INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 28, 1985

INTERVIEWEE: W ILLIAM DePUY

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General DePuy's residence, Delaplane, Virginia

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

G: Now, I have a question here. What was the nature of your duties when you became Director of Special Warfare under DCSOPS [Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans]?

D: Well, what happened was that I came back from commanding the First Battle Group, Thirtieth Infantry, in the Third Division because Bill [William B.] Rosson, who at that time in Europe was the ADC [aide de camp?] of the Eighth Division, knew me and worked with me on a couple of exercises, and he was brought back from Europe to be the special assistant to the secretary and the chief, I think, for counterinsurgency. The reason was that, you know, counterinsurgency was stylish, and Brute [Victor] Krulak, the marine, had a similar position on the Joint Staff. Same one I had much later. So the army was very anxious to get in the act and do the right things, and the Kennedys were pressing hard. So, anyhow, Bill brought me back, and he was at first the Director of Special Warfare and the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency. After he'd been back

there just a little while, he then made me the Director of Special Warfare, and he retained this higher position.

G: Is that what came to be known as SACSA [Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities]?

D: No, SACSA was in the Joint Staff.

G: Oh, all right.

D: No, Bill had that, and I think he was the only one who ever had it. There may have been others, but I don't remember.

G: I see.

D: It was sort of to get the ball rolling.

G: What precisely were you given to do in that position?

D: Well, the first place, I have to confess I knew nothing about anything. I knew zero.

G: Well, nobody else did either.

D: That's right. We had as operating elements the special forces, and the Kennedys were pushing very hard because Kennedy, you know, had been insulted by Khrushchev--frightened, I think, by Khrushchev, too--and Khrushchev had threatened wars of liberation, and "We'll bury you!" and all that, and they came up with counterinsurgency as a sort of response to that. You know all of this, of course. But, anyway, we were recruiting, organizing, and deploying special forces as fast as we could. Added a group or two, expanded the groups that existed, and tried to have an element in the Pacific, an element in Central and Latin America, an element in Europe, the Tenth, an element in general reserve at Fort Bragg. I believe we ended up with two groups at Fort Bragg, one of which was also the Latin American group. They had certain elements in

Panama and tried to get into Latin America but couldn't. Then we put together with the special forces groups, and usually under the command of some special forces commander, oh, engineer detachments and some psyops people, and medics. They were called Special Action Forces, and that's when counterinsurgency was brand new. We were all very naive. We did all the things that Americans know how to do, like build bridges and put bandages on people and print leaflets and broadcast things. Now, mind you, we didn't know what to put on the leaflet or what to say in the broadcast, but, anyway, the whole government was being prodded into a high level of agitation and activity at that time.

G: Was there any resistance in the army to forming the special forces? It seems to me some of the older soldiers resisted the idea of an elite group.

D: Well, there's always some of that, but I can tell you that it had no effect. There were a lot of people in the army who thought the whole counterinsurgency idea was a nonsense, and they had some reason to think that. I mean, it was pretty much sort of marshmallow-whip at the beginning, with enthusiasm.

G: Some of the earlier chances, I think, to get to deploy some of these troops came in Laos in the White Star Team operations and so on.

D: Yes, Bull [Arthur D.] Simons had them over there.

G: Yes. Did you have anything to do with that?

D: They had gone over there before I became involved. They were rotated from one of the groups; I can't remember which. Fifth or Seventh. Fifth, probably. There were about three hundred of them. They were under the opcon of the--they had a cover organization over there. I've forgotten what--some technical and training thing; I don't remember the

exact name. And I would say that the controls were more State Department. The controls in other cases were CIA, but I think--I'm not sure of it--but I do--you see, there was an army officer over there. I don't remember who he was, but a brigadier who ran this office that had the funny name, which was a cover name, and the only forces he had was Bull Simons and his group, and I personally had nothing to do with that. You know they were pulled out at the time of the Geneva Accord.

G: Yes.

D: We pulled our guys out. Of course, the North Vietnamese didn't pull theirs out.

G: Well, they always claimed they didn't have any to pull out, didn't they?

D: They had six thousand.

G: That they admitted to?

D: Well, everybody pretty much eventually got to know. What they did is they had a contingent in there; it was part of a division, and they put it in there in the first place to bolster the Pathet Lao, because the Pathet Lao were kind of pathetic. Not to make a pun, but they weren't very good. They weren't good, dedicated communist fighters. But then later, of course, the larger issue was not the Pathet Lao but was to protect the Ho Chi Minh Trail. So they kept their troops in there, and they did protect the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and they were expanded enormously to do that.

G: Exactly. Now you were Director of Plans and Programs under the Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development?

D: Let me just tell you one more thing that may be relevant to the Director of Special Warfare thing.

G: All right, sir.

D: Up at Ban Me Thuot the CIA guys working in Saigon had an operation going with the Rhade, and they borrowed first one, and then two, and then a lot of our special forces detachments. I think most of them were from the group on Okinawa. And this thing got big, and we--we meaning the Chief of Staff and the DCSOPS--then called the G-3 or whatever the heck he was called--anyway, decided that this thing had gotten too big. So I went over there with a fellow named George Morton, a special forces hood (laughter)--colonel--nice guy, and we established the headquarters in Le Tran [Nha Trang?], which then became the First or the Fifth Special Forces Group and, later, the special forces headquarters in Vietnam. And we took over from CIA these detachments and began what later then--we began the CIDG [Civilian Irregular Defense Group] program. In fact, what they were doing--what the CIA was doing up in the [Central] Highlands was simply--in fact, *they* named it CIDG, and we kept that name, and we opened a lot more camps.

G: That was Operation Switchback?

D: Switchback. Yes, that's right. Yes. Well, I just thought that might be--

G: No, I think it's very relevant. In fact, I think, William Colby's on record as saying that that was a big mistake, that if we'd let the CIA alone they would have won the war in the early days.

D: Yes. Well, I don't agree with that, but anyway, we did take it back because it got very big, and it was absorbing our assets, and we wanted to run our show. Just that simple. You can call it institutional turf, or whatever, but that's what it was.

G: As Director of Plans and Programs under the Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, did you contribute to the development of any concept which played a

significant role in Vietnam, such as air mobility or the riverine operation or any of those [inaudible]?

D: No, I was--no. I want to go back to my Special Warfare thing, to one other thing, in a minute if I may.

G: Fine.

D: No. That was a planning, programming, and budgeting job, pure and simple. ACSFOR [Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development] was founded--I was one of the charter members. In other words, when I became the Director of Plans and Programs, I was the first director of Plans and Programs. Ben Harrell was the ACSFOR. Abe [Creighton] Abrams was Harrell's deputy, and so on. But my task was to design a thing called the force development plan, which today in the army they call a force modernization plan, and what it was was simply to try to put together the organization and structure of the army with its budget, manpower, and new weapons systems in an orderly process. We didn't do a very good job the first time around, and then later Abrams did away with ACSFOR, but we had a number of interesting guys [who] had that job. Donn [A.] Starry had it. Fritz [Frederick] Kroesen, whom I think you may have known, who was CINCUSAREUR [Commander in Chief, United States Army, Europe], and George [S.] Blanchard had it, so--and Frank [A.] Camm had it at one time. So there were a lot of interesting people who went into that job, and it was an important function. It was at the heart of the management of the Department of the Army. I learned a lot there.

Now the thing I wanted to go back to--

G: Please do.

D: An interesting project I was asked to undertake by General [Earle] Wheeler, who was chief of staff. One day, I was sitting--I was a colonel, Director of Special Warfare; that was just shortly before I was promoted. And he called me up, and I dutifully reported with my little notebook to take copious notes, and he said, "The President"--this was Kennedy--"wants a Cuban battalion in the invasion of Cuba." Now this was at the time that we were right on the verge, and the fact of the matter is Ham [Hamilton H.] Howze, who was the XVIII Airborne Corps commander, had his commanders, 101st, 82nd, 2nd Armored Division, all at Fort Bragg issuing orders.

G: This was in 1962 during the missile crisis?

D: Yes sir. Yes sir. You know, we were that close to--anyhow, and I said, "Yes, sir." I wasn't privy to the planning for the invasion. I knew what was going on, but I mean, I didn't know the schedules or anything. And I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "I want you to provide such a battalion. I want you to use the Cubans that have been enlisting under"--whatever it was, the Lodge Act or whatever--it might have been. Was it Lodge Act? Something like that. They weren't enlisting. What they were doing is they were going to get some military training and be given citizenship. Learn English, enlist in the army, and their reward would be citizenship. Like we did to Yugoslav pilots and so on in World War II.

So I said, "Yes, sir. How much time do I have?" Well, this was like Tuesday afternoon. I could be off a day, but it was like Tuesday afternoon, and he said, "They have to be ready to go into the invasion Monday morning, so they will have to be at Homestead Sunday." They didn't exist! So, anyway, we scrambled around, and went down--I said, "You know, I'm going to have to do a lot of things fast, and I'm going to

have to overcome a lot of resistance, and I need a letter from you that gives me the authority to do it." Well, he said, "Go out in my outer office and write it, and bring it in, and I will sign it." So I wrote a letter that said something like, "Colonel DePuy has been given a mission by me. He will tell you what it is only to the extent you really need to know, but other than that he has my authority, so give him what he asks for, or do what he wants," or something like that. And [he] signed it; never batted an eye, and gave it to me.

