

INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 7, 1985

INTERVIEWEE: JULIAN EWELL

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General Ewell's residence, McLean, Virginia

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G: Just by way of getting into this painlessly, when were you assigned to Vietnam?

E: I went over and took over the Ninth Division just about a month after Tet, late February, 1968, stayed with it till about March of 1969, and then I was shifted up to II Field Force, which was the field force that coincided with the III Corps' Tactical Zone around Saigon, and I stayed there until about March or April of 1970. So I was in Vietnam for two years, from post-Tet to just before the invasion of Cambodia.

G: I see. What was the situation like, post-Tet? What did you find when you came in country and took over the division?

E: Our division headquarters at that time was at a place called Bear Cat which was east of Saigon, and things were pretty quiet in that area. They'd sort of gotten themselves reorganized after Tet.

But shortly after I arrived I was sent down to the Delta to see what the situation was and what we ought to do about it. I don't know why, because I was as green as grass as far as Vietnam was concerned, but the Ninth had a brigade, the Riverine Brigade, down in the Delta and we had a brigade in Long An, which is a province just south of Saigon, and part of a brigade in Dinh Tuong, which is the next province down.

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And the division was scheduled to move completely to the Delta later in the year, so I guess they thought I'd be responsible for picking up the pieces so they sent me down there to see what was going on.

Well, the situation down there wasn't really all that bad but there is no doubt that the Vietnamese were considerably shaken by Tet, and there were still some VC fairly close to several of the main populated areas, and it was quite apparent that we were going to have to get in there and straighten things out, mainly to help the Vietnamese regain their morale and esprit. So, in summary, the situation around Saigon was, I'd say, not back to normal the way it had been before Tet, but in fairly good shape. Down in the Delta the Vietnamese in particular were very shaky. I think the progress of the VC there was partially actual and partially psychological but the two together made it pretty bad.

G: There were a lot of reports coming back to the effect that the VC had taken over the countryside, that pacification had been set back some number of months or maybe as long as a year or so. How accurate were these reports, do you think?

E: Well, there was something to them. Of course, the press tends to overdramatize things. I guess it's just endemic to the press. So I don't think it was anywhere near as dramatic as they painted it, but if you looked at the Hamlet Evaluation System numbers, which were not ideal but the best you had, you could see that pacification percentage or degree, whatever you wanted to call it, had dropped considerably in lots of areas. So there was something to it. The fact that the VC

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had lost a lot of their cadre and soldiers in the Tet battles I don't think came out immediately; it took a while to get a handle on that, and I think there is something to it, that the VC never recovered from Tet. Mainly because, at least in the South, that is Saigon and the Delta, the VC carried the load; the NVA pushed them out front and they took the casualties and the NVA didn't.

G: Did you see any evidence of the NVA taking on more of the load after Tet? Was this apparent at all?

E: Oh, yes. Yes, it was quite apparent. Of course, needless to say, after fifteen years all this is not crystal clear in my mind. But as you probably know, there were allegedly two VC divisions and one NVA division around north of Saigon, between Saigon and Cambodia. Actually, even before Tet, those two VC divisions were NVA divisions; they had just infiltrated the cadre and soldiers and everything else. And I would say that by Tet the NVA were well along in the process of taking over the war from the VC around Saigon. In the Delta, south of Saigon, before and after Tet, it was still about 100 per cent VC, but as we began to beat on the VC--I think the first NVA unit came in south of Saigon in the summer of 1968, a whole regiment, the first T0&E NVA unit that had ever been introduced into the Delta area. Then when the Ninth Division really got cranked up we, I guess you could say, decimated the VC and they began to push in NVA cadre, NVA replacements, and the NVA infusion began to move slowly down through the Delta. As a generalization, the NVA were getting into the northern Delta pretty well when I left in 1969.

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G: Was there a qualitative difference in fighting such as you say a T0&E NVA unit as, let's say, a VC main force unit?

