WASHINGTON -- FOLLOWING IS THE TRANSCRIPT OF A TV INTERVIEW OF AMBASSADOR ELLSWORTH BUNKER NOVEMBER 14:

(BEGIN TEXT)

HUGH DOWNS: OUR WASHINGTON GUEST THIS MORNING IS ELLSWORTH BUNKER, WHO'S UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO SOUTH VIETNAM, JUST BACK FROM SAIGON.

AMBASSADOR BUNKER, WHOSE DIPLOMATIC EXPERIENCE INCLUDES NEARLY TWO DECADES OF SERVICE AS MISSION CHIEF IN EUROPE, AND SOUTH AMERICA, AND ASIA, IS IN WASHINGTON NOW TO REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ON THE PROGRESS OF THE VIETNAM FIGHTING, AND THE PACIFICATION AND NATION BUILDING PROGRAM.

WITH MR. BUNKER IN OUR STUDIO IS NBC NEWS DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT ELIE ABEL.

GENTLEMEN.

ABEL: HUGH, THANKS VERY MUCH.

AMBASSADOR BUNKER, AS YOU KNOW, A VIRGINIA CLERGYMAN CAUSED RATHER A STIR LAST WEEKEND BY DARING TO ASK PRESIDENT JOHNSON FROM THE PULPIT FOR A LOGICAL, STRAIGHTFORWARD EXPLANATION OF WHY WE'RE IN VIETNAM, AND WHAT WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE THERE.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION?
Bunker: Well, I think, Mr. Abel, that our objectives have been made clear a good many times by the President. They are, I would say, first, to achieve an honorable, durable peace through negotiation, to keep the door always open to negotiation. Second, to make it possible for the Vietnamese to choose in free elections the kind of government under which they wish to live. Third, to help them build their own political institutions, suited to their own genius, their own needs, and to develop a viable economy. Fourth, to make credible our obligations under the United Nations Charter, and the SEATO Treaty.

And, again, as the President has made clear, once peace is secured, to develop regional organizations for economic development and mutual cooperation.

Abel: Ambassador, you mentioned again, as everyone seems to in this area, the desire for a negotiated settlement.

Christmas is less than six weeks away. This always seems to be the season for talk of peace, and for various maneuverings on both sides. What can we look for this time?

Bunker: Well, it's very difficult to say, Mr. Abel, because it's very difficult to know, I think, what is in the back of Hanoi's mind.

So far, as you know, we have made a great many efforts to come to negotiations, but without any response from the other side.

Abel: On this matter of response, though, there is one which I think, General Gavin made on Sunday that does interest me. I know it's talked about a good deal in Europe. We keep saying that we would stop the bombing if they would stop sending troops and men through to the South. I wonder is that a realistic demand? We are asking them to stop doing what they are doing, in exchange for our stopping doing something that they're not doing there.

Bunker: Well, you may recall in the speech the President made at San Antonio he said that we would stop the bombing, provided we have assurance that this would lead to prompt and productive negotiations, and that we assume that the other side would not take advantage of it.
ABEL: BUT ON THIS QUESTION OF TAKING ADVANTAGE OF IT, IT'S BEEN
SAID REPEATEDLY IN PREVIOUS PAUSES THE COMMUNIST SIDE USED THE PAUSE
TO BUILD UP THEIR SUPPLIES, AND SO FORTH.

DIDN'T WE DO EXACTLY THE SAME THING ON OUR SIDE?

BUNKER: YES, BUT YOU MUST REMEMBER THAT THE COMMUNISTS GOT A
GREAT ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGE FROM THE PAUSE, BECAUSE THEY WERE ABLE
TO MOVE IN FAR LARGER QUANTITIES OF MUNITIONS, MEN, AND
EVERYTHING ELSE, THAN THEY COULD NORMALLY DO UNDER PRESENT
WARTIME CONDITIONS.

ABEL: YOU MEAN THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE BOMBING?