Well, anyway, I did go down. I went down to Ham Howze, and he was issuing the order in the theater at Fort Bragg, and, in a break, I got him out. He was furious! And he said, "What kind of a battalion have you got?" And I said, "I don't have it yet." He said, "What the--!" you know. I said, "But I'll have it. I'll have it at Homestead or wherever you want it Sunday, and it will be small. It will be a three-hundred-man battalion of Cubans." I'd already decided what I was going to do. Three companies of a hundred men each. Each company would be commanded by an "A" detachment of special forces, and the battalion would be commanded by a "B" detachment. And all the special forces would be Spanish speakers. Not a bad plan, and simple. And so I said, "It will be all together 350 [or] 375 people, and they want it to be in the assault. They want it to arrive right at the beginning so that they can say, 'There is a Cuban element with the assaulting elements.'" "Well," he said, "I'm not going to disrupt my planning for the airstream, the airlift stream," but he said, "Why don't you collect all of the Caribous that you need? With your authority," he said, "it shouldn't be--" and he pointed to my letter, and he said, "With pilots. And use those, and as soon as the Eighty-second Airborne Division lands and has secured the airfield, we will take off from Homestead [inaudible]."

Well, to make a long story short, I had them ready. We got them. I flew them up from Miami to Fort Knox. We got them in uniforms, gave them shots, organized them into squads and platoons commanded by special forces--the squads by special forces sergeants, and so on. We augmented the special forces a little bit. We put them on the range to fire their rifles--they were M-1s, I think, in those days; I'm not sure. They weren't M-16s. They might have been 14s. And machine guns. And they all threw some grenades, and they all got a lecture on first aid, and they all went out and spent half a day doing sort of "Squads east!" and "Squads west!" extended order, and got on the airplanes and flew to Homestead, and I called the general up and said, "They are there," and he said, "It's all been called off." We didn't do that everyday, I'm not implying that, but that was--you know, a lot of interesting sorts of things like that went on. Okay.

G: What do you think would have happened to that battalion if it had been deployed?

D: Well, they wouldn't have been able to fight. Well, the special forces people would have made it try to do whatever was required, but I'm assuming that the commanders on the spot would have treated it gingerly.

G: Precisely.

How did you come to be selected Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam]? How did that happen?

D: Clearly and simply, Dick [Richard D.] Stilwell. In the Ninetieth Division, I had been--when he was the G-3 of the Ninetieth, I started out and soon became the battalion S-3. After a week in Normandy, I was a regimental S-3. After I commanded a battalion for about the last half of the war, I ended up as a division G-3. I had worked for him in CIA, again, on operational kinds of things, and I know that it was Dick Stilwell, pure and

simple. That's the way the army works, as you know, and so he presumably thought that I would be able to do the job he had just been doing, and he was going to be moved up. Now, General [William] Westmoreland knew me, and it may have been cleared with him. I don't know, but I had been--I spent four years in the Chief of Staff's office when General Westmoreland was the secretary to the general staff.

G: General Westmoreland credits you with having come in and saved the situation in Quang Ngai Province in the fall of 1964. What are your recollections of that episode?

D: Well, first of all, as the J-3 in those days, the scope of my activities reminded me very much of being either a regimental S-3 or a division G-3. In those days, we had no American troops except the helicopters, and some special forces, but the main instrument that we had was helicopters. We had quite a few of them. We probably had 350 or something like that. Now the J-3 was the one who kind of kept track of those for COMUSMACV [Commander United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam]. All of the helicopters were under the opcon of the four senior advisers and were spread out working with the Vietnamese divisions, but when one of those divisions, wherever in the country, got into a big fight, then we would take helicopter companies from the other corps and move them to the vicinity of the battle to an airfield or more than one airfield and support the reinforcement--pile-on concept--of the Vietnamese commanders, although we were not in command of anything except the helicopters. But that was a great leverage, so I was well-known to the Vietnamese high command as "Mister Helicopter," I mean the man who controlled the helicopters. And in all cases, I went to the battles. There were three, really four, very critical battles in 1964 and early 1965,

which really were the trigger to the U.S. deployment over there, and I went to all of them under these same circumstances.

The first one was the battle at Binh Gia, which was over in Phuoc Thuy Province, where the Ninth Division attacked the Catholic village in the former strategic hamlets of Binh Gia with the Ninth Division, which had gone down into the vicinity of Muc Hoa [Hoa Muc?] to pick up their AK-47s, their RPG-2s, and the modern, standardized equipment that the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] and the VC [Viet Cong] main forces then began to get. They came down by trawler. They only had two regiments in the division, but they attacked, and then they ambushed people, and what I would do in those battles was simply go to the corps commander or the division commander, whatever Vietnamese officer was in charge. Now in the case of Binh Gia, it was eventually the corps commander, the III Corps commander. The next battle--I can't remember the sequence exactly--but the next battle was the one at Binh Ba. That was the one in Quang Ngai province. This was an action in which the First and Second VC Regiments attacked a small district town called Binh Ba, inland from Quang Ngai on a little river, maybe twenty-five miles inland, something like that, maybe not that far but about that. And then there was an ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] battalion there that had been operating in the area, and one of its companies was bushwhacked on the road, and then they reacted, and the VC were all set, and then they reacted with more battalions, including the Thirty-eighth Ranger Battalion. I think the adviser was a Captain O'Shaughnessy--was; he was killed in the action--and they went in and were ambushed on the way. Then a marine battalion went in and got ambushed, and then a couple of battalions from one of the regiments, 2/50 [Marines] or something like that. Anyway, I

went up with General [Nguyen Duc] Thang. Now Thang was my counterpart on the Vietnamese Joint General Staff. A wonderful man. A reserve officer, a professor of mathematics. Tough. Big. He ran the rural development, revolutionary development thing later. A strong man, and whenever I could, I'd take Thang with me. "Taing," as they pronounced it. But we went together to that one.

Now the American Marines were there. We had a division, and the division commander--Collins was his name--and we didn't have to commit the marines. It was over. I thought we were going to, and I wanted to, but those actions, you know, never lasted very long. Working with the Corps Commander--first the Division Commander and then the Corps Commander of the ARVN Division--Thang and I first went out on the battlefield in my helicopter to find out what was going on, and one of the things we found was [that] the entire Thirty-eighth Ranger Battalion had been massacred. There was a little conical hill that was terraced for rice, and when you looked down on the top of it, it looked like a target with the bull's eye at the top and circles around it, and the VC had not only killed everybody in that battalion, but they had laid their bodies out like the hands of a clock. On each terrace from the top all the way down, about six terraces down, bodies every five feet, including O'Shaugnessy. I think that was his name.

Well, what Thang and I did is--and we went to the marine battalion, which was hard-pressed. We went to a couple of ARVN battalions that really weren't doing anything, and we then knew more about what was actually going on, of course, than anybody else did, including the ARVN commanders, and then we made some recommendations and got them moving some troops. It wasn't all that important, but there was a panic. The problem was there was a panic all the way back into Quang Ngai

City. I think the Division Commander had fled, and the Assistant Division Commander was a big, tall, skinny, un-Vietnamese-looking guy, who was in an absolute funk, and all we did up there was to get them to do the obvious things.

About the time that they started doing the obvious things, the First and Second VC Regiments, although this battle lasted for about three days--very unusual--disappeared into the woodwork. So I came back after two or three days, and, of course, I knew a lot about the battle, but I didn't do any heroics or anything all that bright.

But, you see, then the same thing happened at the battle of Dong Xoai. That was the third one. Dong Xoai was up in the area north of Saigon. You were up further north, but Dong Xoai was a special forces camp between Phuoc Vinh and Song Be. The fourth battle was at Song Be. And the same thing: they came in and attacked the special forces camp, and then they ambushed the Vietnamese airborne and Seventh Regiment troops on both sides, and General [Cao Van] Vien was the corps commander at that time, later the chief of the Joint General Staff. No, wait a minute. He was the chief of the Joint General Staff then, and he came up to the airstrip at Phuoc Vinh, and I had the helicopters, and I told him what I thought he ought to do, and we did most of the things. So I got very deeply involved in all--as much involved as you could in my position--in all of those really critical battles in late 1964 [and] early 1965. That was important because it was our impression of those battles and [of] the performance of the Vietnamese that they were unraveling. And General Westmoreland then made his famous statement that he gave them about six months, if things continued that way, losing about a battalion a week and a district town every month, and so on and so forth. So that's the story of those battles.

G: Is it General Westmoreland that's credited with saying that the VC had won the war in early 1965 but neither side really knew it?

D: Well, I don't know. He may have said that. The ironic thing is that in Stanley Karnow's book [*Vietnam: A History*?], which I'm sure you've read, a fellow named Bui Tin came into--and incidentally, he's the chap who accepted the surrender of Big [Duong Van] Minh and so on, you remember, in that book--but he came down to make a survey along with a lot of other people, and they went back and told the politburo in Hanoi that things weren't going so badly but that the VC would not be able to do it alone, and that's when they decided to build the Ho Chi Minh Trail and started to send the North Vietnamese army south.