E: Yes, it's not so much qualitative but a difference in style. An NVA unit tends to be very tough, very disciplined, and you could just-- although none of the communist units, as you probably recall, would seek out a fight except under very favorable circumstances; they tried to evade except when they'd have a high point. You know, they shifted over to the high point idea around late 1967, or perhaps Tet was the first dramatic high point, and thereafter they'd have a high point about every six months, although the high points kept getting lower and lower. But the VC were quite different, particularly a VC unit that had existed for some years in an area that was semi-dominated by the ARVN. They'd gotten so skillful at staying out of trouble that they were just as slippery as eels, much more adept at staying alive than the North Vietnamese but not as skillful fighters because they didn't have the discipline and they'd been beat up for a long time.

Starting in, at least in the Delta, oh, I guess mid-1968 when we'd really bled them for a while, the VC began to lose their skill entirely, as their cadre were killed off and their content of recruits was higher. I'd say their skill level just went down, down, down and although it's somewhat of an overstatement by the time--oh, by winter of 1969 the VC were just sort of running around like a bunch of chickens and it was really no contest. I can show you some of the statistics that bring it out very clearly.

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- G: Why didn't this aspect of the war become better known back in the States?
- E: Well, the press was the primary, and TV to a lesser extent, conduit for getting information back to the States. And, as you probably know--I won't get into the strategy, which I think was pretty sad--but the war in Vietnam was highly tactical and almost technique, I mean it was sort of like making a watch. I think the public interest and understanding of that type of operation was just about zero, and the press, a great majority of whom didn't know anything about Vietnam, didn't know anything about fighting, didn't know anything about anything except what they'd been doing before, they just weren't capable of grasping what went on. Sometime in 1968-69 the press took such a negative slant to the war that you could have marched to Hanoi and they would have found some way to poor-mouth you on it. It was very difficult, plus the fact, giving the press their credit, it was an extremely difficult war to cover because most of the action took place down at the squad and platoon level, with some exceptions. You didn't have big operations, and it was almost impossible for a correspondent, particularly a TV correspondent, to get out where the action was. He was liable to get shot or killed, very difficult for a TV guy to get out where the action was, and when he got out, what was there there? Just people scurrying around in the bushes and nothing to take a picture of.
- G: Very difficult to measure progress in a situation like that.

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E: And then, too, I think that when you got right down to it you measured your progress in very modest increments, you didn't have any great tactical battles, like the Bulge, it was just a question of grinding these people down. Pacification also went rather slowly, and so it was very difficult to dramatize.

Then of course the few experienced correspondents, of which there were some who'd been there for two, three, five or six years, they were so discouraged by the fact that the war had gone up and down and up and down and there'd been so many optimistic predictions that hadn't panned out, et cetera, that even when they saw something that was good they'd say, "Well, you know, that looks pretty good but I remember I was here two years ago and, God, it looked great and then it just collapsed like a house of cards." So they had their problems.

Of course, when [Creighton] Abrams took over, he, seeing how [William] Westmoreland had gotten himself in trouble by some optimistic predictions, made it quite clear that we weren't going to make any grandiose predictions at any level, we'd just go about our business and let our progress speak for itself. Well, although I think he was right, it's one way to stay out of jail with the press, it also made it difficult to present a story that the press could get a handle on. I know that when I was in II Field Force I ended up having a press conference once a month, and before I did it, I asked General Abrams and he said, "I don't like it, but I'm not going to tell you you can't do it." So that's not very reassuring, to have somebody say

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something like that, and I don't know whether the conferences were any help or not, but. . . .

G: Well, it sounds to me a little like General Abrams sort of put you on your honor when he said that. In other words, you can have your press conference but don't make any mistakes.

E: Yes. Well, he didn't put it that way, but. . . .

G: Well, how were your relations with the press?

