INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: DONNELLY P. BOLTON

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

G: Can we begin with your giving us some idea of your background and military education and so forth prior to your assignment to Vietnam?

D: Yes. I'm a 1942 graduate of the [U.S.] Military Academy. I went to war in World War II as a rifle company commander, in Europe, [was] wounded, back into the fight, and then home. [I] came home with the idea of going to Japan, and this was sort of forestalled by the atomic bomb. So although we were ready, we never moved out of Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

G: You were going to be in the invasion force, should there be one?

D: Yes, one of the new outfits. Then, luckily enough, I came out of the war a captain, which was a little bit lower than I had aspired to, but the wound didn't help at all. In the military career, I lucked into going to a course, not a short course, sort of a medium-sized course, at Leavenworth as a captain with three years' service. And this was just because they were starting to demobilize; there weren't that many regular officers around, and so when we started to demobilize we went off to Leavenworth.

G: You were a very young man to go to Leavenworth.

D: I was a very young man to go to Leavenworth. Now, some people who had had a short three-month--this was a five-month course; they were in the process of going back to the old system. A number of people during World War II went for a quick three-month course. And so I got credit for it, which helped a little bit. Now, I don't want to stray too far, but in that same course were people like General Wheeler, people like that, who had come home, you know, and had not had their card punched, and so they were all in the course. There was a great deal learned as a result of this, because you learn more from the students who are on either side of you than you do from the platform.

Okay. Then back to Fort Benning, and the Infantry School, quickly to Japan for thirty months, where I was in the Twenty-fifth Division, but you know, it was not a division as such. It was an occupation force that did all sorts of things, and I became the assistant G-4 of the division, and stayed there for some time.

Then right back to the Infantry School as an instructor. The first time I was there I was on the Infantry Board, testing weapons. [I] stayed there until the Korean War. By this time I'm a major; I had been to Korea on a couple of visits out of the Infantry School, and as a result of this I went over there as a major and got a battalion. Now this is a--you know, I didn't know how much of a break it was when this happened, but I was lucky enough, because most of my contemporaries who were lieutenant colonels then got caught in that stupid thing that we called the pentomic division, and so there were no command slots for lieutenant colonels. So the man who had a battalion either during the war or right after the war then got a little bit more of a lift up, if you did things well.

After the Korean War I came home and went into the Career Management, which is the personnel business that is now called OPO. And from there I became the assistant G-3 and the G-3 of SETAF, which at that time was the first missile command that the army put out, with Honest--

G: Would you give us those initials for SETAF?

D: SETAF: Southern European Task Force, in Verona, Italy, with units in Vicente [?], Italy. And I stayed there--well, let me back up. En route there, instead of going to the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, I went to the Joint Services Staff College in England as an exchange student, and spent nine months there, and then on to SETAF.

And [it was] a real good experience; I'm an infantryman and that sort of thing, and it gave me a little more insight into what was going on not only with other branches, but the sort of newer things that we were doing. We had Honest Johns and Corporal units, and an atomic demolition group, an engineering group. And so, being the assistant [G]-3 in that thing, it was a pretty good setup, because I did get some education that helped.

Let's see. After SETAF I came home and went to the Army War College, and that was 1959-1960, the class of 1960. After that I went back to the Pentagon. I went to the Pentagon in the operations business, and I was in the Ops directorate, and during the first part of the time I was in the Ops directorate was when Castro was coming to power, and I was an action officer in the Latin American part of the thing. Which I learned a lot out of, but the basic fact is that Castro was just about in power, so there was nothing anybody was going to do about it except read the stuff for background.

After about a year, Mr. [Robert] McNamara came to power, and I went off on a task force on Project 80, it was called, or the Holscher Committee. The Holscher Committee was run by Leonard Holscher, who was a civilian deputy controller. And I must say, you know, I'm not really great on Department of the Army civilians, but General Decker, who had been a controller, and Holscher were together on this, and they had decided in talking to Mr. McNamara and people like that, that they were going to get rid of the technical services as an entity, you know, where the Signal Corps ran its own personnel thing and all that sort of stuff. Also, they made them commodity-type commands. And this Project 80 was a typical one--well, one of the two or three top ones that McNamara put out. It again gave me a lot of experience, I mean, a lot of things that I wouldn't have gotten in Ops.

When it was approved by Mr. McNamara, I became the planner for starting it up and that sort of stuff. We had a number of very senior people. I'll tell you how I got it: it's just that I was a lieutenant colonel on the promotion list to colonel, and I was the junior colonel around, and they just handed it to me, you know, I mean there wasn't much choice in the matter. And also, it made it easier for them to work. And I learned a lot. Frank Besson was on it; Jablonski was on it; all these people that had different commodity commands, or different--like personnel things and stuff like that. And it took me a year and three or four months to go through that routine.

After which, I went down for some joint duty the last two years in the JCS, and from there I got involved in the Congo. (Laughter)

G: You got there about the time David Halberstam did, I guess.

D: Yes, just about. And I wasn't in country all the time, but I went over with Louie Truman, who was a three-star type that retired up in Atlanta, and who was that time the deputy CONARC commander. And in those days we had a task force inside CONARC that did the things that the command down in Florida has, you know--let me see. STRICOM. And it was just a nucleus headquarters, and about ten of us went over, including some State Department types, one of them being Charlie Whitehouse, who later spent a lot of time in Vietnam with us.

And then we bounced around and pretty soon I became--because the UN was in the Congo bit, I sort of inherited the area of sub-Sahara Africa and the Middle East. And they were sort of sleepy little place in those days, you know--

(Laughter)

--it wasn't like now. But we did have a little fight in Yemen, and this was the first time I ran into Ellsworth Bunker, and I did not personally run into him, but in working with him, because he was the guy that was mediating this thing between Nasser and--sort of a funny experience that somebody might--the royalists were opponents of the Nasser group in Yemen. Nasser was putting shiploads full of rifles and all that sort of stuff, and not completely, but the Saudis of course were very interested in it, and instead of getting a big army together, they got a force together that they had, and they'd sent a camel train full of gold bars down to the Yemen area and then these guys would buy from Nasser's people--

(Laughter)

--and turn around and shoot at them the next day. The best logistic thing that ever happened, as far as I'm concerned.

(Laughter)

A couple of camel trains full of gold was better logistics than the whole damned mobilization on the Egyptian part.

G: That's great.

D: But anyway that's the story about that thing.

From the JCS then, I went to [Fort] Hood, had a brigade in the armored division at Hood, and then to Vietnam.

G: Was that the Second Armored?

D: It was the First Armored in those days. And then, you see, about three years later they moved the First Cav back into that, right after the war, and the First Armored Division went to Europe.

G: So you landed in Vietnam in--

D: About April of 1966.

G: Okay. And you were what?

D: I was a colonel.

G: You were a colonel then. Okay.

D: Not a young colonel. Not a young colonel, but a junior colonel, you know, you just didn't recover from the things until we got into that war and they started to [inaudible].

I was ticketed originally to be the mayor-of-Saigon type, you know, and I didn't like that, and so I eventually went to work for General Larson up at I Force Victor, and he's the guy that was my beast barracks corporal as a cadet, and I must say I wrote him--

(Laughter)

--and said, "I don't want to be in Saigon." And then Jack Deane was there as the chief of staff, and a guy by the name of Mel Zais had just left--

G: What was that name, sir?

D: Mel Zais, Z-A-I-S. He died here just about--

G: The name rang a bell, and I wasn't sure.

D: Yes. He was a four-star type, eventually; he was a young BG at the time. So about that time, Attleboro, which was down in the Saigon area, north of Saigon toward Tay Ninh, came, and Bill DePuy in his inimitable way was relieving people--

G: He was with the First Division.

D: Yes. Well, he had grabbed control of that thing, and Ted deSaussure was relieved. And so Jack Deane had gone down to the First Division, and then six months later I went down to the Twenty-fifth Division just because--well, they had to have a replacement, and Ted came up to I Force.

So I must have been [for] about five months the chief of staff in I Force Victor.

G: You replaced General deSaussure, is that right?

D: No, I replaced General Deane, who went off when Mel Zais got out of the thing.

Okay. Then I was in the Twenty-fifth Division, and Fred Weyand was still--Fred Weyand, when he arrived, was the acting corps commander, but this was because somebody was off on leave, or something like that. And he then came back to the Twenty-fifth. And I was the ADC, and there were two of them. One of them was G. G. [George G.] O'Connor, who died over here, and he went on to take a division and then had a heart attack.

Then a man by the name of John Tilson, who at one time had been the J-3, came in as the division commander. And then another man by the name of [Maj. General Fillmore K.?] Mearns came in, and I lasted through--you know, not through the whole part, but three division commanders, and had been in the Saigon area now for some time. And so General [Creighton] Abrams about that time came along and said, "You're coming down to Saigon. I've got a thing that I'm setting up and you're going to do it."

I might say that one of the things that probably influenced him was that Fred Weyand had a different philosophy of how that war should have been fought than most of these sort of little gangsters that were running around the place did. Now, I don't particularly approve of that thing as a general--you know, he had a briefing that he would give to Mr. McNamara or anybody who came in. And he was selling them a very good bill of goods. And it was sort of the ink spot theory, if you know that. In other words, start around the population centers and work it out, work it out, and get yourself in the civic action business, and the protection, and work on the hearts and minds, and fight, but fight

with the idea of protecting the areas that you had liberated or were in the process of liberating, and then move it out.

I think that the flavor of the war at that time made that a pretty good method of handling the war. I'm completely opposed to having that kind of an atmosphere in a war. I mean, you know, all you have to do is look at the kind of war we fought in World War II, and then if you say that's out of date, you ought to look at the kind of war the Israelis fought in Lebanon, and you find out it isn't out of date. And this was one of the bad things of the war, because we inched into it, and there were so many restrictions.

