s projecting the large number of older veterans that were going to need care because of the population increasing in age and so on. So we developed this program, a geriatric fellowship program, for physicians who had completed their residency. It was two-year program. It was in VA hospitals affiliated with medical schools. We gave out, I guess about six or seven of those grants. What’s so wonderful about that is that really, that was the forerunner of the certification in geriatric medicine which we now have for physicians. It highlighted, you know, the needs, not only in the VA, but in the general population.

LC: Absolutely. Yeah.

DB: Physicians who can care for us oldsters. Then we had several other programs that we developed for need, depending on the need. There were needs of the
VA for substance abuse, spinal cord injuries. We had a fellowship program with the
Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program. So, those were all very important I
felt.

LC: It sounds like very rewarding as well as interesting work.

DB: Right. Then, the other thing was the Office of Academic Affairs had never
done any contracts for educational efforts. We did some contracts. Then also peer
review was not in their line of thinking. We had peer review. We brought in consultants
for all of these—developing all of these programs to review the applications and make
suggestions and recommendations. So that was really something new for academic
affairs. I don’t know. I suppose the research office—they have a large research office in
the VA, they probably had peer review, but it was a hard sell.

LC: Was it really?

DB: It was with Don Custis. He was the Navy man. John Mather was away and
I had to go and explain to Don Custis what we were doing. He says, “Well, why do we
need all these people coming in here?”

LC: What did you say, Dorothy?

DB: I said, “Well, this is the way we do it.” I said, “This is the NIH (National
Institutes of Health) model. This is the way we evaluate these.” Anyway, we got along
fine. Well, then there was another—the VA Health Professions Educational Assistance
Act, Health Professions Educational Assistance Act was passed in, I think it was 1980 or
‘81. I had intended to only stay at the VA for five years, but actually stayed eight years.
This scholarship program came along and I was in charge of that. It was really designed
for medical students. The VA was short of physicians at that time, but also in the
legislation they increased the pay for physicians. So as it turned out, by the time the
appropriation was made a year or two later, the need was greater for nursing personnel.
So we had this scholarship program for nursing students for the last two years of the
baccalaureate program or two years of the master’s program in which the students would
receive—their tuition was paid and they received funds for books in return for which they
would spend two years, a minimum of two years in a VA center, hospital.

LC: That’s a very good deal.
DB: Yes. It was a good program. It was really modeled after the National Health Service Corps Program [of] the Public Health Services. I never believed in reinventing the whee, so I went out to the National Health Service Corps in Rockville. They explained what we were doing and they gave me all their materials. We just adapted them to the needs of the VA. It was 1985 and they were reducing staff. I was on a cruise that year. Let’s see, from Florida to San Francisco. I was calling the office periodically. I remember being in San Francisco and my assistant was saying that they had to cut out one position. So I said, “Well, I’ll retire.” I said, “I’ve had my career and other people need a job more than I do.” So after, what, thirty-eight years in the federal service, I decided to retire. Then I thought, what am I going to do next? So, I got married. (Laughs)

LC: Right. This was to Arthur Bloomfield.

DB: Yes.

LC: Had you known Arthur?

DB: I met Arthur in Saigon, would you believe?

LC: That’s what I thought you had said.

DB: Dixie knew Arthur. They were together in Phnom Penh one time I remember. Arthur lived at the hotel. He was not too happy about the food and he didn’t have too much companionship. So we had him for dinner several times and he used to ride in the car with me in the mornings to go to the office. He had spent a lot of time in Korea. He was there during the war with UNKRA, United Nations Korean Rehabilitation Agency, I think it was called. He was stationed in Pusan. He had an assimilated military rank. He was working with the Koreans in developing the Bank of Korea, which was established in 1950. Yeah, that’s right 1950. It’s not a commercial bank. It’s the equivalent of our Federal Reserve Bank. Arthur and another man who was with him, Mr. Jenson, Arthur wrote legislation which set up that. Then we had a lot of—he had made altogether twelve trips to Korea. He was also a consultant to the state department. He was in—I remember he was in Zaire, Kinshasa. He was a consultant in—oh, he was in the Caribbean. He was in the Philippines. I can’t remember where all. He had been born in Montreal, graduated from, got his bachelor’s and master’s from McGill and his PhD in economics from the University of Chicago. He was with the
Federal Reserve Bank in New York until 1957. It was when he was at the Fed that he went to Korea. He came first in 1952 when President Eisenhower came into office. He sent teams of businessmen around the world to look at these aid programs. The group that came to Saigon was headed by Brayton Wilbur, who was a business man from San Francisco. He was, I guess, on the Federal Reserve Board or Bank in San Francisco. So he called his friend who was the head of the bank in New York and he said, “Don’t you have somebody who could go to Saigon and write our report?”

LC: They sent Arthur.