E: Well, personally I tried to help them out but I was very cautious, very cautious. I never really had a bum rap but, oh, periodically, once a month or something, you'd get a clipping from the States on something that affected your particular area and the next time you saw the correspondent you'd say, "What about this? I can't say it's wrong but it sure has a rather pessimistic smell to it." And he said, "That's not the way I sent it in. They rewrote it." Well, you couldn't pin these guys down. They'd always say, "That's not the way I sent it in. They rewrote it in the States." Probably correct in one or two out of three times, but I didn't trust any of them out of my sight, which is probably wrong. But I know in the Ninth if anybody wanted to come down, whether press or TV, we did everything we could to help them. But that was sort of a backwater and the media really didn't have much interest in what went on down in the Delta.

G: We mentioned the topic a minute ago about how hard it was to measure progress or to get a handle on how we were doing and so on. Of course, everybody always points to the body count as the technique that was used in an attempt to put some kind of measurement on the

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war. What observations can you give us about that issue--the body count?

E: Well, when I arrived in Vietnam, of course MACV--you're familiar with the term Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, which was Westmoreland's headquarters and then Abrams'--required a fairly voluminous set of statistical reports. I can't recall all of them, but I would guess you had to report on about ten different things daily or weekly or whatever, probably daily, and then a monthly summary. At that time body count was probably the one that achieved the most notoriety, whether it was the most important one or not I don't know. I can remember one, for instance, that you had to report every contact involving ten or more enemy, as sort of a measure of the intensity of the fighting, or the size of the engagement. Well, that was okay, except starting in about 1968 or 1969 the VC and the NVA were evading so much that you seldom had a ten-soldier engagement, but the reporting system was so monolithic that they didn't have either the sense or the ability to lower the thresholds. So in our division we kept lowering the threshold so that you could measure the activity level. Then of course the Hamlet Evaluation System was a very elaborate system of reports, some important, some not so important.

G: Did you have any responsibility for the hamlet evaluation statistics?

E: No, not specifically, but as a division commander--although the CORDS side was separate--what did they call it; what does CORDS mean?

G: I think it's Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development.

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E: Yes. Civil Operations-Revolutionary Development System. It reported up through its own channel. Being as how the Division had lots of resources in the area, particularly military resources, when it got right down to a crunch, you had to work on pacification to a certain extent.

(Interruption)

At the division level you would try to arrange your operations to give a boost to the pacification program, so while you didn't report on it you could really affect it. It was different at the field force or corps level. You were in charge of the CORDS man in that corps sector and although he had his own chain of reporting and so on, in a general sense within the framework of his general directives you could influence how he went about things. I know in II Field Force--as I mentioned, the HES system had so many reports that it was hard to see the woods for the trees, but we finally sat down with the CORDS rep, who was State Department, didn't know anything about pacification but he was a quick learner, and we finally figured out the four or five forcing elements in the HES system and concentrated on those, at my direction. Well, I talked him into it and it was logical, so he agreed. And by pushing these four or five or six main things and pushing them ahead, they just pulled everything else along behind them. So the field force commander if he so desired could have a definite influence on the pacification program. And of course his counterpart, the corps commander, although the province chiefs were allegedly not under the corps commander and they reported to Saigon,

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don't believe it. When the corps commander really got fried off and told them to do something, they did it. So the chain of command, chain of responsibility, if you could call it that, was really byzantine; you just had chains all over the place.

G: Sometimes you wonder how they ever got any work done if they were so busy with the paperwork end of it.

E: All you can say is it worked, sort of.

One philosophical point that is brought up by that is that--and I'll put it right out front, particularly as regards the Ninth Division, many American commanders disagreed violently with the way we went about business. They classed me as somewhere to the left of Attila the Hun. We had such spectacular success that they just couldn't believe it, and as a result our approach was somewhere between accepted and unpopular as hell in Vietnam at that time. But I'd say the typical liberal U.S. commander tended to get infected with this hearts-and-minds philosophy, which against the NVA, was just shooting yourself in the foot because they did not believe in hearts and minds. They believed in sheer power and terror to the extreme, although they did temper it to fit the situation, and if you were trying to "hearts and minds" the NVA you were just wasting your time. Our approach was exactly the opposite: primarily military pressure, secondarily pacification instead of the obverse. I know I've been in some areas where I was just horrified. I can think of this province that's east of where the 1st Cav was, along the coast, I forget the--

G: Binh Dinh?