G: What restrictions bothered you particularly?

B: Well, not crossing the border, except in the latter days. I had a boss, [Lt. General] "Swede" Larson, [who] came home and said to the press--without any coaching or anything, not being rebellious at all--said, "You can look across--when you get up in Pleiku you can look across into Laos and Cambodia and you can see them building their hooches over there." You know, when the [Ho Chi Minh?] Trail was coming down. And he got back here and he said this to some newspaperman, without being rebellious, just not having been told that this wasn't something you were supposed to say. And Mr. McNamara came out and said, "That's not so." And Swede Larson got a rap on the wrist, but there wasn't anything that he had done insubordinately.

But they were there, you know, this was a big fat lie that somebody was putting out, and I can't figure out the reason except the State Department did not want to get that thing known all over the place. The State Department I think at that time thought that you were

going to be able to keep that war from bursting out at the seams, and so these things. . . . Later on we did, but it was pretty late when we got to be able to go across the border.

Other restrictions--and this is hard to do--but artillery wasn't allowed to fire a lot of times when you were in populous areas. And I'm as humane as anybody else, but it seems to me that the fact that you couldn't do this, or the fact that a battery commander had to come around and damn near check every gun--and firing battery chiefs were not worth a damn because they weren't allowed to do anything; they weren't allowed to take care of their own skills, and so then you'd shoot and--hell, I think a lot of young captains and stuff like that probably were very careful, that they didn't get anything right into the center of the thing, just because they didn't want to be relieved. And the fact is that that's where the VC were. And this goes back to my talk about the Israelis and World War II. Basically, if we'd have cleaned it out, we'd have killed a bunch of people at one time, but in the long run the war wouldn't have been prolonged and there'd be a hell of a lot more Vietnamese alive if you had been able to cut the war back in time. And it has to be an impersonal thing. They all are. If you're going to get personal about war, you're just going to go off your rocker, because [inaudible].

G: What about all the charges that we were in fact too free with firepower in Vietnam?

B: I think that there's a certain amount of that, but not really too free. Because our maneuver capability was inhibited by borders, by towns and stuff like that, what the hell were you going to do? You'd go out--and this is another thing--you'd go out on these company and

battalion-sized things, and you didn't shoot as much as you wanted then, and they just sifted away and off you went. There is something to the real estate grabbers' philosophy of war.

G: Explain that for me.

B: Well, I mean there's a time when you have to go after objectives. There's a time, for instance, at a very high level, when Saigon [Hanoi?] should have been a target for occupation, not for just being bombed. Take a look at the wars. We moved across Europe and we moved from island to island by securing the geography, and then you have something to do things with. Now, they tell you all about the guerrilla forces and how they faded into the thing, and how--and they're giving the same thing up here in Afghanistan, that the guerrilla forces can beat you. But the time we got beat--and I guess I'm ahead of myself too much--the time we got our beating, after most of the U.S. troops had gone, is the time when [Vo Nguyen] Giap had gone conventional in his offensive. No doubt about it. I mean, they were using tanks, they were using carriers, they were using artillery in volume. You're not going to do anything in Afghanistan, and it never will go like the Vietnam thing, mostly because there are just too few of them and Russia's too big.

But you can run around and harass the hell out of people, but it doesn't let you win the war, is what I'm telling you.

G: I read you. Can you tell us a little bit about the operations of I Field Force and the Twenty-fifth Division, as you recall? Do you recall any special high points, low points, anything that--?

B: I Field Force had a tremendous area, you know, and had the Cav. I've forgotten the name of the first operation, out beyond Pleiku. Was that Hawthorne?

G: It could very well be.

B: There was one called Masher-White Wing, and that was combined with the marines, and that they did down in the Qui Nhon area.

G: Let's see, Hawthorne was in June of 1966.

B: No, this was before I even got there.

G: How about Birmingham?

B: No, Birmingham I know. That's Willard Pearson, [who] took them up into Ban Me Thuot, that area up in there, closer to the--I think it was Birmingham. But anyway, no, the great thing Harry Kinnard did, there was a fight on the top of a mountain out there on the border. I'm trying to remember the name. I wasn't there yet.

G: It wasn't Ia Drang, was it?

B: Yes, that one. Okay. The surprise of the helicopter combined with the other operation with the helicopter and the marines, amphibious, was such that we probably could have moved faster and gone a lot more places if again, you couldn't go across the border, if we had had North Vietnam as an objective, that sort of thing. It was absolutely a total surprise as far as I know, when they came in with the lift down to the top of the mountain, with troops deployed at the bottom of the mountain as well, and then they swept on down. And they really did clean out a lot of people. It was a very successful operation. And the point is that

the longer you did that, and then never really exploited your mobility--I'm talking about exploiting your mobility the way [George] Patton exploited his mobility--

G: You mean in the pursuit?

B: Yes, and in moving toward the objective--then we would have gotten even more out of the helicopter, after the vertical envelopment. Not just the Cav, but all the rest of the stuff that started to come in and flow in faster. We never did that, and so I don't say that the helicopter became less effective, but I do say that the enemy adjusted to it. And this again goes back to sort of--you've got to move, that sort of thing. Now, the helicopter was great anyway, but I mean after about a year we didn't have the great big surprise, the capabilities--they hadn't had any time to get anti-[aircraft] weapons in, and all that stuff. We missed the boat, to a certain extent. The helicopter was a magnificent machine, and it did a great deal for our mobility, but after you're finished with them we moved away.

And we never did threaten their homeland. Later on, McNamara's electric fence and that sort of crap, that's just--there was more time and effort wasted on that, probably, than any other single little gimmick that we had.

To go on, though, I came down to--we had done pretty well, up in the Field Force, but we had not as many helicopters as in the other parts of the Field Force, the Twenty-fifth Division brigade, the 101 brigade with Will Pearson and that sort of stuff. And we had the biggest territory. And therefore we moved and did pretty well, but during those six months, there were no critical fights. There were a lot of people scurrying around trying to get

information, and landing on top of hills and that sort of stuff, but we really didn't get the kind of fights that we got later on.

G: You mentioned the First Cavalry Division. That outfit developed a kind of a mystique about it, didn't it?

B: Oh, yes.

G: Was that deserved, in your opinion?

B: I'll tell you what. In my opinion, the First Cav, when it came over there, maybe for another year to a year and a half, the First Cav had so damned much talent that they probably deserved the mystique. I mean, they had guys, you take a look at the [inaudible] thing. Harry Kinnard running it, Jack Wright, Jack Hennessy, who was a battalion commander when he started out and then had a brigade--you just go down the list of whoever was hot in the United States Army that could physically take care of the jumping and the helicopter business, they had them. They had the best. Not that there are other guys out that you could pick out as individuals, but that was the best military organization that I had seen.

G: I was thinking of Hal Moore.

B: Hal Moore, yes. All of these guys were--and George Casey, people like that, who not only came in as a brigade commander, and then came back as the division commander and got killed. There was just all sorts of talent around there. And I think that probably their reputation was earned in those days, and just held on. And they got a lot of good men along the line; I don't mean that they then dropped. But they--well, the sergeants and stuff like that, who weren't coming back or who were--the people that were--some of those people

came back for third and fourth trips, but not always to the same place and not always to that organization. Maybe if you'd had some sort of a British setup--

G: A regimental system?

B: --a regimental system that would have been--I'm not particularly enamored with it, but it does keep those units in pretty great shape.

Then the Twenty-fifth Division. I got down there during Attleboro, which was a real, real tough fight. And I don't know the legitimacy of the relieving of Ted deSaussure. I really don't, and he's a close friend, and I've never talked to him about it. It was pretty bad, because I came in and he went out, and we didn't even get to see one another. He went up to the Field Force, the I Field Force, as the artillery commander, and Buster Boatwright, who was the artillery commander, came in and took my job as chief of staff.

But Attleboro was a mixed-up, poorly run fight. There are probably two or three reasons for that. Maybe Ted deSaussure wasn't that good with it. See, what he had was the separate brigade, and then he became the ADC, or really part of the division, and they did get boxed in pretty heavily.

G: You've heard the stories that circulated about that.

B: Yes. Seven and eight companies in one battalion and not the other; they piecemealed the troops in, and that sort of stuff, yes. I'm not sure, however, that on the other side of the ledger that the First Division was doing all that they could do. And I don't mean that, you know, talking about soldiers and junior officers and that sort of stuff. I think that there was probably--well, Bill DePuy fired deSaussure, when it really comes down to it. Heintges

was there, and Heintges then took the message back to Westy [William Westmoreland], and that's the way it was.

The good part of that thing, and this shows some of the antipathy, is that Ted deSaussure went up to Field Force, then became the artillery commander for the Cav, and did an outstanding job, by reputation--I wasn't in that area any more, so I can't say anything first-hand--and got promoted to major general.

There was another guy who was the ADC of the First Division, Charley Mount [?], whom DePuy fired, and I think maybe I would have fired him, not because he was inept, but because he walked out of a meeting one time and said, "That son of a bitch is going to kill us all," and was overheard, and he should have kept his mouth shut.

G: You can think those things, but you shouldn't say them.

B: Well, not in front of a mob; he's the second ranking general in the thing. But he also got to be a major general. When both of them went home, on the next promotion list both of them came out as major generals. Now, this is backlash on the First Division, or on the First Division commander.

G: Did General DePuy have that kind of--I'm going to rephrase it. Were there people who had the long knives out for General DePuy and were showing it by promoting people that he had fired?

B: Oh, yes. See, he had fired, I mean, not just general officers, but he had fired battalion commanders about twice a day until he got what he wanted. And there was a backlash, and obviously there was a backlash at the very senior level, because General Johnson sent him

down to a job, a spooky-forces job, in the JCS. And he was in limbo for a while. And it was only after General Johnson left that Bill DePuy came back into the fold and worked for General Wheeler and was a Vietnam expert.

