SUNDAY, JULY 3, 1966

QUEST: SENATOR EVERETT MCKINLEY DIRKSEN (R. III.)

INTERVIEWED BY: Edward P. Morgan, ABC News Commentator
and
Wally Bruner, ABC News Correspondent

MR. MORGAN: Senator Dirksen, even on this Fourth of July Holiday week-end, Viet Nam must be in everybody's mind. It is said that the President's bombing order has escalated the war. What do you think of his action and where do you think it will lead?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Probably the best answer I can give is the action that was taken by the Republican National Coordinating Committee consisting of a half-dozen members of our national committee, a half-dozen Republican governors, joint leadership of Republican leadership of the Senate and House, those who have been candidates for the Presidency and the Vice-Presidency and then, of course, President Eisenhower. And we meet about every quarter.

Now it was on the 13th of December of last year that we met and we issued a one-page paper on this very subject and I need only recite what the essence of it was.

MR. MORGAN: Do.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Because we shared the objective -- and
there is no difference about objectives, but we recommended
that there be a Kennedy-type quarantine so far as the Port of
Hyphong is concerned, and then specifically recommended that we
use conventional naval and air power to bomb strategic
targets in critical target areas.

MR. BRUNER: You are pleased, then, with the latest --

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Indeed I am pleased and I support it.
I thought it should have been done long ago. Because that was
seven months ago that we made that statement and we are getting
around to this bombing only now.

Now I am not critical of that delay. I only say that
that represented the best concensus thinking of Republican
leaders from all over the country.

MR. MORGAN: The port of Hyphong has not yet been quaran-
tined, mined or bombed. Do you think it must be?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, let's wait and see what the net
result of the two bombing strikes will be.

Now we have reason to believe that morale is diminishing
rather rapidly in North Viet Nam. In fact that was disclosed
to us at that last briefing session which was three weeks ago
tomorrow at the White House. You may remember that I had to
harrass the President a little in order to get the joint
leadership back there but we did. Among other things we dis-
covered that in the interviews of these Viet Cong prisoners
almost uniformly, now, they were talking about what was
happening to the morale in North Viet Nam.

MR. BRUNER: Well, then, you think the credibility gap that you have described is no longer a problem? You think now you are getting the information you need?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: We are getting the information we need. I have so stated. You see it took a long time to get that joint meeting so that we were fully advised of what the exact impact of our action was.

MR. MORGAN: In other words, you think the President is now leveling with the people and probably doing so because of your prior criticism?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I won't say that he has not leveled with the people before. There is such a thing as not quite disclosing all the things that we think we ought to know. He may have quite other ideas. That still doesn't open him to the charge of leveling. It is only that it gives us ammunition and it fortifies us because we are not only accessible to the public but infinitely more accessible than he and of course when you go back home there are people -- and this is the No. 1 topic in their minds, and you have got to have something more than a superficial answer.

MR. MORGAN: Senator, the President said that this bombing was necessary because we had to raise the price of aggression at the source. At every prior time that we have increased our strength, the enemy has met the price. What if the enemy
continues the price and we run out of targets in North Viet Nam?

SENATOR DIRksen: Well, now, we will know whether or not the enemy will meet the price. The easiest way to determine it is whether or not there is a sudden cessation in that Viet Cong steady march of vehicles and / soldiers down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, part of which goes through Cambodia.

Now the last figure we had was that the infiltration was about 4500 a month, and that has been rather constant. Now we will watch and see what the effect is going to be. When you find a diminution in that effort then you know that the strikes have been exceedingly effective. The only way you will get fuel down there then will be on the backs of coolies in the form of heavy drums of gasoline and that will be equally true when you try to fuel your airplanes.

MR. BRUNER: But Senator, one of the biggest concerns, before, last January, when the doves in the House and the Senate sent their letter to the President asking a continuation of the bombing pause, one of their concerns was whether or not Red China might come into the war on the side of the North Vietnamese. Now if we continue the heavy bombing raids in North Vietnam, does that not bring Red China closer to having to make a decision?

SENATOR DIRksen: I see no reason why. I have never been too seriously disposed over the allegations that have been
constantly made that it is an open invitation to bring Red China into this conflict. After all, Red China is vulnerable in her own right. Here she has set up these nuclear installations and obviously we know where they are because of the effectiveness of our reconnaissance.

Now suppose it should happen and you had to go in and bomb out all these installations, the fruit of a long-time labor? Red China doesn't have anything much that is disposable except manpower, and millions of it. But when all is said and done without weapons, what is it like?

MR. MORGAN: Tomorrow is the Fourth of July and Independence Day would hardly be Independence Day without a Dirksen speech somewhere. Have you got one booked for the Fourth?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, let me say I had one booked and strangely enough I had it booked for the Fourth of July, 1965. The same place, the same speech, perhaps, for 1966. But a year ago, two days or a day before the Fourth of July, I was in an ambulance on the way to Walter Reed Hospital because of recurrence of those intestinal spasms. This year I was so unfortunate as to tumble out of that high-geared bed in the same hospital and came up with a fractured hip and I am as full of hardware as a country hardware store -- thinking of all the nails and other gadgetry they put in, because they nailed me together.