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E: Right, Binh Dinh. I went up there once and the 173rd Airborne Brigade, I think it was, was in there and they were toe-dancing around and having Maypole celebrations and all this junk. And the NVA were hiding up in the mountains, just waiting until they had moved out and they'd come back in, kick hell out of the ARVN or the Regional Forces or Popular Forces. I just threw up my hands.

But there was a very appealing element to this hearts-and-minds thrust. It's hard to quantify, but I sometimes felt that pacification didn't develop its own momentum until it reached about 95 per cent on the HES scale, and then it was just Sunday at the beach. Then things just sort of burst out. But if you weren't able to hold the main force and the provincial battalions out and even the district platoons or whatever they were, if you weren't able to get them neutralized, you could have a very nice pacification operation going on and they could come in and upset it in a week and you couldn't forestall them. I don't know what your experience was, but I learned the hard way that you couldn't hold these people out by traditional methods, such as setting up lines; they'd seep through every time. The only way you could get them out of there was to beat on them until they were so weak that they just didn't dare come into the populated areas. And that took tremendous skill, tremendous tactical skill.

I don't think the figure is particularly precise, but if you could attrite the communists in a province 15 per cent a month, after about eight or ten months they would just disappear. There were some left but so few that they were almost inconsequential. The only time

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I ever saw that done was in Long An, which was a province south of Saigon. There was a really tough province chief and the RF and PF were more scared of him than they were of the communists. We had a brigade in there and the ARVN had a regiment (which didn't do a damn thing, at least for a while). We were attriting them 15 per cent a month. Well, their regeneration rate was so slow that they went down about 10 per cent a month and after seven or eight months there just wasn't anybody left.

Well, to get back, your original question was body count, wasn't it?

G: I think it was.

E: Yes. Well, when I took over the Ninth we were on the body count bit, but eventually we adopted what we called the elimination or exchange ratio, which was a measurement of the relative casualties--not casualties as a whole, but dead VC against dead U.S. That wasn't an ideal measure but it was much better, because in effect it's how many U.S. soldiers killed did it take to kill X number of communists, or VC in our case. And this in my opinion was a very good measure of skill. I can show you a diagram here that brings this out. Let's see. (Looks for diagram.) Well, in any event, I'll find it sooner or later.

G: Oh, this gets us to the question of the performance of the division. I think I asked that question directly. How did you evaluate the performance of your division? I know how unfair a question that is to ask, but--

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E: Here is what I was looking for. Just stay there, I can read it. When I was in II Field Force and would look at an outfit, if they had an exchange ratio of one to fifty and above, that was a highly skilled U.S. unit. I mean they were really super, although it had to be in fairly open terrain. One to twenty-five was very good in heavy jungle, fairly good in open terrain, very good for ARVN in open terrain. One to fifteen was low but acceptable for a U.S. unit, good for South Vietnamese. One to ten was the historical U.S. average over a period of four or five years. We wouldn't wipe our shoes with one to ten in the Ninth. And one to six was the South Vietnamese Army average, so in effect in the Ninth we tended to operate at 500 per cent better than the average U.S. unit. I mean this was sheer skill, tactical and technical skill. And that's why people thought we were cheating or something, they couldn't believe that you could do it.

Now, later on as the VC and the NVA began to get so beat up that they were spending 90 per cent of their time evading and there weren't that many around, the exchange ratio became very unstable. I mean it was just a question of luck if you ran into somebody for if you didn't, booby traps would eat you up and then your ratio would drop. Of course, as you know, booby traps were sort of the price of admission. You didn't notice it when you were in heavy combat, but when the level of combat dropped you found that just moving around you got so many casualties a day from booby traps, and then anything else was on top of that.