The basic fact is that Bill DePuy is smart, he's a hell of a soldier, I get along with him fine. But he had a completely different way of motivating. Again, you go back to the kind of war that we should have fought. He probably was the epitome of that, among division commanders in Vietnam. I don't condone wholesale relief or anything like that, but nevertheless--you know, we have Sam Williams as an example where somebody just had to come in and hack it up, and he got caught in the thing. I think to a much lesser extent the same thing happened in the DePuy thing. And he went out to get people, and got people, and he had good battalion commanders. As a matter of fact, when we were in the Twenty-fifth we took two of them from him that were majors, and put them in, and they were outstanding commanders. But if you're not talking humanities and you're talking war, that was a pretty good one.

Then, later on in that area, we started to move into War Zone C. I don't have at my fingertips all of the operations.

G: This list is obviously kind of spotty.

B: Yes, that's right, and anyway I don't think it's sort of necessary--

G: I wasn't trying to trap you into giving me a recitation, but I was interested if there was some particular operation that you found revealing or anything.

B: Well, there were two of them. The First Infantry Division, when we were doing some things other places, had Cedar Falls. It did not last very long; it was to clear up the little area across the Saigon River above Lai Khe, and that sort of stuff, and I've forgotten the geography. Then Westy got all hepped up to have a big operation to clean out War Zone C, and that's Junction City. Junction City was run by Fred Weyand, even though he was only a division commander at the time. And we had parts of the Ninth Division, the Fourth Division, ARVN, all of them, and this is the first one that I really got into on a big operation.

We cleaned it out. The roads were open to the border, they melted back in across the border down there in that part of Cambodia. They had by this time gotten enough communications and all that sort of equipment down there so that they were able to have a headquarters, and Giap would come in and out during this thing. We cleaned it up; I don't know what the body count and that sort of stuff is, but it was our territory. Now, there were still people hanging around on the fringes, and some people were--you know, there's a geographical landmark called the Black Virgin, or something like that, right up at Tay Ninh, and it had a monastery on the top and stuff like that, and for years there had been a hundred to two hundred guerrillas on the slopes, not afraid to come down but coming down and moving someplace else surreptitiously, rather than coming down to fight the war. And over in that area there we still had a little fight going on. But War Zone C belonged to us. The Rome plows came in; we had special forces camps at four places along the Cambodian border; we had another one that was right up the main route up into War Zone C. We had

fights all the time after this operation was over, we had raids and all that sort of stuff that came along.

Again, probably, if things had been wide open at that time, and you had been able to go ten miles in and surprise them, which we did a couple of years later, you might have wrapped up the whole goddamned Giap and the headquarters, you see.

G: You think Giap was physically there?

B: Oh, I think he--not all the time, no. He came down--but he moved--I couldn't guarantee that he was even there, but the intelligence that I remember, not specifically, is that you would find intelligence that showed that the senior commander was in this spot, this spot, you know, he roamed the countryside to set up. When they finally got started in the big operations it was, of course, a lot easier to know where the hell all the power was. But I don't think that he ever took charge of an operation. I think he went down, supervised it, and went someplace else, and he was much more mobile. And you know, in a communist setup, you'd better get back and touch base in Hanoi, or somebody's going to be sitting in your seat if you stay away too long. That's just the way things are, and I'm sure he was back for every big meeting.

G: Was most of this based on communications intelligence?

B: I would guess. I can't tell you that, but I suppose that maybe interrogation put him places, but I think that probably in the long run that communications intelligence followed him better. But they did, as a result of that, have cross checks.

G: This was what came to be called COSVN, I guess.

B: Yes.

G: Central Office for South Vietnam.

B: But they would mobile out of there. Most of the time, of course--well, COSVN was in the Hanoi area permanently, but they moved, got to be a fairly mobile sort of thing when they finally got the road in and were able to get the trucks down and all that sort of stuff, you know. All those people who weren't there in the first part of the war, according to Mr. McNamara, got all those damned trucks and ammunition and all that crap down the trail.

G: Right. Is there anything else you want to talk about in relation to the Twenty-fifth Division, or I Field Force?

B: Let me talk a little bit about the Twenty-fifth Division. I thought it did a very good job of opening up the area. I mean, even when I first got there they were running convoys to Tay Ninh. The Twenty-fifth Division did a magnificent job on the Ho Bo Woods and that sort of thing. They Rome-plowed it; they did things that--I mean ingenuity; they got themselves some orange powder stuff, and you know, in the Ho Bo Woods the enemy was all underground, and there were tunnels under the Saigon River. And Ken Mearns got green dye and orange dye and all that sort of stuff and put it down there, and we had pumps on the top to try and force these guys out of the thing, and despite all this we never found a colored bit of water come up. And I'm talking like two or three tons of the stuff. But it was all catacomb down there. They did clean it up pretty well.

Then the First Division and the Twenty-fifth Division did a little job over in the Iron Triangle, where they got their nose bloodied a bit, but nevertheless we finally cleaned it out,

and then you saw the fighting move back up toward the Michelin [plantation] and that real tough area, An Loc, in that area. And those places were VC territory for a long time, and then they started to challenge it. That's about the only thing I have; maybe I'll come across something else.

G: I've heard stories that that Michelin plantation owner was one of the mainstays of the VC in the area.

B: Yes, there's a lot of rumors to that [effect].

G: You're not going to confirm or deny it?

B: I frankly don't know, I really don't know. I know that he probably was paying bribes in the early days, when the VC were down along the Saigon River and in that area, before the sort of housecleaning, you know. And even after we cleaned a lot of that out there were always the guerrilla types, as opposed to the organized outfit, that were down there. But I'm saying that when they were down there, I'm sure he had the job to get the rubber out, and I'm sure he paid, and I'm sure he gave them some subsidies and I'm sure he gave them some safe havens. He had to stay alive, you know. I mean, there weren't that many of them there that they couldn't be wiped out with one zipper pistol. But I must say that when we were in the Michelin plantation--and the Twenty-fifth took over the Michelin plantation with a Fourth Division outfit; I don't know if you've got into all of the rigmarole that went around. The Twenty-fifth Division sent a brigade up into Pleiku--

G: The third brigade of the Twenty-fifth.

B: --so then the Fourth Division was going to go up into Pleiku, okay? But they had to drop their unit off down in the Saigon area, one brigade, down there in the Saigon area, to fill out the Twenty-fifth Division. Because at that time Westy really wanted to keep the 196th Brigade as a force that could move around and he could pull in and out. They didn't; they ended up in Tay Ninh and stayed there, and we put the Fourth Division's brigade in the Michelin plantation headquarters.

But even as poorly as we handled our strategy, you could see things move back, I mean, things were getting better, there's no doubt about that. Crops were coming in and all that sort of stuff. I don't think we got their hearts and minds, but I do think they found out that it was safer on our side of the lines than the other's. And the bad part of it is, of course, the poor bastards believed us, and then later on they got themselves all cut up.

G: At this point, you went to MACV headquarters.

B: I went to MACV, yes. I think General Westmoreland--see, General Abrams was over there not quite a year before General Westmoreland left. General Abrams, outside of the time he went north when they were having all the trouble up in the IV Corps, and what's the one, the 101 got all wrapped around the axle? Well, they moved up into Chu Lai with Task Force Oregon, and then for a period of time General Abrams went up there and sat on top of that, until Bill Rosson got it all sort of squared away.

G: That was what he called MACV Forward?

B: Yes, something like that. And then they changed the name and went on went on for something else.

G: PROVCORPS?

B: Yes. And the bad part of that was that there was a lot of bickering with the marines, and that's one of the reasons that Creighton Abrams went up there, I'm sure.

But he came on back, and he had started this thing, and he felt that we really had to do some real spade work with getting Provincial Forces, prefectural forces--the RF/PF, in other words, plus some of that home guard crap that they had around there. Those people, both on the advisory side and on the Vietnamese side, were spending too much time, especially in the Delta, existing. I mean, the young adviser, some lieutenant, would take off in a jeep--maybe two or three jeeps, because he needed protection--to go down and get the chow or the ammunition or the things for the radios and all that sort of stuff. They had no system. This had started, though, in Can Tho, before I got there. The reason I think that General Abrams wanted to do this is that he felt that he did need an old hand in there to go in, and by this time I was nineteen months or so in country. Because I'd never known him before or anything like that. And I had finished a full year as an assistant division commander. And I was glad to finish it, because working for three bosses is--

G: It's a thankless job.

B: Yes. I was perfectly willing to stay on. I mean, it was just. . . .

So, he called this thing MACMA. I don't know if you've--

G: MACMA?

B: Yes. In all of the cable things that come in and stuff like that, messages, it's MACV J-1--you know, the three first initials had to do with military assistance command. The second group of two is MA, which was Military Assistance. Okay.

Now, as I told you before, but I guess we have to do this for the record, at the level in Saigon the coordination of the Military Assistance Program between the Americans and the Vietnamese was very poor. It was poor not because there was any ill will, although some people griped that they took off too often, and stuff like that, but I mean no ill will. The basic fact was that it was organization. The French organization that was with the Vietnamese, in effect, was our old organization, with a signal corps, an engineer corps, all of these separate technical outfits that all reported into, not the army, but into the Joint Command. The army there was no headquarters for.

Then at that same time, because USARV had graduated up from the Saigon Support Command to the Support Command, and then got into the tremendous big business of running the Log Command and all this sort of stuff--but they really had the expertise. They had all the guys that could deal with their counterparts. However, it was a sort of a wishy-washy thing, because they didn't have a counterpart.

G: I was about to ask, who was your counterpart?