G: Well, that's interesting.

D: You know that is, to me, a fascinating sort of a chronological relationship because it seems to me that both sides were kind of discouraged in late 1964, or in 1964 and early 1965.

G: Well, the first North Vietnamese regiments are supposed to have crossed into South Vietnam in December of 1964, isn't that right? Isn't that the usual chronology?

D: Well, they were in the pipeline in 1964.

G: Yes.

D: And the exact month that they arrived, I don't know. I know that one of those regiments was the 101st, and that 101st Regiment came on down and joined the Ninth Division because, when I was with the First Division, we fought it on a number of occasions. Another regiment was the Sixty-sixth, which was one of those that fought the First Cav at the Ia Drang.

G: And several times thereafter, I think.

D: Yes, that's right.

G: You mentioned the CIDG program earlier, and I wanted to ask you what your recollections are of the Montagnard uprising of September 1964, I think it is.

D: I was involved in that. Well, of course, we had special forces camps with CIDG companies and battalions all around the Highlands and a lot of them around Ban Me Thuot, and, unbeknownst to us and unbeknownst to our special forces people, who were working with them, and certainly unbeknownst to the Vietnamese special forces--you remember, our special forces sat on top of their special forces, which theoretically sat on top of the Montagnards. In fact, it wasn't like that. In fact, the Vietnamese special forces and the Montagnards did not get along very well, and the Montagnards loved the Americans, and the Americans liked them, just like the CIA liked them, and there was quite a direct relationship, and they were fairly loyal to ours, and in the rebellion that became crystal clear because the Rhade rose up and some of the Bahnar and the Coho, and they killed a lot of the Vietnamese special forces. The Assistant Province Chief in Ban Me Thuot was a man whose name was Y Bham, Y B-H-A-M. I know you know all this. Anyway, Y Bham was the hereditary king of the Rhade, and because the Rhade were the senior tribe, he was therefore the closest thing to a hereditary king of the Montagnards. He was involved in this thing and disappeared into Cambodia. After a couple of days, the situation resolved itself in most of the camps, one way or another. I mean, what usually happened was, although the South Vietnamese special forces in some cases were killed and in some cases thrown in the garbage dump and what not, our

special forces eventually persuaded the Montagnards to give up and submit to government controls.

[Interruption]

Anyhow, there was one, however, camp in which the bulk--well, the hard core of the Montagnards were there under the command of a man whose name was Y Tlur, Y T-L-U-R, who later became a Kit Carson Scout, by the way. Now down at Bon Sar Pa, which is down near the tri-border area, they call it, where Phuoc Long Province and Quang Duc Province and the Cambodian Memot Rubber Plantation all comes together, they had also captured a district chief and his family and officials, maybe even two. I think they had Vietnamese district chiefs, and their families and officials from a couple of districts. They also had the commander of the Fifth Special Forces group, John Spears, who had gone to visit his special forces detachment and was detained, and they also had Fritz [John F.] Freund, who was the deputy senior adviser, II Corps, who--the same thing, went down, and they gently restrained him.

Well, the problem, you see, was that the Vietnamese government was furious about the Montagnards killing some of their people and capturing some of their district chiefs, and as far as they were concerned, they wanted to discipline this unruly lot and turn the Twenty-third Division loose on them. Well, we had some problems with that from a couple of respects. First was that we were afraid that in the ensuing fight that our people would be hurt. Well, after about the first two days of it while things were fairly re--Ben Sternberg was sent up; he was the J-1--by Westy, and then, after about another day and a half, he sent me up and brought Ben back. And so I became the MACV rep up there.

[Nguyen] Khanh, as we called him--"Kaing," as they called him--was the president, the little guy who smoked Salems and looked like a kewpie doll. He had taken two of the Dalat generals. The Dalat generals were the chaps who Khanh put in jail when he took over from Big Minh and Don, and one was [Le Van] Kim and the other was Ton That Dinh, who had at one time been a III Corps commander. Kim was a very thoughtful--a Francophile, not trusted by the Vietnamese but very bright. Ton That Dinh was all energy and not much thought; drank a lot of Scotch and smoked a lot of cigarettes. Khanh had sent them there to take the blame. The commander of the Twenty-third was [Hoang Xuan] Lam, who later was the I Corps commander, a very Chinese-looking Vietnamese, absolutely expressionless. Inscrutable man. Well, when I arrived, the advisers at Ban Me Thuot--they had a nice, big lodge there that used to be a hunting lodge for Emperor Bao Dai, and they had a Lieutenant Colonel [Irving] Wendt, who, for some reason or other, the Montagnards and the Viet Cong and everybody would let go back and forth on the road in a jeep all alone at night and otherwise, all the way down to Bon Sar Pa and back, taking messages and acting as an intermediary and so on. So he talked to Fritz Freund, and we came up--Wendt really was the go-between who kind of negotiated a solution to the thing. The solution was we sent a pair of wire clippers down through Wendt and gave them to Fritz, and the plan was that on a certain morning he, Fritz--the Montagnards let him keep his rifle, his--it wasn't a rifle; it was a Swedish K submachine gun. [They] had let him keep it, and they kind of--they liked him and were a little bit afraid and impressed with him. He's an impressive guy, and he had them completely bamboozled. So he said, "I'll call them all into formation, the Montagnard troops, and while they're in formation, then you guys land some helicopters, and I'll go

down while they're in formation, if you'll give me the snippers, and I'll snip the wire off the jail and let the district chiefs and their families out, and they can get on the helicopters and go away." That's pretty direct. That was the plan.

But he thought that it might not go well, so what we did was we got a company--sort of a big platoon and a small company of special forces sergeants, and we had--there's another air field. There's an air field right outside Ban Me Thuot, and we had that--this was an assault company with a bunch of gunships, and we even had some U.S. Air Force A-1s, and we had put--Max Taylor was the ambassador, and I cleared it all, that we would go there early in the morning. We would circle around with the fighters to scare them. We would not use the fighters--they wouldn't let us do that--but we would use the gunships and the special forces company if we had to go in to get the people out. Well, what happened--first of all, the night before, I had gotten a promise from Lam that he would not move on--give me one more day. He got a telephone call, apparently from Khanh. Khanh was up there, and I had a long talk with Khanh. Khanh promised he would give me another day, but when he left, he apparently told Lam--he said, "Move tonight after dark."

Well, we had advisers with the Twenty-third Division, and at about eleven o'clock at night--

Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

D: --so about eleven o'clock I heard about that, and I got up and dressed and motored over immediately to Lam's headquarters, and he, of course, was up and fully dressed, and there were lights on all over the place, and I confronted him with the fact that he had promised me not to do that, and he said, "Well, you know, got orders." And I said, "Yes, but you

gave me your honor as an officer, a statement on your honor, and you have to abide by that. It's the code of officers." "Can't do that." So I said, "You've got to stop them," and he said, "Well, I'll get fired if I stop them." I said, "Matter of honor! You've got to stop them." He called them up and stopped them! They were about five miles, ten miles, away.

Well, the next thing that happened is the next morning was foggy, so we couldn't do it at seven o'clock whenever we wanted to, and it kept foggy until about nine. About nine it cleared up, so anti-climax as it was, we flew down there. All of the things happened the way they were supposed to. Fritz Freund had them all lined up. He made it a little more dramatic because he went up in front of Y Tlur, and he took his Swedish K off his shoulder and slammed it into this little, wispy Montagnard, and said, "Here! If you're going to kill me, kill me with my own machine gun." And Y Tlur was hypnotized, and all the Montagnards' eyes were big as dollars, and they were standing there in line, and Fritz turns on his heel and goes down and clips all the wires away, and as he did that we landed the helicopters. All the people streamed out--just like it was supposed to--streamed out of the little jail, got on the helicopters, and took off.

I landed with the helicopters, and Fritz then walked down and said to me, "Come up and give them a talk." And I said, "What do you mean, 'give them a talk'?" "Give 'em a pep talk," he says. "We've got to do something with these troops." So I said, "Well, I don't know how to speak Montagnard or French." And he said, "That don't make any difference. Just give them a talk." So I went up with Fritz, and I gave them a talk in English and told them what great guys they were and how wise they'd been and how everything was going to work out fine and that they were a fine body of troops and

thanked them very much, and we trooped the line and went back, and he said good-bye to everybody, and we got on the helicopter and flew away. About fifteen minutes later in came the Twenty-third Division, and not a shot was fired. You know, it sort of sounds like--it's like a British colonial story, isn't it?

[Laughter]

G: It has certain elements of the Raj, you know.

D: Yes, that's right.

G: When did you begin planning for the large-scale U.S. deployment in MACV? Was that always a sort of a contingency?