DB: So, Arthur being the specialist—after the war, the different men in the Fed had different areas of responsibility. I’m trying to think of the German fellow who was—I think his area was South America. He later became a governor of the bank, of the Fed here in Washington and was a very close friend of Arthur’s. Then, let me see. I’m trying to think where did I leave off? Oh, so Arthur came in 1952 with this group. They traveled all around and Arthur wrote the report. They went back home to report to Eisenhower, presumably. Well, then the next year Arthur came to Saigon at the request of the state department. He was to set up the Bank of—it was all the Bank of [Indochina]. I’m writing things down while I think of them.

LC: Sure.

DB: So, he was setting up an individual bank for each country. That was his contribution at that time. I think he was there about three months.


DB: Right. Then at that time when he left, Iron Mike McDaniel, I think his name was, or O’Daniel, the head of the embassy, he was ambassador even though he was a general. He had a private meeting with Arthur, wanted him to stay longer or do more, but Arthur declined. He wanted to get back to his work at the Fed. So he did that. He came back.

LC: To New York?

DB: To New York and he was there until 1957 when he had a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship and spent a year in Europe. His field was international trade. He’s written on that subject and books and monographs and all kinds of things. So, we had a correspondence, occasional correspondence. He would come to Washington for the
meetings of the International Bank, IMF (International Monetary Fund), and the World
Bank. He wrote beautiful descriptive letters, you know. All his books and everything he
wrote, he did in long hand. He had beautiful penmanship. He wrote in long-hand and
then would give them to the secretary and even the last book that came out, which was in
the early 1990s, he wrote it all by longhand.

LC: Wow.

DB: Then he typed it and then he gave the typed copy to the secretary. I mean, it’s just phenomenal when you think of—he had a word processor but he didn’t get into
computer. So, anyway, he would write me these letters and half the time I never
responded to them. Then, in June of ’85, he called me and he said, “Dorothy, I haven’t
heard from you in a long time. What are you up to?” So I told him that I was going to
retire. He said, “Well, I’ve just retired.” So, I thought, “Well, maybe we should—”

LC: Dorothy.

LC: So he called you.

DB: Yes.

LC: Yes and you were both retired.

DB: Yes. So we saw each other in Philadelphia—he was living of course, oh, I
guess I didn’t mention. In 1958 he went to the University of Pennsylvania as a tenured
professor and taught until 1985 in the department of economics, which when he went
there was part of the Wharton School. Then, subsequently, the pure economists felt that
the Wharton School was becoming too practical and not theoretical enough. So they
moved, the department moved into the School of Arts and Sciences. He was there for
well over twenty-five years. So then, I met his family. His brother had a very
distinguished career as a medievalist at Harvard and had a chair in English literature. He
died about three months after we were married. We were married in January of 1987.

We had almost twelve years together, which was very nice. On our honeymoon, we went
around the world. We went first to Korea where he received an honorary degree from
Hanyang University. Then we went to Hong Kong, Bangkok, spent a week in Burma and
went to Pagan and Mandalay and so on and then we came back. He had fallen. He
dislocated his shoulder and he wanted to get back here to see medical people here.

LC: Oh, sure. Yeah.
DB: So that was—we did a lot of traveling and cruising. He had a big family and there were a lot of family affairs and that was very nice.

LC: It sounds like it. It sounds very nice. Dorothy, when you were here you told me the total number of countries that you’d been to, but I can’t recall how many it was.

DB: Oh, I’ve been to fifty-nine countries and I’ve booked a tour to South America in January, the end of January. I’m going to go—it’s from—a cruise from Rio to Montevideo to Buenos Aires and Valparaiso. So I’ll pick up 4 more countries.

LC: So you have not spent much time in South America?

DB: No. I’ve done Caracas and Cartagena, those that you do on a cruise, but—

LC: Well, that sounds like a wonderful trip. If you need company, of course, I’ll be available.

DB: All right. I think it’s twenty-one days.

LC: I’m sure I could talk to the boss. Dorothy, just to confirm, when did you lose Arthur?

DB: Arthur died October second. Let’s see. I always get mixed up. His birthday was the second or the fourth of October, that was 1998. Two years, almost two years after we had moved here, a year and a half after we moved here to Bethesda.

LC: So you had been living in—

DB: I had a house in Washington.


DB: He had lived—Arthur had spent some time in Washington in a—he was in and out of there. I think he had a year there in the late ’30s. He told me he lived at the International Student’s House. They had a reception. They were invited to the White House for a reception and were received by Mrs. Roosevelt, I recall he said that. He had a very interesting life.

LC: Can you tell me, I mean, he was an economist, a Chicago-trained economist. What did he, if you can say, and I know he’s written a lot and I’ve seen some of his work, but what did—did the fact that the Roosevelts were in office when he was young influence him? Do you think?

DB: Well, he was a Keynesian.

LC: Yes, absolutely.
DB: But I don’t know.

LC: Actually, that answers the question.