B: Well, this is sort of what I'm leading up to. So, we took several groups of the real technical services, like signal corps, and that sort of stuff, and the logistic people, we took those people from USARV and put them--not physically, but put them under MACMA. We did the same thing, sort of in a coordination way, on the outfit of the J-1; we didn't on the J-2,

that was too big a mess. We took the force structure thing for the Vietnamese out of the J-3 and put it down in MACMA. And the reason for this was that it was going to be sort of a dog's breakfast anyway, you know, even if they had left some of it with USARV.

The reason was that there was nobody at the end of the telephone when the adviser of USARV called. I don't mean that they weren't in communication. But they didn't have a headquarters--there was no [general] army headquarters that the chief of engineers could go to. So he went to the Joint Command. The guy in the Joint Command was picking up the phone and calling his counterpart in MACV, and the loop just never was getting closed. So this became the kind of thing that General Abrams wanted to sort of clean up as best he could.

It was after about two months that we finally reached in and sort of took the force structure away from the J-3. The J-3 was so damned busy with U.S. force structure, with all those forces coming in there. He also ran the ops center; he also ran a lot of planning. The reason he ran a lot of planning is because they had a--I'll be honest, General Westmoreland would rather go to John Chaisson and the J-3 than go to the J-5. I don't know particularly why. He [the J-5] was an air force officer, always. And I think the way it grew up, he was primarily put on long-range plans that nobody ever was going to do anything with, and secondly, he was sort of the liaison and the token staff officer from MACV. And I'm not saying that that was right, I'm just saying that that's the way it grew, and the J-5 had damn little to do. A bunch of long range plans, and had a bunch of good people in there turning out these plans that never got anyplace.

So anyway, we came down and we by this time had computerized organizations, and so it became the job of MACMA to work with the Vietnamese on coordination, not movement of tanks and stuff like that, but to sort of keep the inventory and keep the thing going so that you knew what you were doing, and you didn't send people off to school in the United States and then bring them back and find out that they didn't have any helicopters to fly because somebody over here didn't put the helicopter list in, see. And this had been going on before, and I must say some of it was Westy's fault. He would go out, like down to the Delta, and he'd see six or seven APCs, armored personnel carriers, in a compound that wasn't out doing things. And maybe the day before he'd be up in Tay Ninh; he may be up at Pleiku or someplace like that, and they've lost some helicopters. And so then you go down there and take the helicopters from down there and you put them up here. APCs, primarily I've seen him do this [with]. But anyway, this equipment--and then the orders are going back that say these are coming to the Highlands, and those are the ones that you've taken from the Delta are already up in the Highlands. But the guy reads on the poop sheet that these are going to the Fourth Division in Pleiku, the poop sheet that they tagged it was back there in the United States, and they go up to Pleiku and they get more than they need, and then you get a shipment back down here, and this sort of stuff, you know.

G: Was General Westmoreland trying to do too much himself?

B: Well, a lot of it. You had Phil Davidson here. Phil Davidson and I lived together when I came into Saigon, and then when we all moved out to the trailer camp we lived next door to

one another. He's probably the best intelligence type that we had during the war. He's a pretty tough, brash guy. But he and I were walking out of one of these long, drawn-out Wednesday conferences that Westy had, and he'd just been up to a place up on the border where there was a young major running a special forces setup. And this kid had done a marvelous job on something, but it was in a particular area. And he and I were getting out of there, and Westy had just told us that he wants--he told the J-3, but he's told the whole outfit--he wants us to try and spread that throughout the entire command, so you do it this way. Well, what works in one place does not necessarily work in another place, and you don't do it--you have to sort of test whether it's possible to do this thing, and whether it's efficient to do this thing. You don't just go up there and listen to that spiel from a young major.

And Westy always started one of these things out with, "I was up to see Major So-and-so, and he has a dad-gum good idea." And then we would all run around. Okay. Then Phil Davidson and I were walking down the hall, and he says, "You know, pretty soon we've got to get a plan and quit running this goddamned war on 'dad-gum good ideas.'" And that's one of the detractions that I have on Westy, and he and I are close friends. I mean, we go to their house over in Charleston; they come here for Fiesta, that sort of stuff. I have never indulged in very many things with him on this. He wrote me a couple of times; one time Reader's Digest was coming out with probably the worst thing that I had ever seen. And Phil Davidson, myself, and about four or five others he got ahold of and said, "Look, let's write these people, because it's bad."

G: What were they coming out with?

B: Oh, they'd listened to some of these geniuses from the State Department and from CORDS and all that sort of stuff, and they were coming out with an article on the Vietnam War. And it was completely false. They had mishmashed it; they had some professor up there that had taken all this stuff and put it together. And I wrote this letter and showed about four or five things--we didn't want to do it with one guy doing twenty-five or thirty of these items, because that destroys your credibility, because you couldn't have been all those places or in all those circumstances. So I wrote paragraphs on about three or four things that were in this that were completely false, and we did this.

Anyway, we squashed it. And the last thing I said is, "It is my opinion that this should not be moderated and given a quick fix. It is too bad and it is not fixable. And if you're going to do this go get some guy who's authentic and [can do the thing]."

There's a guy by the name of Jap Wilson; I don't know whether anybody's ever talked to you about him. He's a colonel. He was old Chief of Staff Johnson's outside man, and he is probably the world's biggest character. And you know, he was there off and on for three, three and a half years.

G: What was his first name?

B: Jap Wilson. I don't know what the hell his--

G: J-A-P?

B: I think, yes, J-A-P. Anyway, what I guess I'm saying is that he was the kind of guy that had quick fixes for a lot of things, some of them very clever. But he also got himself in trouble. By the time he came back, he had told them the wrong thing—

(Laughter)

--and that sort of stuff, and circumstances did. But he's the kind of guy who would be able to tell you some more about Westy and--what's the name of the armored cav man that lives up in Dallas, the four-star type who succeeded--?

G: [Paul] Harkins?

B: Harkins. He's the kind of a guy that would get--and that's the way the thing started, you see? I mean, you've got a helicopter unit, and a maintenance unit, and that sort of stuff here and there, and they were using those old [H]-34 helicopters, and it wasn't planned very well.

Let me get back so I don't ramble too much. This thing started to work. We sent five or six of the bright young Vietnamese back to Benning and for a quick course up in the Pentagon and that sort of stuff, to know how the force structure is put together. There are a hell of a lot of Americans that don't know that when you decide you're going to have an infantry regiment, that you've got to have some guy over there start fiddling with radios and all this sort of stuff, and organization, and MOSs, and then you have to get them all together and package them and bring them over. I mean, it's a very complicated process. It was easy, because we had the capability in our computers to do it; we were getting topnotch people in to do it. It wasn't that difficult when you had the choice. We had just all sorts of

people that were in this little cell of eight people that were working on force structure. We got four general officers, and there was--so what I'm saying, I guess, is that we started getting it going. And the amazing thing was that this was at the time when Vien and those people--it was after Tet that it started to work. I came in November, and Tet was in February, and we worked like hell at it even before Tet, but there was no effect or anything like that. But then when Vien and Thieu got together and decided that they could expand the Vietnamese force, this thing came into being as the sort of savior and the plan.

The basic fact is that that was probably a very efficient Vietnamese--in comparison--Vietnamese mobilization. They added a hell of a lot of people to that. I'm not sure that I agree with the three hundred thousand, but they added an awful lot of units, and they would get there and the cadets out at the military academy would get to be second lieutenants in time to get to the unit on time, you know--

(Laughter)

--instead of--you know, and that sort of stuff went on. And it started to work. And I think it was very professional, and this brings me sort of to where I was about ready to go home, because it took a long time.

G: Was this the origin of what became known as Vietnamization?

B: Yes. Vietnamization started there--well, Vietnamization as a name started in Washington, and I would guess that it became Vietnamization a couple of months before I got there, and then Bill Desobry was the director of ops and I was the deputy director of ops, and then he moved on and I became the director of ops. And so in I would guess early 1969, the first

half of that time was when Vietnamization started to roll, and this then became sort of a watchword.

In addition to my operational duty, I was designated as the director of Vietnamization, and there was one from the air force, and there was one from the navy--not much, you know, they really didn't have it, but the marines were in. George Blanchard was sent up to OSD after--I guess about maybe six or eight months later. And he had himself sort of a pain up there, because everybody was trying to get in the act, and he handled it very well, I must say.

The only thing wrong with Vietnamization was that it didn't last.

G: That's an interesting statement. Do you want to--?

B: Well, yes. Basically, we started to pull out troops. About the last year--I'm trying to think of when the brigade of the 9th Division came out. It must have been in the summer, maybe the summer, maybe the fall, of 1969. It was only a token thing, really. They took one brigade out, and then they were going to take another and another. They would have a meeting on each of these things. What I'm saying is, that initial sort of incremental withdrawal was not bad. But it snowballed. Two things: first of all, I would guess that Mr. [Henry] Kissinger probably, having not been to war except as a sergeant, just thought that they could go faster. And probably, and probably, to give him--because I think he did a tremendous job--and probably from a political standpoint, geopolitical as well as political standpoint, it had to move faster than the military wanted it to move.

However, it moved faster than it should have toward the end. That, of course, was when the public opinion thing got after us, in the first part of the 1970s. And so it snowballed to the point where there had not been, in my opinion, enough overlap between this increased number of Vietnamese units, who fought very well up in the northern sector during the 1969 period, when they were up at Khe Sanh--not Khe Sanh, what's the little--Khe Sanh was earlier, but up in that same area. You know, they had a fight at a special forces camp.

G: Lang Vei?

B: Lang Vei, maybe. Anyway, they did a good job up there with a mixture of--a higher mixture than we had had in the past--of Vietnamese and Americans. Sid Berry and some of those guys ran the fire direction center, and pushed it. And they did very well. But then the time when--I've forgotten what triggered the news--when I guess they announced when the last of the--they took a big increment out, and it was announced. And when the Vietnamese outfit that was up in Pleiku and Dar Lac, and places like that, just folded and started back for the coast, there just wasn't enough there for backbone. They hadn't been added [to] enough.