D: Well, that's--I'm hesitating because the responsibility for that, the long-range responsibility was part of a J-5 responsibility, but nothing was long-range. Everything was more or less ad hoc, on short notice, and--but there was no long-range plan, to my knowledge. It was an incremental exercise in gradualism both out there and back here. The first troops to come in were the marines at Da Nang, and the theory then was--that was the Ninth MEB [Marine Expeditionary Brigade?] under a guy named Fred [Frederick J.] Karch--and they were coming in because we were worried out there that the VC would take the Da Nang air field, which was an important air field at that time for a lot of--and Da Nang was important. SOG [Special Operations Group] was there. They were flying from the Da Nang air field over North Vietnam. That was the first kind of retaliation. And the other air field that people thought was equally essen--well, not equally essential but essential--was Bien Hoa, so that's where the 173rd came, and in both cases we put some Hawks on the air field for defense against bombing from North Vietnam, but we wanted some American troops in the area to secure the air field against

the VC. You see, it hadn't been too much before that that the VC had, we thought, attacked the air field at Bien Hoa and blew up a bunch of Canberra bombers.

G: Yes, November 1964, I think.

D: Yes, you see, it was the same general period just before we brought the American troops in and just in the middle of all those big operations that I was talking about, so we were really concerned about the air fields. And when they came in, they came--there were a lot of rules of engagement, sort of nervous rules of engagement--they can't go do anything, and you can't use American jets, and you can only fight defensively, and so on, but those all sort of evaporated over time.

And then Westmoreland was worried about two things. He was worried about Saigon, and he was worried about the Highlands. He always felt--at least he always said--that he was afraid that the VC were going to cut the country in two by coming right down old Highway 19 from Pleiku into Binh Dinh Province, which was in the hands of the VC anyway, and that would be very embarrassing and difficult for everybody, and then that the North Vietnamese and the VC would be able to take over the northern half of the country if that ever happened. That was sort of a gut feeling about that, so that's why the First Cav came into the middle of the country, why the First Division came in just north of Saigon.

G: There was an argument over where to deploy the Cav, wasn't there?

D: Yes, very. General Westmoreland wanted to put it up at Pleiku, at Holloway Air Field, and the interesting argument was that CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific command]--a wonderful man, Admiral Sharp, Oley Sharp [Ulysses S. Sharp, Jr.]. Very fond of him, but an admiral. He had kind of a Dien Bien Phu fixation, and anything

inland made him frankly nervous. He personally was as brave as a bear, but he just was afraid that if we put that division in too far it was going to get surrounded or something. I don't know exactly what he had in his mind, but he didn't like it, so we compromised. He wanted to put it in Qui Nhon; we wanted to put it in Pleiku. I went up with an advance detachment of the First Cav, and we picked An Khe. And they had to make that great big camp up there. So that's that story.

G: You didn't help build the golf course up there, did you?

D: No.

G: Okay.

D: I didn't help build anything, but I took the advance detachment of the First Cavalry Division up there, and, you know, we went around the terrain and looked at it, and they agreed that they could make do. All there was was a special forces detachment in the old An Khe special forces camp on Highway 19. That's all there was there. Tiny little thing, and a little district headquarters. And another camp up north of it. I've forgotten the name of it, but anyway.

G: Catecka? Or Kannack? (Inaudible)

D: Something like that, yes.

G: There's a lot of talk about search and destroy.

D: Yes.

G: I think General Westmoreland credits you with developing the search-and-destroy strategy. What was--what was search and destroy? What was it supposed to accomplish?

D: Well, I can tell you that. General Westmoreland launched, with the Vietnamese in 1964, an operation in and around Saigon called Hop Tac, H-O-P, second word T-A-C, which

means something like "cooperation." Now the idea was sort of an amalgam of all the old theories of oil spots and so on, but if you visualize the city of Saigon itself, proper, the metropolitan center, in that area which we wished to secure, and we used--the name for the process of securing the center was called "securing." [It] was done by police, was done by intelligence services. It was where the people should be in a protected environment, where the economy could flourish, *et cetera*, and where civilians could be in charge. Outside that in a doughnut, in another ring, the next ring out, would be the suburbs and the adjacent districts of the several provinces around Saigon. In that area the goal was to create Popular and Regional Forces. First of all to get all VC out, all the--well, not the secret VC, but get all organized VC units out. The operation to do that, which would have been done by the run-of-the-mill ARVN, was called "clearing." See, it's "securing" in the center, "clearing"--and then after you cleared out, let's say, village platoons, district companies, and provincial battalions, which was about where they were in those days, and pushed them out of there or destroyed them, then you would recruit Popular and Regional Forces, and you would have "cleared." Like you would have secured by "securing," you would have cleared by "clearing." And the remaining problem was that the big boys were still lurking outside the second ring, like the Ninth VC Division, like the several regiments of the Ninth Division, and they in the old days used to come in very close to Saigon, over--you know, destroy a few Popular Forces or Regional Forces elements and terrorize the whole area, set back pacification five years, and terrify--you know, dominate the area.

So then the idea was that the elite ARVN units, Airborne, Ranger, and Marine, and the better ARVN units, if there were any--and there were very few, of the run-of-the-

mill--and American units later, would look for, search for, and engage and destroy or disrupt--and keep moving, but destroy was the object--"search for and destroy" the Ninth VC Division, the Fifth VC Division, the Seventh VC Division, and so on, and keep them out of the cleared area. And then, hopefully, the thing would expand over time. That was the origin of search and destroy. I think it's true that I did that. I think I sort of tried to standardize the terminology. We were dealing with three provinces, two corps, four divisions, umph districts, police forces, and so we wanted to have a concept that people could understand, and different kinds of forces would be associated with different kind of functions. And search and destroy meant searching for and destroying main-force VC and later NVA units, and that carried on into the time the American troops arrived. Now, the problem was that--I think it was a marine unit up near Da Nang where, on television, they showed a guy with a Zippo lighter burning the roof off of the thing, and that was described as search and destroy. You searched the house, and then you burn it down. So much for a perfectly good term, huh? I mean, it turned out not to be a felicitous choice of words, but that's what it was. I mean, no reason to apologize for the term or the concept.

Now, the interesting thing about Hop Tac and search and destroy and clearing is that that concept, in my opinion, was very close to General Westmoreland's visualization of how the war needed to be fought. Now, if I may go on and give you a couple of other thoughts here--

G: Yes.

D: What happened, of course, was that while we were dashing in, arriving in force to help the South Vietnamese--because it was the VC main forces that broke into the Binh Gia,

Ben Ba, Dong Xoai, and Song Be--it wasn't local battalions that did that; it was the big boys--and just devastated those areas, and the sound waves of that went through the whole country and demoralized the whole country. But just at the time we were arriving in strength and at some speed, so, too, were the North Vietnamese. We knew they were in the pipeline and coming in, but I don't think we grasped the fact that the North Vietnamese army was going to be deployed to the South. I don't think anybody did.

I have a theory about all of this, which I might as well tell you now--as good a time as any, because it's related to this. Counterinsurgency was the rule of the day for a long time. It very much affected the thinking both out there and back here in Washington. In the early days of counterinsurgency, Washington was flooded with academics and professors and scientists and social scientists and all sorts of people, and the focus of everybody's attention was on counterinsurgency. And what that really amounted to was that we became very critical of the government of Vietnam, not the enemy, but--you know, after all, if the insurgents are created by dissatisfaction with economic and political and cultural and social conditions, the way you correct that is through your ally, the government of South Vietnam, which was a struggling government. We had managed to get rid of its president. We certainly didn't intend to have him killed, but he was. And then we had a series of very inept governments. So we had a weak tool to work with in the first place, and the focus of all government agencies was on helping the Vietnamese government, and it seems to me that everything that went wrong we blamed on the Vietnamese government. The blame, in fact, was in Hanoi--I mean, should have been in Hanoi. Yes, they should have been better, but one of the reasons they weren't so good was they were under very heavy pressure. Do you follow me?

G: Yes, I do.

D: So that's one thing, and when General Westmoreland first recommended--or suggested--I think it was a suggestion first and later a recommendation--that he put the First Cavalry Division in Laos on the Bolevens Plateau and the Third Marine Division would be operating in Vietnam, and we would sever the Ho Chi Minh Trail, I'm quite sure that that was regarded as inappropriate to the threat--in other words, our mentality was still on counterinsurgency--and that it was too conventional a military solution to an unconventional problem. Those were the days when you heard that we--"The dumb old American Army had trained the Vietnamese army in the wrong way for the wrong war," and "You should fight guerrillas with guerrillas," which is nonsense. But all of that was current in Washington.

And the second was the ambiguity of intelligence. We knew there were North Vietnamese in the pipeline, but nobody projected that. Certainly, nobody projected it to visualize there would be twenty-four divisions in South Vietnam in 1975.

G: No.

D: Okay. So, you know, we had a bean-count system, and everything had to be confirmed by a separate source. So you were always behind six months or so, and I think it was a long time before the United States collectively, over there and back here, realized that the North Vietnamese army was being deployed to the South and that either the game had changed, or, in addition to the Viet Cong, we had this huge additional problem.