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We changed to what I called a contact-success ratio. That is, if you saw anybody, one guy or ten or whatever, that's a contact, and if you had a success, that is, you either killed somebody, or wounded them, or they dropped their supplies and you picked them up--just anything that was a success as opposed to their evading and nothing concrete happened, a very skillful unit could have a 75 per cent contact-success ratio. And then it went down: 65, very professional; 50 per cent, they're beginning to get a handle on it; 40 per cent, they have problems. If you told them, "Don't do this; do that, do that," they could improve. If they were below 40 per cent, that unit was in deep trouble. They didn't know what they were doing and it was very hard to correct because it's usually a plethora of things that they're doing wrong. Not deliberately, but for instance, poor night ambushes. As a generalization, you could say that few units in Vietnam were good at night ambushes. Well, I can show you the figures that when the Ninth was really effective, 40 per cent of our kills were at night. That meant that you were conducting lots of good night ambushes, and a good night ambush, as you know, takes tremendous technical skill and super discipline, noise discipline, light discipline, cigarette discipline, alertness, et cetera, and for a unit to get 40 per cent of its kills at night means that the individual rifleman is disciplined. I mean he does his job and to achieve that is extremely difficult. Do you believe me?

G: Yes, sir.

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E: And so on. Well, anyway, I was never happy with what you'd call a body count, but for want of anything better I guess it's just like the measures they use to measure the health of the U.S. economy. Are any of them any good? Some are better than others, that's about all you can say.

Talking about exchange ratio, let's see, I've got something here, page 220 of my book, Sharpening the Combat Edge. That's not it. Well, anyway, in the Ninth when we really got it all put together, and this took months--it took from February, 1968 till about January, 1969, eleven, twelve months--our exchange ratio division-wide was eighty to one. And the only figure I can remember--for instance, in one month when I think we eliminated something like three thousand VC, we had fifty-five men killed. Well, I talked about some of the credibility problems we had. Three thousand VC was about as much as five normal divisions in Vietnam would get. They couldn't believe it. Of course, we had lots of advantages in that the Delta, which was extremely difficult to operate in, was difficult for the VC, too, and if you had lots of choppers, which we did fortunately, you could really cut them up. In jungle you couldn't do it as well, I mean it's just not technically feasible. But I don't know, is that enough on body count?

G: Well, I think so.

E: Oh, one other point I would like to make is that of course many people claim that people falsified body count either inadvertently or deliberately. Down in the Delta false body counts were not really a problem in that your typical engagement was one or two killed. The way we

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accumulated these astronomical totals was that we would have maybe seventy-five or a hundred engagements a day. But any dummy can make a platoon [?] when a platoon leader comes in and says we killed one guy or we killed two guys, there is no way you can falsify it. Quite different in the jungle where if you had a big knock-down-drag-out and A Company would check this area and B Company would check another, it was quite possible they would overlap one another and you'd have double counting, et cetera. But I must admit, although I was loyal to my people, when we got up in the twenty-nine [hundred] to three thousand a month area, I thought, "This is just too good, there is something fishy here." So one day we had a sort of a super GAO audit and we sent people out all over the place to check the previous day's reports, and to the best of my recollection we found throughout, say, out of spot-checking fifty engagements I think in that case we found that the aggregate report was probably 10 per cent low and that it tended to vary by one or two up or down. So I thought, well, that's pretty good agreement, I'll take the reports as valid. But I never believed my own press agent in Vietnam, never. I didn't tell my people that, but retained by sense of skepticism.

G: How about the riverine operation? That was a kind of unique thing in Vietnam, wasn't it?

E: Yes. Well, in its heyday it was a super idea in that, as you know, the Delta was just laced with rivers, canals, creeks, streams, et cetera, and these rivers were big rivers. I mean one of the seven--I think there were seven--might be as big as the Potomac down here in

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Washington, I mean big rivers. So in the olden days the primary way of moving around the Delta was by water.

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E: So the riverine force gave you the ability to move troops rapidly and practically anywhere in the Delta.