What we did is we inched our way into the war, and we ran like hell out of the war. If we had done both; if we had either ran to hell and gone into the war, and then ran to hell and gone out of the war, it would have been all right. And if we had inched ourselves in, and then inched ourselves out it would have been all right.

G: You're saying we had the worst possible combination.

B: That's right. We panicked out of there. And I must attribute that last bit to the point that there was nobody that could control it. The thing had gone wild at home. If you ever sat in the Pentagon during some of those demonstrations and stuff--things got real rough.

G: No, I never did.

B: Anyway, that sort of takes us through the chronology of it.

G: Right. Let me ask a few more specific questions about the Military Assistance command. I've come across something called the SEER system. Do you remember what that was?

B: No, but it's--God, if I just had something. Have you got a piece of paper that shows it? On RF/PF, and that sort of thing.

G: Let's talk about that for a minute. Bob Komer took over what became CORDS, as I recall, in April of 1967, April or May of 1967, that would be about right.

B: That's about right, yes. Maybe a little earlier than that, but that's about right, yes. He had been out there--let me just talk about him for a minute. He got his reputation started by going out there and grabbing ahold of a transportation officer, who later became a three-star [general] and head of logistics--God, some of these guys I haven't thought about in years. Anyway, there was this tremendous backlog of ships in the Saigon River. It was all over the paper and everything else. They were lined up for miles. And he got over there, and I don't know how much he did, but he did stir a lot, and they sent this guy over with him, and they took that port apart. They worked them all day, all night, they grabbed the people from some of these civilian outfits like RMK, and those that were sitting on their ass they put to work, and those that weren't they moved into higher jobs, and they cleared the damn

Saigon River. When they got that back, and he went back to Washington after numerous trips on this thing, is when he started to get noticed. He worked over in the NSC, I think, someplace like that.

G: He was on the White House staff in some capacity.

B: Yes. Anyway, as far as Vietnam goes, this is where he came from.

G: When did you first encounter him?

B: Oh, I encountered him pretty early in the game, I guess about 1966, maybe the fall of l966. Not in country, but a visitor. I didn't know him, and I think--for instance, these Wednesday meetings that Westy had, why, he was introduced and then talked and did some things like that. I didn't know him in those days, but within six months I began to know him.

Tape 2 of 2

G: Can you recall whether you had any intelligence or intimations about Tet coming up?

B: I did not, as an individual. I really wasn't in that business, and it happened to be at a time when we were very busy. But I did have this, because I lived in the same villa with Phil Davidson, and we started getting things ready around the house, like bringing home some M-16s with us and that sort of stuff. We lived in those days in villas. An aside: this was not a very good way to do it, but this is what was left over from when they had families, and the MAAG in the thing. And there weren't that many big buildings, you know. Until they put the new big headquarters out near Tan Son Nhut, MACV was scattered all over the town. And so we were there. But at that time, yes, I was alerted to the fact that we may have some trouble.

I must say that I really figured we weren't going to have it until after Tet. I didn't realize that--it was the wrong Vietnamese--

(Laughter)

--and that these guys would give up their Tet. But of course, they were all away from home anyway.

G: Yes. Well, a lot of people thought that they wouldn't violate the Tet spirit or season or whatever.

B: Yes.

G: Can you recall how events broke?

B: Yes. Let me just go into the way I moved into it. And some of this is repetitious, but it'll keep it--we had a small firefight around our villa. The only driver that got there was mine. So we packed three of us in the sedan, plus Cowboy, which was the driver's name.

G: A Vietnamese?

B: Yes. The guy had eleven kids.

(Laughter)

G: He obviously wasn't a VC, because he showed up for work.

B: Yes, and he made it all the way. Of course, he used to come very early, because I came very early because I traveled, and get to the airstrip and get the hell out before there was any problem. But anyway, we made it down the street, and when we hit the main drag, and I've forgotten the name of the thing, there was a little firefight up ahead. Then we got on the radio and called Dutch [Walter] Kerwin, who had a house on the main drag between us

and there, and he said, "Pick me up, so we can get some more." And then we finally got on up, and just south of the Vietnamese compound, where the Joint Command was, there was a good firefight going off on a street that was angled off, and we made it through, and that's the outfit where you probably have heard that they ambushed a couple of truckloads of MPs that were trying to get down to BOQ 3.

G: Right.

B: And we wandered in there. So obviously there wasn't anything for me to do, and about noon on that day, and there was still sniper fire and all that sort of stuff around both compounds, Dutch Kerwin said, "Jump in a jeep and get the hell over there, and you spend your time with General Fong," who was the deputy commander and the operations officer.

G: Is that P-H-O-N-G?

B: F-O-N-G. Later got killed.

Which I did. I mean, I was very impressed with the Vietnamese reaction to this thing. There was some panic in the streets, of course, but they came to us for helicopters, that was one of the things that I did, so that we didn't have helicopters being wasted. So I would screen it, and then screen the ammunition and stuff like that, in bulk. For instance, at the time I got there, they were getting all of the cadets out of the military academy; they wanted the big choppers to take them out and put them out with the troops. They brought them in, loaded them, took them out, got them back to the JCS compound, gave them orders, and that sort of stuff, and moved them on out smartly so that they'd have this little extra youthful leadership.

They then began to get reports about who was in trouble and where the problems were. One of the problems was Tan Son Nhut. Glen Otis, who's now the four-star TRACOM commander, had the Twenty-fifth Division armored cav outfit, and took off and went on down there and cut them off before they got around to being able to blow up helicopters and do all this sort of stuff. I guess that that was just one of them. The U.S. reaction was very good in that one. Of course, Tan Son Nhut really was a U.S. installation, when it came to total population, or military population, anyway.

Then we found that down in the Delta there were several big fights going, and in the cities, Binh Dinh or one of those, some at the lower end of the Delta, not the little towns--

G: Ben Tre?

B: No. Can Tho is the big one; Soc Trang was the big helicopter one; this was up a little closer to the Saigon side of the Delta. Anyway, there were about three good firefights going, and they moved in ammunition; they got it done; they held the city over that night, and by the next day they were pushing them out. And I thought that, you know, with the surprise--and anybody that says there was no surprise is, you know. . . . There were varying degrees of surprise, but anybody who says that they were sitting there waiting for them in any large [unit], like having a whole regiment or a whole company--this wasn't so. There was a percentage of these people that were away for Tet, some of whom had enough moxie to come back. The others just stayed home and waited until it was safe, not because they were scared, but because they'd rather stay with their families.

But anyway, I thought that this was--in the first three days, it was done very well, they reacted, and by the end of the second day you could see that the thing was in the process of being under control. Now, you heard lots of things from up north, in Nha Trang, for instance, the special forces and the Vietnamese special forces that were training up there did a good job. That's probably--what goes on in the first three to four days is what I'm talking about. And gradually we were moving it out: the communications hung up, did very well, and everybody looked motivated. And I thought that it was remarkable to be able to feel that it was coming under control in the length of time that [it did].

Have you read [Don] Oberdorfer's book about the Tet Offensive?

B: I read it hurriedly about three or four years ago, it seems to me.

G: Any lasting impressions from it, about its reliability or--?

B: Well, I think it's a very slanted book. I don't say he's a liar; I just say that he draws the wrong conclusion.

G: What effect did the Tet Offensive have on pacification, do you have a feel for that?

B: Yes. I think that once the realization that these people had made an all-out effort to go, to get us, and then all of a sudden disappeared, I mean, the wave went back, and things were quiet--now, they went back only a certain distance, because obviously they regrouped to try the mini-Tet in May. But they got the hell out of the Tet area, where they were trying to really grab hold and have a coup, they got out of there within three to four days. And I think that it had a very positive reaction from the peasant.

G: The story is that a great many people volunteered for active duty and asked for weapons and so on and so forth. Were you involved in that?

B: No, see, because--I mean, I heard the stories, but I was not there because, as I say, I was loose because of the thing and I therefore probably was the troubleshooter with the Vietnamese, plus I was the guy that they could pin on to do the odd job, if something came up important, because we just weren't doing any military assistance.

G: What were the advisers doing? Were they reporting to you, or--?

B: Oh, no. Not when it comes through the--you know, it went up through the prefecture, the various people. No, we had no operational role in MACMA. We had the training and all this other stuff that--you know, like you found in the United States when you have an overseas war.

But since I got off of that as a person--and there were several others, I sent some guys down to Long Binh and some places all around, because we had lots of talent and there were things that could be done. But no, these other things came in through the intelligence and operational network. For instance, one night, I've forgotten what the hell was wrong, but anyway, I took a shift as the guy to run the operations center that night, just because--you know, I don't know whether John Chaisson or somebody had a special project, and so I was sort of the handyman.

G: Something I've wondered about: you talked about the physical setup, that at that time you lived in villas in the town. Why didn't the VC ever make a more concerted effort to go after you? Weren't you in a relatively exposed situation that way?

B: Yes, we were. A couple of soldiers around, and that's all. We went to bed with weapons in the room. We lost a couple of window glasses and that sort of stuff in this thing.

I don't know. First of all, I'm not sure that we as individuals were, like the Westmorelands and people like that, you know even when they had their kids there before the war really came about, they were pretty well guarded, and some of the others were. Why didn't they? The only thing I can see is that they were not as interested in us as they were in utilizing what people they could get in and out of town for intelligence and operational purposes. That might not at all be the truth, but--

G: It just occurred to me, and I've asked it several times, but--boy, you could have made a big splash, you know, "Seventeen American Generals Kidnapped," or whatever.