The third problem that I think we had, and part of it comes from counterinsurgency but part is instinctive: We responded symmetrically. They had guerrillas, we had anti-guerrillas; they had terrorists, we had anti-terrorists; they crossed the border, we guarded

the border. They had main forces, we had sweeps. The idea of a cordon or of some kind of--like along the Thirty-eighth Parallel in Korea--stopping the North Koreans from coming into South Korea was what eventually created the Korea we know today. Now, unfortunately, some of the North Vietnamese had already got through, but about 1966, it would have been possible, I think, to go up there and throw a block. Now, it would have been a heck of a big battle. They might have thrown their whole army against it. Very likely. We don't know, but it's very likely. But we wouldn't be fighting them in every district in South Vietnam.

They not only assailed--take the Fourth Division, our Fourth Division. That division went over there, I know, because H. K. Johnson was the Chief of Staff, and he was a counterinsurgency man, and Ray Peers, and people like that, commanded it. It was going to come over and do counterinsurgency. It did nothing but fight North Vietnamese divisions and regiments in the mountains of Pleiku and Kontum the whole time it was there. No division had tougher, longer, more gruesome fights than the Fourth, without much publicity, I might add.

G: No, it didn't get much glory.

D: No, they didn't, but nothing they did had anything to do with counterinsurgency. They were repelling boarders, is what they were doing.

G: That's a good simile.

D: They were. So, anyway, we responded symmetrically the hard way. I mean, we were fighting the symptoms out at the end of the tentacles instead of going for the heart, and I think that--now, Westmoreland made this suggestion of the First Cav. Later, he made a suggestion of putting a corps up there. The army staff had a plan for building a

superhighway, Highway 9, all the way across to Souvannakhet [now Savannakhet], and then guard it and put allied engineers in. Any of those things would have been a better idea than the one we had, in my opinion, because the search and destroy, coming back to that, all the time that I commanded the First Division--now I know it wasn't very long, a year--but while I commanded the First Division, my understanding of my mission came from Hop Tac. I was on search and destroy against the Ninth Division. I was one-on-one with the Ninth Division. Wherever they went, I went. During fifteen months, the Ninth Division never entered a single populated area, and we fought a number of really brutal engagements with them. Now, I thought that that was the best you could do, but what would happen is that by the end of 1966, they had developed their base areas in Cambodia, so they could control their losses, and as long as they could control their losses, there was no way you could bring the war to any kind of a conclusion.

G: Tell me about one of those big fights.

(Interruption)

G: --big fights that the First Division was in. One that has a lot to talk about, perhaps, including some controversy, is Attleboro. There was a lot of talk in the army about what started Attleboro and how it--there was an incremental thing involved there that generated some controversy. What was your viewpoint as that took place?

D: Well, I know a lot about Attleboro. The 197th [196th]--wasn't it?

G: I think that's right, yes.

D: The 197th [196th] Brigade. Ted [Edward H.] de Saussure was commanding, and then later it was commanded by the--you know, the ADC of the First Cav--anyway. Having a mental block. Wonderful guy. What happened was that the 197th [196th] was new in the

country; its base was at Tay Ninh West. It was operating in an area northwest of Dau Tieng, which is a district town in the Michelin. It was in that area because we had briefly found a big rice cache in there earlier when we were over on Operation Birmingham, and the rice caches were right on the Saigon River banks. Most of the rice came out of Saigon, by the way, in American bags. So they'd take it up the river in boats, and then they'd just stash it just a little bit off the river under little thatched-roof arrangements. So they were in there with three battalions of their own, and two Wolfhound battalions, I think. They had--certainly, they had Sandy Meloy's [Guy S. Meloy III] battalion, which was 1/27.

Anyhow, they were all out in the--now this area, this forest, is southeast of the special forces camp at Soui Da, which is at the base of Nui Ba Den, the big mountain, and between Dau Tieng and Soui Da, and just to the west of the main Michelin rubber plantation.

Well, unbeknownst, I suppose, to both parties--it's my guess that our guys were out there because somebody told them to go out and look for rice, and they were all broken down into squads and platoons, and they were finding rice and looking around, and the Viet Cong Ninth Division, which had four regiments in it, including the 101st, had--they were on a campaign, obviously. Now, it is my understanding that their idea was that they were going to either attack or threaten the Soui Da special forces camp, and then ambush everybody who came to rescue it. They probably hoped that the 197th [196th], this new brigade, would be the one that would do that. Not a bad plan for the VC.

Well, several things went wrong for everybody. The first one was that when the VC went into their base areas down there, and they had sort of four regiments in a box right around Soui Da, and they were old base areas. You know how they used them. They would go in and leave them and go back again, and clean them out and get in, and they were all fortified. One of them, one of those base areas, and I think it was the 273d--yes, it was the 273d VC Regiment--was right in the middle of where the 197th [196th] was broken out into platoon and squad patrols, and in the middle of the night in came the VC, and the next morning--whereas on that day nothing had happened except finding rice and getting hot, the next day everybody was in contact, in these little, tiny groups of Americans.

None of them were doing very well because the VC knew where they were, knew what the base camp configuration was, knew they were trying to clear the place out, had all these pesky Americans wandering around in there, and I--I don't know. I got wind of this. Somebody told me that there were some interesting things going on over there. Well, I regarded everything north of the Saigon River as mine. That was by habit. And everything south was the Twenty-fifth. So I went over there, by myself in my helicopter. My Three [G-3]--I don't know whether you remember Paul Gorman or Al Haig.

G: I think Haig still had a battalion at that time.

D: Well, Haig got the battalion about that time. It was about the changeover from Haig to Gorman. In any event, the minute I got over to the headquarters of the 197th [196th], which was in Dau Tieng, in the headquarters of the rubber plantation--and, incidentally, Rod Paschall, who commanded Delta Force after Charlie Beckwith and who is now head of the Military History Institute at Carlisle, was in one of those battalions of the 197th

[196th]. No, he was in one of the Wolfhound battalions. Anyway--but he had been seconded up to work in the headquarters, and I walked into the operations, and all the radios were going, these frantic messages were coming--it was one of those things that, as an old soldier, you would recognize immediately as a mess.

So it turned out that as the 197th tried to react, they got their battalions all screwed up. I mean, they had--at one time, Meloy's battalion had about nine companies in it. He had companies from other battalions, not quite sure what their call sign was, didn't quite know where they were, didn't quite know why he was getting them, and he had been without sleep for three days, and so on and so forth. Anyway, that was a little later, but what--I got the immediate impression that they were going to have a terrible time. I just sort of instinctively understood what was going on out there, that the VC had just moved into a big base camp, or several, and they knew what they were doing, and our guys didn't, and it just got worse.

I flew back that afternoon, and I moved an infantry battalion to Dau Tieng without anybody telling me to or authorizing me to, and I alerted [Sidney M.] Mickey Marks, who was my third brigade commander--a famous fellow, old paratrooper in World War II--to be ready to go over there and take some more, so he sent a battalion, and the next morning, very early, I went over again, and it was worse. And I met John Heintges, who was the deputy to Westmoreland, and he asked me what I thought, and I said, "Well, I frankly have to tell you that a small--at least a small--disaster is in the later stages of development," and he then went back and apparently talked to Westmoreland and [Frederick C.] Fred Weyand. Now Fred Weyand was the Twenty-fifth Division commander, but he was acting corps commander, acting Field Force II commander.

So late that afternoon, maybe five o'clock or so, Heintges asked me to join him at Bien Hoa air field at five o'clock or something. Anyway, I went over there and Fred was there, and they then directed me to take over the battle--to take command of the battle and to use whatever part of the First Division that I wanted to. I had already sent the third brigade [inaudible], and my medium artillery and my cavalry squadron lined up on the road, and they made a night move from Lai Khe down through Saigon, up Highway 1 through Cu Chi all the way to Tay Ninh City, through Tay Ninh, and back over to Soui Da at night.

G: This was an armored cav squadron?

D: Armored cav squadron and a medium artillery battalion.

G: I'm following you.

D: Because that was all the stuff we couldn't move by helicopter. So in the morning, by daylight, I had the third brigade with two battalions, including an artillery battalion, and then I had the cav and the medium battalion, and that day we got two or three more battalions over in the area. Now, what was happening at the same time was that the special forces had a MIKE [Mobile Strike Force Command] force in there, and the MIKE force was coming from east to west toward Soui Da, and they ran into the 271st Regiment in another base camp, and they got all snarled up in a terrible fight.

So I put Jimmy Hollingsworth in charge of the special forces war. I sent Jack Dean, who was my other ADC, later commanded the 173d and later the Eighty-second and so on--who had a broken foot in a cast from a helicopter crash--over to sit with Sandy Meloy, whose headquarters was about ten feet from the first pillbox, but he needed a little bit of solace. And then I spent my time bringing the rest of the division over, and

what we did is we got the 197th [196th] out. There was nothing they could do. I mean, they were--they had companies with the wrong battalions, wrong battalions with other companies, and so on and so forth. And my plan was very simple. "Get out of the forest, go back to Tay Ninh, and put the companies with the battalions, count noses." And then we brought them back and gave them some other missions.