BUNKER: EXACTLY. IT MADE IT POSSIBLE. IN FACT IN THE
CESSATION OF BOMBING LAST YEAR -- BEFORE THAT CESSATION, THEY
BROUGHT IN SOME 25,000 TONS OF SUPPLIES DURING THAT PERIOD,
ENOUGH TO KEEP THE DIVISION GOING FOR EIGHT OR NINE MONTHS.

ABEL: WELL, I'D LIKE TO UNDERSTAND THIS CLEARLY. YOU'RE
NOT SAYING THAT WE DIDN'T BRING IN SUPPLIES?

BUNKER: NO, I'M NOT SAYING THAT, NO, NO.

ABEL: BUT THEY GOT MORE BENEFIT FROM BEING ABLE TO MOVE SUPPLIES...

BUNKER: A VERY GREAT ADDITIONAL BENEFIT.

ABEL: ...WITHOUT AIR ATTACK....

BUNKER: THAT'S RIGHT.

ABEL: ....THAN WE DID.

BUNKER: THAT'S CORRECT.

ABEL: THERE REMAINS, AS YOU KNOW, IN THIS COUNTRY, MR.
AMBASSADOR, A WIDESPREAD SUSPICION THAT THE ADMINISTRATION
ITSELF, IN SPITE OF ALL ITS STATEMENTS, DOES NOT REALLY SEE A
WAY OUT OF THIS THING, NEITHER VICTORY, NOR A NEGOTIATED
SETTLEMENT, IN VIEW OF THE CHINESE -- OF THE COMMUNIST POSITION.

I KNOW YOU MUST HAVE ASKED YOURSELF A THOUSAND TIMES, HOW WILL
THIS COME OUT? HOW CAN THIS COME OUT?

BUNKER: WELL, I THINK, WE'RE MAKING STEADY PROGRESS NOW IN --
NOT ONLY MILITARILY, BUT IN OTHER WAYS AS WELL. THE EVOLUTION OF
THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS, IN PACIFICATION, WHICH, IN MY VIEW,
IN A SENSE, IS A MISNOMER. WHAT PACIFICATION IS IS REALLY NATION
BUILDING. I THINK THAT THE PACIFICATION, EVOLUTION OF THE
CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE MILITARY SIDE OF THE PROBLEM.

In all of these areas, in my view, we are making steady progress. And I believe that we are now at the point of seeing progress accelerate in these areas.

In the first place, on the military side, we're increasing the ratio of combat to support troops. We are able to not only maintain pressure, but to step it up.

The Vietnamese armed forces are steadily improving. They've turned in some excellent performances.

On the political side, the evolution of the constitutional process -- you may recall that there had been five elections in the last 14 months. In time of war, in itself, quite a remarkable performance.

The elections last spring and summer for the village and hamlet officials, in my view, were almost as important as the elections for president, and for the two houses of the assembly, which took place in September and October of this year, because, with the election of village and hamlet officials, it was to begin the re-institution of local government, which had been pretty well destroyed by the French occupation and by Diem. And this, I think, can have an extremely important effect on the countryside.

Abel: Mr. Ambassador, you said yesterday at the White House, I believe, that, and I quote you now, "more and more of the war is being taken over by the North Vietnamese."

It is equally true on our side that more and more of the fighting has long since been taken over by the United States forces.

Bunker: No, I don't think that's correct. And I think there's a misapprehension here. The Vietnamese forces have lost a great many more than we have. They have been assigned -- part of the forces have been assigned to the pacification effort, which means that they're diverted from what we might call the large scale war to a smaller scale war, but an equally difficult war, because it involved night fighting, guerrilla fighting --
Perhaps, more difficult to handle than the large unit warfare.

They are doing, as I say, increasingly better. They're turning in increasingly better performances.

Abel: You speak of the misapprehension on that part, Mr. Ambassador. And yet, I think I'm right in saying that the impression the American people are getting, not only from their own news media, but from our own government spokesmen, is of that disproportion between American and Vietnamese effort.

Now, what do you suppose can be done to put that in better perspective?