B: Well, see, there never were that many. We were spread, and the telephone-radio hookup--there were a couple of nights that it looked like there might be problems around someplace, and you'd get the radio back in your villa, and then rally around. They'd be a block or two away, and that sort of stuff. I always figured that the Vietnamese maid was a spy.

G: What made you think that?

B: I couldn't see how they could miss doing that. One of these gals had a child. The guy who was the adviser in the intelligence business had--you know, he was a colonel who had a family there--and she had been there all that time, and she had a child. But the basic fact is that she didn't have that child when she was working there, after we got in there. And I

would guess that whether she liked it or not, she was spying. And I have no way of proving it at all, but I mean I just can't believe that it didn't work that way.

G: You think that somebody was holding the child.

B: Yes.

G: Something that you've mentioned that I'd like to talk about in this connection was that later in February General [Earle] Wheeler came over on a visit, from which apparently a lot of things came. Were you involved in the discussions that took place?

B: Yes, I was involved in the discussions, I guess not so much because of just being there, but because I was the guy that was building the force structure for the Vietnamese. This impinged a little bit on the force structure, or the force structure buildup. And I'd been in country about a year and a half to two years, and was fairly up on what was going on and what we needed.

Let me hesitate for a minute. There's a thing where we did not go through the regular military assistance channel for back to the United States. Like, we did not have to do the paperwork that, when you were sending something to Brazil or the other places. It was obviously too cumbersome. And so they had a thing called MASF, and that's Military Assistance Service Fund, which meant that you could dip into the U.S. stockpile and send it over expeditiously, because of MASF. And then they rebated the money and it all came out in a big pool. What I'm saying is that really allowed, back in the States, for the same pool to take care of both the Vietnamese and the U.S. So they weren't in two separate piles. This was of interest to me because you don't want to get to the point where you're running

around training two more or three more divisions and, at the same time, because of that, things are deteriorating in Vietnam because people are training on the vehicles that the people in Vietnam should be fighting with.

But it was a pretty general discussion. There were some smaller ones and some larger ones, because you had to go through the whole process of building this thing up. And then there were some other ones that probably only had two or three people in them. I would think that--I hate to sort of make a joke of this, because it's a very serious thing, but Phil Davidson and I, with offices close to one another, usually picked one another up and walked up to the conference room. And then when it was over, why, we'd gather our papers and go on back to our own offices. And as we walked out of there, I said to Phil Davidson, "Goddamn. How the hell can we run around here and tell the world that we just whipped the ass off the VC and we need two hundred thousand more troops? This is the most incongruous thing we've ever done." And there were a lot of people that were submitting troop requests, and I'm going to tell you one of them, and he's been fairly untouched. And that's Bruce Palmer. Bruce Palmer had, or his people, and I think he probably knew it was going on, but about the second level down, when we were trying to put that thing together, they came up with a thing that USARV needed twelve or fifteen, I've forgotten which, MP battalions. Now, this would be MP battalions with armored cars, or you know that wheeled armored car that we had, the Cadillac-Age [-gauge?].

G: Yes, I can't remember what it was called.

B: Anyway, these guys would then be roadrunners, you see, and they would take over the whole road network. Well, this would give Bruce Palmer an operational combat command. It went fairly high up the thing, and I'm not sure that it was not on the list when the list got scrubbed. But these were the kinds of things that were happening. When the idea of two hundred thousand more troops hit the headquarters, it became a hunt for how the hell can we justify this thing, and what units can we use, and that sort of stuff.

G: Wasn't there a--?

B: When it trickled down to the guy who's still in there with a stubby pencil.

G: Wasn't there a contingency plan in existence for mounting a Laotian operation to cut the trails, a corps-sized--?

B: Oh, yes, hell, but that's the same kind of a--you know, when I was at Fort Hood we had a Southeast Asia plan. I'm saying Fort Hood, but it's not too farfetched, because both of the corps headquarters came out of Fort Hood, and that was a little secret that was back in there, that that was a mobilization base as well. And so if you're going to send a brigade, it probably needs to go with the guys they've been working on in the planning thing.

But I don't think there was anything realistic about this kind of a plan.

G: In what sense? Do you mean that it would be allowed to proceed? Or that it wouldn't work?

B: No, I just think that if there was a plan lying on a shelf someplace, instead of one that's done hot today, but if you had one that was lying on a shelf someplace and needed to be dusted off, that there was not enough emphasis on keeping things like that up to date. If there was

such a plan, it was out of date, and if there was such a plan that was required, they would have been starting on it about the time they heard the news that they were talking about two hundred thousand people.

Now, I was not in the Pentagon at that time, and there may have been one.

G: Well, if--

B: See, I can't believe that--well, I shouldn't say that, I guess. But I can't believe that anybody thought that they could make hay for the all-out mobilization of the U.S. Army.

G: Well, what do you think lay behind this?

B: I have no idea. This is the one that drives me--I'll tell you what. There are a couple of other things that might be--people were covering their rear, and people were afraid not to take this offer, because then if something happened, the blame could be dumped out there, away from politics, away from everything that goes on in Washington: this field commander did not take our offer of troops.

G: You think General Wheeler made the offer, then.

B: I think he made the offer. I don't know at what level, you know, I don't know much beyond him, and I don't know how much "what if" was in, when there probably was an Abrams-Westmoreland-Bunker-Wheeler, and maybe two or three Indians in a conference room. I don't know how they sort of did it. I wonder, frankly, I wonder and ask myself if Lyndon B. Johnson was not the individual, so that he would be clean.

G: Well, it's on record that he asked General Westmoreland what he needed. There's no question about that. But who came up with the two hundred and five thousand and some hundreds troop figure? That's not entirely clear.

B: That's right, it isn't clear, because it came--I mean, there might have been some back channels and stuff that I didn't see, but it came to my level, and probably one level higher than me, it came to us as a two-hundred-thousand-man package.

G: Were you asked to modify or take into account this figure in order to affect the way you were--

B: No.

G: --structuring your force structure?

B: No. We continued to march the way we were going to go.

G: Which was in what direction?

B: Which was up. I would say that if we got two hundred thousand more U.S. forces, that we would have had to scale our effort back to hell and gone. I get that from what I found was sort of available when I got back and took over the Vietnamization desk in Washington. There weren't enough things to go around.

G: In terms of equipment and so forth?

B: Yes.

G: That brings up something, and that's the issue of the M-16, which created quite a stir, I understand, in Washington. I don't know whether created a stir in Saigon or not. There

was a big push, I understand, in February and March, to get the M-16s out to the Vietnamese.

B: Yes.

G: You say that in a kind of resigned tone of voice.

B: Well, I'm not sure--

(Laughter)

--the reason [is] I'm not great for M-16s for even U.S. forces.

G: You didn't like it as a weapon, then.

B: I didn't mind it. I thought there were uses for it. I thought it became--well, it just grew too big. For instance, I think in a rifle company out in a rice paddy, they shot too much ammunition, and therefore had to take people off of their combat job to be carrying the ammunition for one other guy. I think we shot too much; there's no doubt about it. Everybody toward the end was trying to make sure that he went home, and that's understandable. Of course, there's another story, or another thing about going home, too, that bothers me.

G: What's that?

B: Well, I don't think you should get off in a year. That started in Korea. They had a point system. The Korean thing turned out to be bad. See, the Korean thing, though, the United States Army and the government just mobilized every goddamned veteran that had just come out that signed up for the reserves, and there were lots and lots of them that signed up

for the reserves because this was a supplement to their GI Bill. And those guys, you know, had been home six and eight months, and then boom, back they came.

Well, I thought that in the Korean War--I went over as an observer on a six-week trip, and I thought that was probably the best army I'd seen in a long time. It was after the panic was over, and the thing down at the toe of the boot, what the hell's the name of that?

G: Pusan?

B: The Pusan perimeter was gone; Van Fleet was up and in charge in Seoul. We were doing very well, and I thought that was a first-class outfit. And this was every division, where I knew people (Inaudible). I went back home, wrote my report, and then came back over. And there was a big drop-off, as far as I was concerned, in quality. Not necessarily from the individual, but the fact is you had fewer experienced individuals. And toward the end of the war, it was very tough. We didn't have the kind of talent we needed. And when you think of what went on in Vietnam--did you come over with the Cav?

G: No, I went over in 1966.

B: Oh, well, damned near over with the Cav. What I'm saying to you is, for instance, when the Ninth Division came in, and maybe even when the Fourth Division came in--and the Cav experienced this also, but the Cav got some extra help. But if you go in there like that, feeding in a unit, and you know that unless they're dead or evacuated wounded, that you're going to pull the whole division out at the same time, you've got nothing. So they did the best things they could; they didn't do it with the Cav; they had some extra people in the airborne divisions [brigades?] and that sort of stuff. But for instance, they took, at the end

of four months, one brigade out of a division and flipped in over with another one, and you did that again, so that finally you got to the point where you had three increments, and those three increments were either coming, going, or there. So there was no unity in the whole damned thing, which was another sort of stupid failure.

But what I'm saying is--and this goes a long way; I talked a little bit earlier about the black and the brown, and the kind of lottery they got into. But I'm saying that the only way you can run one of these things is the way they ran some of those outfits in Europe during World War II, where you went over there and they were there for four years, and they stayed until somebody carried them out. Now, you can say that's bad or not, but if you look at it impersonally, it's the most economical way to run a first-class war, for two reasons. First of all, you get all of this experience that can absorb the young recruit as he comes in as an individual. And the second thing is, you've got plenty of incentive to get the war over with, instead of--in the last three months of your one-year tour, you keep looking over your shoulder and trying to find other things. Now, that's tough on the individual, but what I'm talking about [is that] it's an American war and that's the way it needed to go.

And then you get back to the M-16, all the way back. And my point is there, we had a hundred-dollar saddle on a fifty-dollar horse, for Christ's sake. These guys were just out there--like using a garden hose.