And the only big fight--we had lots of little fights. I brought Sam Walker's brigade over, and we put battalions down and companies down all over that area, and the only one that really paid off was--we had a battalion, 1/28, commanded by a fellow named Jack Whitted, a very solid soldier. We put him down about three in the afternoon in a--we had been watching their radios move around, and we moved him in the direction of one of those, and he didn't run into a damn thing. And he settled down just at dark, the whole battalion in one place fortunately, and just before daylight the next morning, the whole bloody regiment hit him. And he did very well. The reason they went after him was that he was, without knowing it, four hundred yards from the largest ammo depot I ever saw in Vietnam. Among other things, it had, oh, twenty or thirty naval mines of the kind you sink oceangoing--and these were to be used apparently on the Saigon River or something, because this thing wasn't very far from the river. That's where we got the--we had, oh, you know, like three thousand claymores and on and on and on. Uncounted numbers of--then, the next thing I know is Mickey Marks, to whom 1/28 belonged, got this whole ammo dump evacuated from where it was, and do you know where he put it? Inside the Soui Da special forces camp, where he had his headquarters, and in the Soui Da special forces camp, there's no question but that half of the Montagnard in there were VC. All one of them would have had to do was to throw one hand grenade in that ammo

dump, and we'd have had a hole about the size of Nui Ba Den in the other direction, and we would have lost everything. I mean, the whole brigade headquarters, artillery--and I walked in and saw that, and I thought, "My God!"

(Laughter)

G: How long did it take you to tell him to get it out of there?

D: Well, I moved the brigade headquarters.

G: That was a lot easier than moving the ammo dump.

D: Then we moved it.

One of the questions I'm always asked, and I saw it on there, "Did I relieve de Saussure?" and I did not. Heintges and Westmoreland made that decision without consulting me. To be perfectly honest, I was not impressed with the command and control of the 197th [196th], but, be that as it may, you know, they were new. They were in a very tough situation, and he was an artilleryman. Now, you're an artilleryman, but I'm a great believer that artillerymen are very good with artillery, you know. It takes a little experience with infantry, and he didn't have it. So they didn't relieve him--what they did--well, they did, but they transferred him, transferred him over, and made him the artilleryman of the I Field Force, and he was promoted. So, anyway, that's that story.

(Interruption)

G: The fight at Ia Drang was a shock, you mean?

D: I think it was. I think it was maybe a tougher fight than they initially thought they would get into, but they handled it well, and, of course, they were lucky to have Hal Moore there, because he was a cool customer. And from then on, as far as I could see, the First Cav just kept going on and getting better and better. They were a fighting outfit. I

always had great admiration for them. Harry Kinnard [Harry William Osborne Kinnard II] is a good friend of mine.

They would always look for and accept a fight. That was my impression of the First Cav. If there was a fight to be had, they'd find it and go fight it. The one thing I envied them was the Ninth Cavalry. You see, I only had one troop, and they had the whole Ninth Cav. If I'd had an air cavalry squadron, I'd have been able to do a lot of the things they did. I had as many helicopters in the early days, more than they did, and they didn't have to maintain any of them because [George P.] Phip Seneff had that great big First Aviation Brigade, and there weren't any other divisions using helicopters in the Saigon area. On many days, I had ninety lift ships going, and twenty or thirty or thirty-five gunships, and all the Chinooks I needed, so I could move whole battalions in one lift. It was very rare [that] the First Cav could do that when they had to maintain their own helicopters, very rare indeed. But we didn't have all the stuff that went with it, but we got pretty nimble and used small headquarters. But we didn't have the cavalry reconnaissance to find and get these fights started.

G: What about the chiefs of staff that you've served under at MACV? How would you compare and contrast their styles and ways of getting the job done?

D: Well, I really don't have anything useful to say there because both of them are great guys, Dick Stilwell and Bill Rosson. I mean, they're two of the army's best officers in all departments. They're different kinds of personalities and so on but--and I know Dick better, but Bill is also a very close friend. Both of them gave me, oh, complete freedom, and, you know, you appreciate that, and total support, so I really--they were just great! I don't have anything more to say about that.

G: Did you have--I'm still referring to when you were a J-3--operational responsibility for the Allied troops as well as the U.S. when they came in? The Koreans, the Australians, and so on?

D: Well, of course, MACV did, and as the chief operations officer of MACV, I had the same relationship to them I did to everybody else. Sure.

G: Were there constraints on how you could employ them as opposed to how we could deploy American troops?

D: Yes. Well, they were more sort of implicit. The Koreans were fairly conservative. Good fighters if they decided to fight. We tried to put the various small Allied contingents together with a larger U.S. contingent and deal with them through them. Although at the very beginning, we had the Australians over in Phuoc Tuy Province and dealt directly with them; then we hooked them up with the 173d Airborne Brigade while they were there--give them a home, give them a little independence--and they had a New Zealand artillery battery with them. But little units need a daddy. A division would be the better daddy for them, or a corps in the case of the Korean divisions. But yes, from the beginning, we dealt with them sort of like a regiment, and later, we tried to farm them out.

G: How would you compare their performance?

D: I thought the Australians were very good. The Australians, including an Australian SAS [Special Air Service] unit, were very good on patrolling. You have to learn how they do that. They would only move maybe five hundred yards in a day. Most people don't know that. Their technique is to take about three steps, and wait and listen for five minutes. They go into the deepest part of the jungle and stay there and move and are

very seldom ever detected. They detect the enemy. The enemy doesn't detect them. The price they pay for that is they don't move around very much. And it's an intelligence operation. It's not an assault operation.

G: How does that compare with the technique that our long range patrols were using?

D: Well, our long range patrols, by and large, were not very good. They were kind of amateurish. Brave but amateurish. I think that's true in every division. And in most cases--

G: That's an interesting observation.

D: In most cases, we had to go out and extract them. As soon as they got into some kind of an interesting situation, they would be discovered, they'd come under fire, and they'd ask for help. Then it was like the *Perils of Pauline*; you'd go and rescue them, every one being a dramatic--

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

D: --as far as I was concerned was the negative information that they gave us. We eventually tried to know where all the base areas were. We also watched their radios, and so the name of the game was to try to find out where they were and where they were not, because sometimes they weren't on the air, and if you put long range patrols out in the base areas and found there wasn't anybody there, that was very valuable. And then you didn't have to extract them, and it wasn't so exciting for everybody.

(Laughter)

G: What about the Koreans? You said that they fought well if they chose to fight.

D: Well, I'm really not the man to talk to about that because I didn't work--I left MACV shortly after they got going, but they were--my word for the Korean was they were

reserved. You could tell an American corps commander or division commander--or Westmoreland could--you know, "Here's what we want you to do, and get going," and you'd get all that enthusiasm, and they'd move immediately. I think the Koreans were more deliberate, more careful, and I'm not sure why. Once they'd decided to fight, they were formidable fighters. But I--they didn't go into that war like the First Cavalry Division, believe me.

G: All right, sir. How long were you in Vietnam [inaudible]?

D: Well, I was there two months short of three years.

G: That's a little long, isn't it, even for a general officer?

D: Yes, well, but I didn't go twice.

D: Well, even that would bear some explanation. Why such a long single tour?

D: Well, it was just circumstance, because it was at the transition from the old to the new. I spent what would have been--a normal tour back in the MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] days and the early days of MACV would have been two years or so. Well, I did that. I spent two years as MACV J-3, and then I probably would have come home, but then the big war started, and--

(Interruption)

--then they gave me the division, and so I had that for just a year.

G: Well, nobody turns down a division [inaudible].

D: No, of course not. So that's really what [inaudible].

G: Now, you said that the division was a good division, the Big Red One, and, of course, you are aware of all the stories that circulated in the army about reliefs from command. What's behind that?

D: Well, in the first place, all stories are exaggerated in an army. You may start with that. The First Division was thrown together--Jack Seaman tells a wonderful story about the one year, or the six months, before the division deployed, where he got orders and counterorders and, "Send a brigade," or, "No, send two brigades," or, "Send a whole division, and don't send the tanks," and, "Don't send the 'mech'" and, finally--

(Interruption)

When the division arrived, he put all the good people--not all the good people--deployable people and good people in one brigade, and he'd no sooner done that than he was told to send the whole division. And he picked up troops from Massachusetts, and he picked up the Second Infantry that had never been in the division, and he had a hell of a time, both at the soldier level and at the officer level and at the NCO [non-commissioned officer] level. Jack is a fine officer, artilleryman, hadn't lived through the two years I had lived through going to these battles, you know. I think, in all fairness, we probably did not--"we" meaning MACV--did not explain adequately to new divisions or even new corps commanders what exactly we expected of them.

Now, I may be unfair to General Westmoreland on that. He may have done all that while I wasn't there, but I have the impression that they had come from the United States, where they were expecting one kind of a war, more of a counterinsurgency war, which is more static. I know the marines were because they came under the tutelage of Krulak, and I think the First Division and I know the Twenty-fifth Division did. They came in with the idea they were going to do counterinsurgency and local security and so on and so forth, whereas General Westmoreland and certainly I--we regarded them as part of the elite force that would go in and do search and destroy.