Bunker: Well, I think one of the problems is that the American newsmen who are there naturally follow the American troops, because of language, and because of the interest here, quite naturally, so that the reporting of what the Vietnamese do doesn't get adequate coverage, in my opinion.

And then, I think, there's also a tendency to generalize from specific instances. I don't mean to say that every action of the Vietnamese is a successful one. They have their setbacks. So do we. But they are steadily improving, and have turned in some very excellent performances.

As a matter of fact, I have of the period from -- just happen to have it -- from October 20th to November 6th. And they turned in about 43 engagements they were engaged in, of which 35 were highly successful. They had one or two setbacks, some -- more or less what you might call a drawn engagement. But -- but they were -- did some very good work.

Abel: You apparently are satisfied, Mr. Ambassador, that we are making steady progress out there. But you've certainly been back long enough to sense that somehow the more official assurances we get to that effect, the less persuaded our people appear to be whether they're doves or hawks, whether they feel we ought to get out, whether we ought to hit them harder.

Can you recite a little chapter and verse for us on -- on this matter of progress? How much better are we doing than, say, a year ago?
Yes, well, one benchmark, for example, is the voting in September '66 for the constituent assembly, and the voting a year later for president and vice president. In September '66, 5,200,000 registered to vote, and 80 percent of them voted. In September '67, 5,865,000 registered to vote, and 83 percent of them voted. The 5,865,000 registered voters represents about 75 percent of the population which is secure enough to vote, and came to vote in very large numbers, which is a very distinct advance over the year before.

Our estimates of the population under government control a year ago were about 55 percent, and today about 67 percent, with some 17 percent under Viet Cong control, and the rest of it being contested, with those benchmarks on the side of increasing security, and there's a military effort.

But, as I said a minute ago, I consider the other aspect equally important, the development of the constitutional process, the development of pacification, that was slow getting under way. But now it's picking up momentum. It was slow getting under way, because it required a great deal of planning, a great deal of organization, a great deal of training. Some 3,000 individuals, cadres as they call them now, have been trained for the pacification team.

We have now -- at the end of September 611 teams, compared with 450 a year ago -- should have about 700 at the end of this year. Probably between 900 and 1,000 hamlets will be pacified this year. We expect to raise that to 1,500 to 2,000 next year, so that all along the line, I think, there are indications that we are making, as I say, steady progress.

Mr. Ambassador, how much of a burden is it to you out there in Saigon with so many Americans at home -- the young and the not so young should be protesting this war, voicing their doubts about our purpose there?

Well, I think, as far as the government of Vietnam is concerned, I think, they're entirely satisfied that we're going to keep our commitment. And as far as the -- our own troops are concerned, I would think -- I would say that the morale
HAS NEVER BEEN BETTER -- THAT, I THINK, GENERAL WESTMORELAND, GENERAL ABRAMS, GENERAL PALMER -- ANY OF THEM THAT YOU WOULD TALK WITH WOULD TELL YOU THAT THEY ARE, PERHAPS, THE BEST TROOPS WE'VE EVER HAD, MOST EFFECTIVE.

ABEL: ARE YOU SAYING THEN THAT THIS -- THE PROTEST MOVEMENT HERE HAS NO EFFECT OUT THERE IN....

BUNKER: NO, I'M NOT SAYING THAT IT HAS NO EFFECT. I THINK OBVIOUSLY THINGS ARE SOMETIMES SAID HERE WHICH ARE DISTURBING, OF COURSE, TO THE VIETNAMESE, AND DISTURBING TO THE GOVERNMENT, AND IT DOES HAVE AN EFFECT. BUT I'M SAYING THAT, BY AND LARGE, THAT THE VIETNAMESE, I'M SURE ARE SATISFIED THAT WE -- WE INTEND TO GO THROUGH WITH OUR COMMITMENT.

ABEL: MR. AMBASSADOR, THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMING IN HERE TODAY.

THIS IS ELIE ABEL IN WASHINGTON. NOW BACK TO TODAY IN NEW YORK.

DOWNS: THANK YOU VERY MUCH ELIE, AND THANK YOU, AMBASSADOR BUNKER.