G: What about the claims that ARVN was outgunned by the VC toward the end?

B: Toward the end, yes.

G: I mean even at Tet.

B: Oh, I don't think so.

G: Well, now, let me--

B: Okay, yes.

G: I'm not going to argue with you, but--

B: No, I would like to--

G: A VC company, let's say a main force company, armed with the Chicom AK-47 family--

G: Yes.

G: --as I guess most of them were by 1968, weren't they?

B: Yes.

B: An ARVN company armed with M-1s and BARs, wouldn't they be outgunned by such a force?

B: Yes, they'd be outgunned by such a force, but the basic fact is that the AK-47 unit that would spew it out, but those guys didn't shoot it that way. They didn't have that--they weren't squirting at the whole countryside. They had been together as a unit; they had a discipline, and they knew how many rounds they had. They damned sure kept some more [in] reserve.

G: That's a good observation.

B: I had an infantry rifle company--

G: In World War II?

B: --in World War II, and we were down in a little place just south [north?] of Metz, called Maizières-le-Metz, and the Krauts had a chateau that they held that was outside of town.

And there was a big hole in the damned chimney, where a round had gone through and not blown it down, just kept going. And they had an observer in there. And we started after him, but in the jeep that I had, you know, one of two jeeps, we had three sniper rifles. And we took a couple of sawhorses and a door out of one of the houses in this little thing, and put a mattress on it, and set a guy up in there--there were three of them that were rotating--and strapped him in the way you do on a rifle range, and we killed about four of them in the first day. Pretty soon there was nobody in there, and there wasn't any place that they could shoot [from]. There is a requirement for that kind of training. Again, these kids, one-year tour, reluctant anyway, not too smart. In World War II infantrymen were--you know, George Marshall required a certain percentage of high-IQ infantrymen. Right now, we got nothing, except some brave kids, some kids that are going to do it. I should say--never say nothing. But it just wasn't there.

I'll tell you another story, and this is as illustrative of Vietnam as it is of any other war. My rifle company was moving through, we were across the Dortmund-Ems canal in Germany, and we ran into some problems there, and we were going through a village, and all of a sudden on the 536 radio I got a squawk from the platoon leader who was over on the left side. And he said, "We're catching hell here. These bastards have--there are SS in here, and what they've done is they've built up sandbag forts inside of the rooms of these things, and therefore when we go along and throw a grenade through the window, they duck, it goes off, and we dive through the window after it and there's some guy up there with an old Kraut zipper pistol and he's killing them." And I said, "Hold on and I'll be there." So--I

didn't know what the hell I was going to do, but I was going to go look at it. By the time I got there--which, ducking around and getting over the rubble and stuff, was about ten minutes--just as I was walking up behind this building on them, it came over my radio saying, "We got it solved, never mind, Captain." The basic fact is that some corporal had decided--had figured out a way, really, of beating them. He was throwing a grenade in without pulling the pin, they were ducking down, he came in and shot them in the head while they were under the barricades. See?

Now the moral of the story is, not only did we have a smart corporal, but that we don't have those kind of corporals in the army any more. We don't have that kind of talent. They just haven't spread the talent through the thing, and the only way you're ever going to run anything like that, of course, is a lottery. But what I'm saying is, it'd be bad enough to be running that army with a Garand and that sort of stuff, but when you turn a bunch of people who are really not qualified yet, when you start talking about rotation of people as individuals and coming out of a training center directly into, rather than--oh, yes, they go to Fort Carson for an extra six weeks or something like that before they get over, but that doesn't put you in any capability to have a first-class unit. I don't think that the M-16 was the answer to any problems. If you have a much more skilled army, you'd probably be able to get much more use out of them.

G: So you were not necessarily impressed by the big push to get M-16s to the ARVN.

B: No. And the other thing, if you take a look at their size, it's worse.

G: You really think it was worse than the M-1?

B: Yes. I think that you probably could find a mixture that would maximize what you could get out, but when you start turning an automatic on with one of these little midgets, you just have to hope that the enemy walks in front of the bullet.

(Laughter)

G: What changes in policy or emphasis, from your perspective, in your job, came about as a result of Tet? We know that, for example, there was a big push to get more production out of the ARVN. That was part of what this M-16 program was supposed to accomplish.

B: Oh, yes. And if it gave them the confidence, it probably was worth it. But it isn't that effective.

G: I see. Were there other things tried as well, more emphasis on--?

B: One of the things, I think, is that after Tet there was a much greater confidence. I think desertion--if you really went into it, and I don't have any figures, but I'll bet you that desertion sent down.

G: It did.

B: Considerably.

G: It did go down considerably. The disturbing thing was that by the summer it was back up. That's according to General Westmoreland's report.

B: The summer of what?

G: Of 1968, July.

B: I can't believe that. Unless this was the start of the buildup, and they just went out to the streets and grabbed them. Because we had another very significant, as far as I'm concerned,

win in May of 1968, when they tried the second Tet, or the mini-Tet. So there were two successes in a row, you might say. It's hard to prove that, but certainly on a percentage basis the May one was more successful than the other one, because they really didn't lay a glove on us.

G: Yes, mostly attacks by fire.

Did you brief General Abrams before he came back to the States in March? He came back on a visit in March of 1968, supposedly to satisfy Lyndon Johnson that his ideas on strategy and so forth were the right ones.

B: Jesus, I briefed him so many times I don't know what the hell we used it for.

G: He came back and talked to Lyndon Johnson and to the so-called Wise Men, the senior advisers that he used to consult a lot.

B: I can't tell you.

G: Okay. What was the reaction of the Americans in your circle to the March 31 speech?

B: Umh! Well, it was shock, really. There would be maybe, you know, the anticipation was what the hell was he going to say now? But I would guess that there wasn't an average of one in twenty that would say that he was going to quit.

G: What did you think that that was going to do to the war? Was there any perception of that?

B: No, I don't think so, after it was all over. I mean, after we settled down to it. As a matter of fact, the war for the next year--let's see, yes, almost a year--the war was a little bit on the upswing all the way. I would think that the coming of the Nixon regime--not necessarily Nixon, although he was more hard-nosed than people thought, but the Kissinger thing

that--Kissinger, I think that he was a cohesive sort of influence, not necessarily on that war, but I mean to bring the whole damned problems of the United States into perspective.

I think Al [Alexander] Haig did a tremendous job as Kissinger's sort of messenger boy, and finally became a guy that Kissinger had complete confidence in, and probably thought that he really knows more about the war than I do.

G: Haig had been a battalion commander, hadn't he, in the--?

B: Yes, he had a brigade out there in the First Division.

G: A brigade.

Do you remember talking to General Abrams when he came back from that visit? That's probably going to get the same answer, because there were so many.

B: Give me a date again.

G: This would have been March; I don't have a precise date. It would have been late March of 1968. This would have been when Johnson was making up his mind to bring Westmoreland back and name Abrams as COMUSMACV.

B: No. You know, he was a drop-inner, and he did not have lots of formal briefings. He had some small meetings all the time, and he had three or four people that were in on everything, and then he had others who came in for specific things, and I must say I--well, we had a deputy, who was Andy Goodpaster, and that was sort of a bad thing. He's a very, very bright guy, and he is a very brave--you know, he's a DSC winner in World War II, and stuff like that, but he had been in the political-economic and that sort of stuff business too long when he got out there. He came back and had a heart attack, and they gave him a job

over at the War College or some place like that, and then he worked in the Pentagon for a while, and then--you know, he just was almost out of date. And so I think that he sat in with Abe but he really didn't carry a lot of weight. And I shouldn't say that, or I maybe should soften it and say I think that Abe thought he had the capabilities and was trying to gradually bring him in, experience-wise, to the kinds of things that needed to be done and were going on. And then of course as soon as that happened, why, Nixon pulled him back out and sent him up in the White House.

G: You had a pretty good catbird seat, I guess, to observe the Vietnamese reaction to the announcement of March 31. How did they take it?

B: Oh! I thought they were shocked for a while. I really think, though, that it didn't take them that long to get over it. They perceived no difference; they perceived product going on out and it wasn't--it turned out to be non-catastrophic, but it was unexpected, and it was like a thundercloud at first.

G: How did they perceive the candidates? Did they have any feel at all for American politics?

B: I suppose guys like Thieu, Ky, a few of those. But you've got to recognize that they were colonized and kept under colonial power, and that sort of thing, so that there wasn't anybody there who really studied and who really knew, even after the French had gone. There were no external things that they had to do. Some of the mechanical things that go with any diplomatic process, but I don't think they had to think globally; I don't think they had to think even Indochina for a while. And then all of a sudden, of course, they were in trouble.

G: When did you leave Vietnam? You left when?

B: I left Vietnam in--well, let's see. It was probably a couple of days before or after the first of December 1968.

G: Okay, so you were there--

B: I went to duty in the Pentagon in January of 1969.

G: Okay. So you were there when the election took place in November. How did the Vietnamese react to that? How did they perceive Humphrey and Nixon and so on?

B: I may have been travelling with the wrong crew, but I really didn't think that there was that much difference.

G: The war was going to go on more or less as before.

B: Yes. And to a certain extent, the American contingent over there calmed the waters as much as they could.

G: How about the cessation of the bombing?

B: Oh, this killed them for a while.

G: I think it was the last day of October or something like that, just a few days before the election. Was the bombing that important to them as a morale factor?

B: I don't know, but--

G: One of the reasons given for keeping it up, you know, was that it kept the South Vietnamese--

B: The basic fact is that anything that you took away from the South Vietnamese was going to cause big waves, because the one thing they were--you know, it wasn't until they began to

believe in us that we betrayed them. They had doubts about us when we very sincerely were going to get the war won for them, and then, of course, they got a great confidence in us, finally. Not only because of victories, but because we had stayed with them this long, and that sort of stuff. And then of course when they thought we were going to do it very gradually and we were going to do all the correct things, and that we would have a force that could come back, if necessary, and all that kind of garbage that went on in the [cable] traffic, then we didn't. And we bugged out fast, really.