So there was a sort of a difference there, and when the First Division came in it started being very conservative and sort of patrolling around its base areas and sort of waiting for somebody to tell it what to do, in a way. When I came in, I already had my preconceptions as to what was a--what I thought was required and what I thought that Westmoreland wanted, and so, when I hit the division, it was a big change for the division. I moved it around a lot; I moved my headquarters around a lot. Even sometimes when I didn't have a very good excuse to move it around, I moved it anyway to get it to learn how to move.

Now, most of the big fights that took place--Jack had a lot of big fights. Most of them were one-battalion fights. The battalion would be out in the jungle, and they would get in a hell of a fight, and that was it. Well, I tried very hard to get more battalions in every one of those fights, and we got better and better at it. I finally got five battalions in one fight. That's very unusual. That takes a lot of doing, to get them in before the fight's over.

G: That' s right.

D: So there was that difference. So, I think I was a shock to the First Division, and the First Division was a little bit of a shock to me. I believe that the--well, the number of people relieved was nothing like what the rumor, you know, the Ladies' Aid Society back in the United States would say. I relieved a special forces major, who was commanding one of the battalions very soon after I arrived. He should never have been an officer, let alone be a battalion commander. I relieved a battalion commander of the Twenty-sixth Infantry. I should have relieved him as soon as I discovered he was weak, but I didn't, and then he got in a big fight, and he lost a lot of people through sheer ineptitude, and

then I did. I relieved an officer commanding one of the battalions of the Sixteenth Infantry for failing to obey an order. Now, the order--I visited him one day. I told him that I wanted his line--he was in a battalion perimeter up near Loc Ninh, and this was just before we fought this big series of engagements. The VC Ninth Division was in the area, and I had sort of pulled back into battalion--but, anyway, he wasn't dug in, and the soldiers were leaving a lot of trash and paper around their positions. Well, I had seen the Vietnamese get zonked because of that, and I had a rule that at every two-man position that they would have a hole in the ground, and they would throw all their junk in there and that they would not leave their positions without at least their helmet and their weapon. They could go stark naked as far as I was concerned if they had their helmet and their weapons. I went back the next day, and none of those things had been done. None! And I just [inaudible].

There was one more. I'm talking about infantry battalion commanders. I relieved one because he had his headquarters and one rifle company in a sort of a base, a patrol base, and the other companies were working out of there, and the company that was protecting his headquarters had one platoon that was dug in on our side five to ten feet on this side of a rice paddy bank. On our side. And he wasn't there when I got there, so I walked around, and I discovered this thing. They had been there about three days, which, in the first place, was too long, and so I crawled down and you obviously couldn't see anything, and when he came in, I asked him. I said, "Are you satisfied with the positions around here?" He didn't even question. "Yes, sir." "Have you inspected them? Have you inspected those over there?" So I said, "Well, come with me." And we went over, and we got down in one, and there, right in front of you, five feet away, was a rice paddy

bank. So I said now, "What have you got to say about that?" "Well," he said, "Why--I don't see anything." He said, "It's not a very good position." Well, I really--I think this is the only one I really blew my stack, and I just told him that, "You know, either you were lying to me about having inspected this position or, if you did inspect it, you don't deserve to be a battalion commander of infantry."

We relieved three battalion commanders. Two of them [were] relieved by my Divarty [divisional artillery] commander on his own hook, and one of them I relieved. I got rid of a provost marshal, who also should never have been an officer. That was about it. So I think maybe that's too many, but if I had it to do over again, I'd have to do the same thing.

You have to understand one thing about me--not that you give a damn--but I fought in Normandy with a regiment with three battalion commanders who should have been relieved in peacetime. One was a coward, one was a small-time gangster from Chicago and a coward, and the other was a drunk. We went into combat with them, and we got all sorts of people killed unnecessarily, and I--I can't stand that. I don't like that. And if I have to choose between the Rotarian spirit of the officer corps and keeping the soldiers alive, well, there's no question which way I vote. Yes, I have a bad reputation for all that, but every time I go to the war colleges and give a speech, and I do that--I'm going this week--and I've done it dozens and dozens of times. At least two times out of three, I'm asked the same question. My reputation has obviously spread. I always answer it by starting out with the Ninetieth Division, and then I explain a couple of these reliefs, and then I give them my philosophy about not training incompetent commanders on the lives of First Division soldiers or Ninetieth Division soldiers. I don't think armies

have to do that. I think you have to be discriminating, and if you have a choice, the choice to me is easy. So there. That's the story.

G: That's a good explanation.

D: Generally, I've had a very fair reception from my audiences on that.

G: Nobody can quarrel with the reasoning, that's certain.

Tell me about the press in Vietnam from your perspective. What sort of a relationship did you have with the press?

D: Well, there were some, you know, Ike Pappas and Arnett--

G: Peter Arnett?

D: Peter Arnett, and even the guy who's on *60 Minutes*, the little, ugly fellow like--

G: Morley Safer?

D: Morley Safer. And some others--Francois Sully, who's dead, I liked. And they spent a lot of time with us, and we got on fine, and we never had an unfair story. I'm one of those who doesn't blame the press very much for Vietnam. I mean, I don't blame the press for Vietnam. I think that television raises some very tough questions for us because I don't think that mothers and sisters and young children and grandmothers and grandfathers should have to see war at close hand. Because they can't like it; they really don't want to have anything to do with it, and if they keep getting it, and television goes to the aid stations--that's where you get your stories--and they go to the most newsworthy part of the battlefield, which is probably the bloodiest part, and you sort of get the impression that there's nothing but disaster, and if you talk to a man in an aid station about how well the battle went, it didn't go very well as far as he's concerned. "It was a disaster."

So I don't have any problem with it. The press--the thinking press, the [David] Halberstams and those guys, they formed their opinions early in the war during the counter-insurgency phase, even before U.S. troops got there, and they really still believe that, you know, that it's not quite clear who was right. That's the way they think about it. And certainly armies are hard to love. I don't know anybody who loves an army except the officers in it. No outsiders do. And so I just think the press is a necessary evil, an inevitable evil, but I worry more about television coverage. If we'd had television in Normandy, I don't know whether they'd have relieved Eisenhower, but they'd have relieved a lot of people below him.

G: That's a good observation.

I heard a story once about a group of visiting firemen from Washington, one of whom was George Carver, came to visit you, and you had arranged a dinner out in the jungle headquarters someplace and brought in a number of your interesting officers to sit with these guys, and one of them was Al Haig, and he sat down with George Carver, and they had a conversation. Was that something you did as a regular thing?

D: No, not too often, but, you know, I knew a lot of people, but I used to--my God, the officers I had in that division after I got it sort of fixed up, you can't believe! That's why the Chief of Staff of the Army was mad at me. He said he couldn't afford the First Division.

(Laughter)

G: Was this General Johnson?

D: Yes. Well, you know, I had three G-3s. I had Paul Gorman, Al Haig, and Sam Walker. ADCs, in addition to--I had Mel [Melvin] Zais; I had Hollingsworth, Dean and Bernie

Rogers, and I think that amongst the battalion commanders that there are, including of course, Al and Sam and Paul and [Robert W.] Sennewald and [Richard E.] Cavazos, *et cetera*. I mean, we have a very--the First Cav has a lot, too, but from that period, we just have a very large slice of the high command of the army. Now, you can't do anything but succeed with an aggregation like that. It's like a good football team or a good anything else. They're just good men, all by themselves, and put them all together, you get something unusual going. Amongst the officers who served during the one year I was there, I think, forty-seven of them became generals.

G: You wonder--

D: And they're still coming along. It will be much bigger than that before it's finished.

D: Now you went from the First Division back to the States as SACSA [Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities], is that correct?

D: Yes.

G: How did you land that one?

D: Well, I didn't want it.

G: You didn't want it.

D: I wanted to go to Benning, but the powers that be, Johnson and others, and General [Earle] Wheeler, who was then the chairman, wanted me to come and be SACSA, and I spent a very interesting time because SACSA then, unlike now, was an independent thing. Now it's part of J-3, or almost disappeared. But anyway, except for the air war, which was handled by the J-3 himself, who was an air force lieutenant-general, Meyer, I was Mr. Vietnam Operations for Wheeler. And in all of the meetings that went on and interdepartmental things to get the chairman ready for lunches in the White House and all

that sort of stuff and working with Bill Bundy and Phil Habib and George Carver and so on, I did all of the--Dick Steadman was--and Bill Jorden from the White House. That same group of people. We spent about two years together, culminating in that horrible situation of the briefing of the great--you know, of the Wise Men.

G: The Wise Men. I was coming to that.

D: Well, anyway, so that's what I did. We also had Special Operations responsibility, but that's not really how I spent my time. I spent my time as an assistant to Wheeler for Vietnam, minus the air war.

G: You had SOG [Special Operations Group] as a special responsibility, I guess.

D: SOG was part of it, too. Yes.

G: That's a whole story in itself, I think.

D: Yes.

G: But I wanted to ask you about Tet. Everybody has to talk about Tet. To what extent was it a surprise to you? What was the real mathematics of the battlefield at Tet? How did we come out? How did they come out? And so forth.