DB: Yes, I think so. All right. He thought of himself, too, as a banker. He was very formal. In fact, one time a friend asked me if he came to breakfast with his suit and tie. I said, “No, he’s a little more casual than that.” But, most, you know, I’ve often thought I was married to two very interesting, but very different men. Dixie—but they were both perfectionists. Dixie, I mean, everything in the lab, everything about his person, his clothing, if the maid didn’t—if there was wrinkle in his trousers or something, they would be thrown on the floor and have to go through the wash again and be ironed again. I mean, he was a perfectionist and Arthur was, too, but Dixie was the artist. Arthur was the scholar. I remember one time I was writing a thank-you note to one of Arthur’s family for something or other. I gave it to him to look it over and I said, “How does this sound?” He said, “Oh, this is fine.” He said, “But you didn’t dot the I’s.” (Laughs) He dotted the I’s and crossed the T’s.

LC: I guess so.

DB: I still don’t dot the I’s half the time, but on the fiftieth anniversary of the Bank of Korea, which was June of 2000, there was a big celebration in Korea. The Bank of Korea representative in Washington presented me with this beautiful jade plaque on a jade stand, weighs five pounds, which is a tribute to Arthur for his work in developing the Bank of Korea. So, there was a very close connection with, and he had many good Korean friends who he saw when they came to Washington. One of them, Mr. Shin, later moved to Washington and I’m still in contact with his widow and his family.

LC: Very interesting.

DB: Another interesting person that I might touch on, not from Saigon, but in relation to Arthur was Herbert Stein. Herb Stein and Mildred Stein were classmates of Arthur’s at the University of Chicago. Herb Stein became kind of a famous economist. He was head of the Council of the Economic Advisors under Nixon. Also David Rockefeller was in his class at the University of Chicago. I remember one time Arthur told me the story of walking across campus and meeting David. David asked him if he could borrow fifty cents. He needed some money and he didn’t have any with him. So, this poor boy from Montreal who was on a fellowship or a scholarship—
LC: Sure. Sure.

DB: Gave David the fifty cents, which he said was promptly returned. But it’s interesting. David is still living. I think he must be 92.

LC: Yes. I think he is. Yes.

DB: He’s had a wonderful life, too. His biography, his autobiography is fascinating reading.

LC: I have not, I haven’t seen it.

DB: He’s a very modest person. He said they really didn’t have that much money. They just had what was coming in from the trust. His wife bought all these, would go to second-hand shops and by this furniture and so on. Hard to believe but—

LC: Now I—that sounds right actually.

DB: That’s what he said.

LC: It’s a most interesting family, very interesting folks, with a sense of public service.

DB: Well, Laura, Arthur, or Arthur, Laura, I feel as if I’ve drained my brain.

LC: Well, you wanted to say something, I think, about Horst Faas.

DB: Yes. I cannot conclude this oral history without paying tribute to Horst Faas. It was Horst Faas and Tim Page through Requiem who, shall I say, discovered Dixie and his work and who made all this possible and without whom Dixie’s name and work would never be known. As it is, some of his work has been given to the Eastman House in Rochester, New York, and the remaining negatives, which my son has, will be given to Eastman House. Horst really was the one who mentioned the Vietnam Center to me at one time. He always considered us of the Requiem family, because we always got together at events when there were openings or receptions for Requiem, for the book or the for the exhibition or so on.

LC: For the traveling exhibit.

DB: I was deeply saddened recently to look Horst up on the Internet and find that he was back in Hanoi on April [29], 2005 for the thirtieth anniversary of the Fall of Saigon, if you want to call it, or the end of the—and to learn that he had developed a blood clot on his spine and was flown to Bangkok where he was hospitalized. He was paralyzed from the chest down and was at that time in a rehabilitation hospital in Bavaria,
Germany. He was German. He was a wonderful photographer and he won Pulitzer Prize a couple of times. He was in Saigon for sixteen years and the head of the AP (Associated Press) bureau there. So I just felt very sad about that. I don’t know anything about his present condition, but I just feel that he—that I’m greatly indebted to him. Actually it was Pierre Schoendorfer, too, when these pictures, when Alan sent the pictures of Dixie’s to Horst in London for the book, he asked Pierre if he knew anything about Dixie. Pierre was quoted as having said, “Oh, yes.” He said, “If you can get Dixie’s pictures that would be wonderful.” So I think I owe Pierre a debt of gratitude as well. But, Horst, I just—he just made this all possible and for that I am very grateful.

LC: Dorothy, I think we all owe him quite a lot, all of us who care about Vietnam and about the events there throughout the twentieth century. I’m grateful for what you’ve said and for drawing attention to *Requiem* and to the traveling exhibit, again. It’s something that I hope one day we’ll have here. Dorothy is there—

DB: If you have it, I’ll come down.

LC: Absolutely. Okay, terrific. It’s a deal.

DB: Well, thank you so much for your patience. I’ve enjoyed getting to know you, appreciate all the good work you’re doing. Maybe we’ll talk from time to time.

LC: Yes ma’am. Well, thank you very much for participating.