G: You said that you were on the Vietnamization desk when you went back to work in the Pentagon. What did that entail? What were you--?

B: Well, again, it was the same thing--it was taking action on the things that I had been sending back. You know, we had a little chart that showed when things were being mobilized, where there was an armored cav squadron, a this, a that. Okay, then you went to the log people and to the signal people and all of this stuff, and you said, "This is what we've got to have; give me some sort of a schedule for how fast you can get it without trying to move the world," get ourselves some contingency stuff. And then we started a series of round table things so that when the Twentieth Cavalry Battalion was due to come on board, did we have the capability to have all the equipment there, have the training done there--the helicopter pilots, for instance.

Christ, we had all sorts of aches and pains. We had to get the top-notch mental type to go. Okay. He spoke French, maybe; he'd probably been educated with the French, maybe. But he spoke classical French, and he didn't know how you talked--in French, he

didn't know anything about the word "propeller," or "wrench," or something like that. So we got some guys, for instance, and we set up a little language school of our own--not to teach English; that was done at Lackland. But to get these French linguists to know the rudiments of technical French was another step along the way. And it took about six months of hard work to even convince people that it was necessary, okay? So then you go from there.

But you know, the great thing about the Vietnamese was that they were mechanically inclined, and they were hard working. When I first went over there and you would visit Saigon, you'd see all the people on bicycles. And there'd be a guy that fixed bicycles on the street corners, or in a little town. He did that. Without any more education, they started having Hondas, and that same son of a bitch knew how to fix the Honda. He learned right there, sitting on the curb. So there was an adaptability so that you could work it out.

But you'd have to go down, you know, we took over Hunter Air Base, had to activate that when we really started pouring the choppers to them for training, after we had almost closed it down, because the American choppers were just in the replacement business after that. And then we had Hunter, and it was--you know, I would guess Hunter was ninety per cent Vietnamese, maybe a little less than that, because we probably trained some people from some of the other MAAG countries. But the idea of scheduling the men, the materiel, the training and that sort of thing, and getting them all in the boat so that they'd get there at one time, was the job of the Vietnamization desk.

Now, we did not do the job. I did not get logisticians in my shop. This was one of those things where you had the authority to put the bite for--and it was pretty specific, but it was also pretty mandatory, if you met the criteria, that the other outfits would get it to you, and get it to you as reasonable as possible. This didn't mean that there probably weren't fifteen or twenty adjustments on each one of these outfits over a six-or an eight-month period. But it had to be kept up like that, so that you kept it going. Again, you go back to this MASF thing, you see. If we had been strictly in the MAAG business, where we had to go through the military assistance budget and that sort of stuff, and if you forgot to put something in, why, you waited until next year, which is what happens in a lot of MAAG and mission stuff. But this time everybody was coming in together, and the money came out through the comptroller, so that it was MAAG funds or service funds.

G: How much pressure was involved in the Vietnamization program?

B: There was a lot of pressure, but--there was a lot of work, more than pressure. I think everybody was--most of the people in Washington, in the services, out in the arsenals, and all of that, were pretty well dedicated to try not to have a failure. And people weren't goofing off and that sort of stuff. It was an eighty-hour week, and it was an eighty-hour week for me, it was more than an eighty-hour week for some of the others.

G: Did you have any Vietnamese friends who came out after the thing was over?

B: You know, I left and went to Hawaii after that, and I also couldn't get rid of the Vietnamese because I ended up having the Twenty-fifth Division under my command, bringing all the refugees out of Guam, and I never knew who the hell got back to the United States.

Through the back channel route we got people like Vien's wife out early, and all that sort of stuff. I did not have anything to do with it, but I happened to be in a position to see all of that sort of stuff.

G: I thought some of them might have looked you up or given you a call, or you'd run across them or something.

B: No. I have a bunch of them in San Antonio.

G: Do you?

B: Yes, that have found out that I was in Vietnam, and they come around.

G: What connection did you have with the CORDS part of the pacification program?

B: It was a pretty close connection, because with the idea of being able to get to not only the regular soldier, not only the regular adviser, but getting to all the people that we were supplying weapons to, you got into having to deal with Komer's people, who were the province advisers and the sector advisers down the line. And they were invaluable in some cases, because you traded back and forth. They had one place to go to to get things squared away, and so the stuff that went to the regular forces--and especially this was true in the Delta, more than in the other places. See, there really were--outside the riverine, that's all there were. The Delta was a Vietnamese show. And the others with the distance, Saigon, a lot of it, but that's pretty easy to get cleared up because the boats are coming in there. But we were sort of responsible for getting ammo and supplies and all the rest of this stuff to the Regional and Popular Forces and to some of the self-defense types. So this was about as common to deal with the province adviser, as it was to deal with the division adviser. And

we tried to consolidate and get these things out so we weren't competing with one another. And we structured things and put them in the computer about the time I was leaving, and people tell me they finished the thing. So that you had all of that information for the Ruff-Puffs [RF-PFs?] and the other people.

You had problems every once in a while with the military adviser and the CORDS adviser at the higher level. The province senior adviser was about fifty-fifty military and fifty-fifty civilian.

G: Where did the civilians come from?

B: Well, for instance, one of them was Wilbur Wilson, who had retired from the army, and had been with AID and the rest of them, and come on up the line. In each corps level there was a CORDS adviser. One of them was Charlie Whitehouse, whom I mentioned before, who then became the ambassador to Thailand. In the days when CORDS was in its heyday, there was--the State Department young up-and-coming types knew that they better have gone to Vietnam and gotten themselves some experience, or they were going to be out in the cold, because somebody's got a bigger punch on the ticket than they have. And so you had all sorts of talent in the way of State Department types.

G: Did you deal with Komer personally?

B: Yes, in the headquarters. And it was a pretty amiable sort of setup, because I wasn't doing anything except helping him. And because I wasn't trying to fight the troops, maneuver the troops and stuff like that, you see, there was never any conflict. There was conflict, you know, like between the province adviser and the division adviser. One of them had orders

to go with the American division or to do this, that, or the other thing, and Komer would say, "We're having problems here, and there's a buildup, and we need some regular forces to help out." And then there would be a go-around like that. In other words, I was never really in position, except when he would want some exorbitant amount of materiel in a tremendous hurry, and would want me to divert, and it was very seldom that I diverted. But there were times when it was proper to do so. But there wasn't any built-in antipathy with the two job descriptions.

G: How about William Colby, did you know him?

B: I know him very well, yes. He's the guy that really ran CORDS. He's the guy that put the starch in it, that put the structure together, did that sort of thing. He really did it. Bill Knowlton and he were together, and it was a sort of a dual office, and Bill Knowlton is a very bright guy. They did it, and they did it very well, as far as I'm concerned.

Now, Komer was the pot-stirrer, and sometimes they did what he told them to do and sometimes they waited until he got in another pot to stir, and went on about their business. Which is a sort of necessary thing, though, because provinces and places like that were usually fairly safe, and if there wasn't somebody stirring the pot, there would be a lot more margin for error. The patrols wouldn't be going out, and all this sort of stuff. Now, I don't mean that Bob Komer ever got down to chasing a patrol out into the woods, but the fact that he was running around to every province every time he got a chance--and he had track shoes on, and cleats on, and was moving things. He's energetic.

G: Did you support the Phoenix program?

B: Not really. I have a feeling that I did--

G: Indirectly.

B: Indirectly. Their people were tagging that onto some of my stuff, but no, and frankly, I really didn't want to get into it. And it wasn't because I had any abhorrence for it, but I had really no authority to get in there, and I'm a believer that unless you need to know, you shouldn't be running around throwing your prestige so that you know you're smarter than the other guy. It doesn't bother me if somebody says at a meeting, "I've got this need-to-know thing, and I can't tell you." I didn't usually jump up and walk out of the room in a huff, which Bob Komer would do, you know, different. But I really didn't fool with the Phoenix program.

G: Was Phoenix that hush-hush; was it--?

B: Yes, they kept it pretty hush-hush, I mean, after all, they had the assassin squads and all that sort of stuff, and it just wasn't the kind of thing that needed to be talked about. There are some guys that you could talk to. John Archer is one, and he was a Phoenix type; he's an old CIA type who was in the Ninetieth Division with DePuy and Stilwell and that crew. I don't know him--I've met him, but I don't know him at all.

G: You don't know where he might happen to be?

B: No, but I guess guys like DePuy and Stilwell and those people do. I don't know; John Archer--he may have died, as far as that goes. He was a little older.

G: Did you know George Jacobson?

B: Yes, I know Jake.

G: He took over Phoenix, didn't he?

B: Yes, after a while.

G: After Colby, I think.

B: Yes, that's right. After Colby. But see, Colby had Phoenix as well as Regional [Forces] and Popular [Forces] and that sort of stuff. Of course, Colby was eminently qualified.

G: I used to wonder, why did they pick George Jacobson? I don't know that much about him, but--

B: He was somebody's boy in the embassy. As a matter of fact, he did a good job. He stayed in Vietnam so damned long that he had a great deal of knowledge. How effective he was with the Phoenix program probably was dependent upon the effectiveness of his subordinate who spent all of his time on Phoenix.

G: You don't happen to know who that was, do you?

B: No. See, I was gone by this time, and I stayed out.

G: He's one I would like to find sometime and talk to.

B: Well, I think he should be around.

G: He's a retired colonel, isn't he?

B: Yes, he's a retired colonel, so we ought to be able to get it out of the--

G: Retired list.

B: --retired list.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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