D: Well, I think all of us in Washington were--somewhat were shocked by Tet. Surprised. Not sure we all handled it very well, either. Now, when I say "we," I mean everybody. I don't know anybody--there probably were some--but everybody in Washington that I knew was dismayed as well as surprised, partly because we realized what effect it was having back here. The information that it had been a defeat for the VC was not immediately apparent, I don't think, to anybody back here. In the first place, nobody believed anything that anybody said for a while after Tet. And although Westmoreland was right, his credibility had suffered simply because there was a Tet offensive of that

magnitude. And he said, "They've suffered a great defeat." And people back here said, "He's bugling." But he was right, and I've always felt a little badly about that, but I don't know--I mean, Wheeler, who--nobody was more loyal to Westmoreland than the chairman, but *he* was dismayed and shocked. And so, if it had an effect on us, some of us who had been there, just think of the effect it had on people who didn't know anything about the war. So I think it had a negative effect.

I went over with Wheeler, and the party consisted of Carver and Habib--I just don't know whether Steadman was with us or not, but Habib and Carver were, and we then got all the briefings at MACV, and then we were sent out around the country, and I went to First Cav. I went to the First Division and First Cav. George Forsythe was commanding it at the time. Old friend.

G: Do you know where he is these days?

D: Yes. He's down at Ladies' Island at Beaufort, South Carolina. Well, our report--I would say we tried to stick to the numbers, and we tried--I wrote the report for Wheeler with the help of an [inaudible], but I pulled it together for him. I tried to write a report that was to some extent neutral. Now in the retrospective view, if I'd been smart enough and Wheeler had been smart enough, and Habib and Carver and everybody, we would have written that "Now is a great opportunity. We have defeated the VC," and so on. We didn't know that, in my opinion. I didn't know that. I was astounded that they were able to move in and stay in Saigon as long as they did. I was astounded that they were able to do what they did at Hue. And not happy about it. So I would say that we tried to be more neutral and let Westmoreland speak for himself, if you follow me.

And in the briefing that I finally gave, along with Habib and Carver, we all tried to be factual. There was very little speculation on the part of any of us in those briefings. I simply tried to lay out, "Here is the situation in I Corps, II Corps, III Corps, IV Corps, and across the country." It was a poor briefing, okay? Because it was kind of stilted. But I do remember a couple of things. It was not--let's put it this way. It was neither--it wasn't--I tried to make it not an upbeat or a downbeat briefing, a kind of a neutral briefing. "Here are the facts we have received. Here's what we were told, and here's what we saw." Well, the Wise Men--particularly Clark Clifford, apparently, was pleased with it because he thought that it favored his point of view, which was really, "Get the hell out!" They asked one critical question of Phil Habib, and I think Clifford asked it. And that was, "Can the war be won militarily?" And Habib said, "No." I think all of us wondered whether it could be won militarily at that time, even those of us who had been chasing VCs around who slipped back into sanctuaries and so on. I had doubts. I think that we were pursuing the most difficult possible operational plan, and I'm not sure that any amount of optimism would have made a hell of a lot of difference. But what we didn't understand was the reaction that we would get from the President himself, or the growing reaction in Washington that they have to figure a way out. I mean, it really was a watershed.

G: Did Ambassador [Arthur] Goldberg speak up at this meeting that you recall?

D: No. He may have, but I don't remember.

G: Now, LBJ wanted to hear these briefings himself later. Did you get to--

D: Yes, I gave it.

G: What did he say?

D: Nothing. It was the damnedest thing I've ever seen. In the first place, Habib skipped town. Well, he didn't skip town; he was gone. He was smart. So Carver and I went over, and the first thing is we had a viewgraph thing, and we had to get a map and turn it around backward in the Oval Office, or the Cabinet Room--yes, it was the Cabinet Room, and we got a map around, and while we were giving this briefing, I think that LBJ had already made up his mind to not run again. Henry Fowler, the Secretary of the Treasury, came in. He talked to him. He made telephone calls. Patrick [Lyndon] Nugent was running around the table and bouncing on his knee, and the President would put a coke bottle in his mouth and gave no evidence he was listing to anything we said. And they were taking pictures all the time; they had a little Oriental fellow who took pictures all the time. And when we were finished, he said, "Well, thanks, fellows." He said, "I don't see anything wrong with that." And we left. No discussion. No nothing.

G: That's fascinating. But I'm not sure I know what it means.

D: I don't either. I have no idea what that means. I can tell you it was not what I expected.

G: Let's talk for a minute, if we can back up just a second, into the visit that you made with General Wheeler and the subsequent report, and, of course, one of the things that comes out of that is the famous 206,000--

D: Yes.

G: --troop request. In quotation marks, if you want to put them there. What can you contribute to our knowledge of that thing? Who instigated the request, or was it a request?

D: You see, I don't know the answer to that. I know what General Westmoreland says about it. An impression I get is that he felt that General Wheeler led him down that path on the

premise that Wheeler thought that in the shock of this offensive would be a good time to get a larger force, which might force the country into general mobilization, *et cetera*, which General Wheeler thought was needed. And I think General Westmoreland may have felt that he was somewhat trapped on that. Now he says, of course, that he wanted it in order to resume the offensive, to take the offensive, and to follow up on his victory. In Washington, it was viewed just the opposite, which was, "If it's a victory, why do you need more troops? It must have been a defeat." And I think that's been a very unhappy thing for General Westmoreland.

All we put in our report was whatever the numbers were and what they meant in terms of units and schedules and so on. I think that's what the report said. We got briefings right away about what was going on, and I didn't come away with any strong convictions one way or the other. I certainly didn't come away with a strong conviction that it had been a great victory, but I was wrong. It was, but it was awfully hard to perceive that. I mean, the VC were still in Soc Trang and still in Hue, and rockets were still being fired at the--one of those seven-inch rockets came into the room next to mine in the BOQ [Base Officers' Quarters?] the night before the briefing. So the whole atmosphere was not sort of, "The battle's over, and it was a great victory." It was more of a picture of confusion, uncertainty, not understanding exactly how they could have done all that, and what it meant. It wasn't at all clear how much the North Vietnamese had been involved. That was a controversial point. It turns out not very much, but some, and that was one of the things that worried everybody. "Are the North Vietnamese laying back, and are they going to hit the second blow, drop the other shoe, so to speak?" That's the impression that I had.

G: Do you remember what General Phil Davidson's summary of the situation was? Was he convinced in his own mind, or do you recall?

D: I think that his briefing very much supported General Westmoreland's view that they had just accomplished a great victory. I don't remember the details, but I think that's what Phil said.

There was skepticism, certainly in CIA. You see, CIA had been working in the pacification business, among other things, at the local level, and a lot of the things that they had worked on, although the VC had taken a beating, almost everything they were trying to do was seriously disrupted by Tet, so there wasn't a lot of joy in Mudville. And you can understand that.

G: They were reporting that the pacification was set back who knows how much, is that right?

D: That' s right.

G: You think they were wrong [inaudible]?

D: No, I think that they--it was--everything was set back. I think what nobody appreciated was the fact that the VC local forces had been so heavily committed and so badly decimated. That came through but came through slowly, and I'm not even sure that I fully appreciated it until after the war.

G: I don't know why I make the association, but this is, I guess, as good a place to ask it as any. What did you make of the CBS-General Westmoreland confrontation in the past couple of years?

D: Well, first of all, of course, I am very sympathetic with General Westmoreland. Point two is I thought it was a trivial matter. The real problem was the massive deployment of

the North Vietnamese army to the south, and it is on that issue that I think that we Americans collectively didn't do very well in (a) appreciating it and (b) responding to it.

[Interruption]

And (c) I believe that the Secret Self-Defense Force, among other things, amounts to quote, all the rest, unquote. If you go down in a hamlet, and you take out the hamlet squad, the village platoon, the district company or battalion, the province regiment, and the recruiting they do for the main force VC, what you have left, as you know, in a hamlet are old people [and] very young people, and the communists are in the habit of enlisting everybody in some kind of an organization to keep track of them and to give them something to do and to make them feel [like] participants. So the Secret Self-Defense Force may have been much larger than somebody estimated or much smaller, but the fact is, I believe, it was something that almost could be called "miscellaneous," everybody else. And I think to make that the major issue, in the face of this major movement of the North Vietnamese army, is a trivial pursuit. I mean, there were--it may be interesting to Sam Adams, who was counting them. [It] was very damn little interest to me. So I thought that typically it was a tempest in a teapot, in substance. Now it wasn't a tempest in a teapot from a public relations standpoint. I'm sorry it ever happened, but I guess General Westmoreland--well, I know--he felt his honor was at stake, and he had to challenge it. It didn't end the way I wanted it to end. I was very unhappy the way it ended.

The last point I would make is that I don't think in the trial they ever raised the issue I have just made with you. I don't think that was ever illuminated, the fact that this was, quote, all the rest, miscellaneous, or whatever, and whether it was a hundred

thousand more or a hundred thousand less, as far as I'm concerned, make a damn--I mean, nobody knows how many there were there at any one time in any one village or even which villages were counted on which side of the ledger. I just couldn't get interested in Sam Adams' obsession, which was what it was, and I'm just disappointed that General Westy got drawn into it.

G: That's a good summation.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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