For some months it paid off very well, because the VC, due to the pressure in the more open areas, tended to congregate along the wooded banks of the rivers and creeks and canals, and the riverine force could get at them easily.

(Interruption)

Well, the VC were not dumb, I mean they could count, and after a while they began to realize that it wasn't a very good idea to hang out along the edges of the waterways. As a result, the effectiveness of the riverine force began to go down and down. It had its inherent disadvantages. One is that by definition you were sort of in a marine-type assault operation which was not a very good way to do business. Your exchange ratio tends to be about six to one, lots of casualties, friendly casualties. The other problem was that you could move around all over the Delta but as a result you weren't familiar, intimately familiar, with where you actually began to operate. This gave you lots of problems, because the way we got these tremendous exchange ratios is you would put a battalion in an area and then that area was yours for weeks or months, and this commander got to where he knew the ground and the enemy and the situation as well, if not

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better, than the VC did and could become extremely skillful. You couldn't do it with the riverine force.

Eventually, I forget when it was, probably about late 1968 or early 1969, there's a province called Kien Hoa south of Dinh Tuong which was a real problem. It was just covered with waterways and it's where the VC allegedly got their start and was allegedly the capital of VC-dom, whatever that is. Historically, for years, if not centuries, it's sort of been a pirate haven and so it was sort of historically a dissident area and the VC really had a lock on it. The ARVN regiment that was down there, they hardly dared get out of their barracks. They didn't like it. Well, we took the riverine brigade and put it in there, although we didn't take them off their boats completely; they still used them to get around, and after a month or two when they really began to know this terrain and know the situation, they just began to tear the VC up. I forget the details but I think in one month they had a kill ratio above a hundred to one. I mean they were just crucifying the VC. But they also had choppers. The riverine force without choppers was terrible. Later on with good infantry, the riverine and choppers, they were great. You got the best of all worlds.

And eventually the navy was putting in a big effort down in the Delta to control the waterways, and the Ninth sort of under the table kept passing resources to them and I would imagine by the time I left the division, although it didn't show on paper, that two-thirds of the navy riverine force was operating under the navy on waterway control

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and not on strictly riverine operations. Riverine was an interesting idea and I'd say they worked themselves out of a job, and then when they went into a really complete combined arms operation they did very well.

G: What sort of guidance existed? What kind of policies existed for the sort of operations that you were being asked to conduct? What I'm getting at is, was there a method of operation, a posture, that General Westmoreland wanted you to assume that differed from that which General Abrams wanted?

E: Well, that's a good question. When I first took over the division, I'd say the first job the division had in the Delta was to finish cleaning up from Tet. This involved--we put the riverine brigade in south of Can Tho, which is the biggest city in the Delta, and the VC were about four or five kilometers out of town, and in essentially almost a set-piece operation, or a formal attack, they drove the VC away from Can Tho. Then at the same time the VC--the city in Dinh Tuong which is called My Tho which was the second biggest city in the Delta--the VC were about four or five kilometers out of town in some wooded areas. So we got a lot of choppers and in a sort of a knock-down-drag-out battle (which later on I would have done entirely differently, but being the new boy in town did the best I could), in a period of two or three weeks we got them about ten kilometers away and then about fifteen and then about twenty and so that wrapped that up.

Then the next job they gave us was to secure Route 4, which was the main highway from Saigon that ran all the way down through the

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Delta and was where all the rice and vegetables and other things from the Delta went up to Saigon, and the people went back and forth on it. The VC were cutting this route at least once a day. So we got the job of securing Route 4. It wasn't easy; for about two, three, four weeks every night the VC would blow craters in that highway. There would be six to eight craters big enough to put a Volkswagen in. They were big, and the engineers worked until about three in the afternoon patching the road up and then the trucks could go back and forth. It was a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. In fact, it was so bad that Westmoreland and [General Cao Van] Vien who was the Vietnamese chairman, JCS equivalent, came down. There was one village that sort of paralleled Route 4, and right where this village touched Route 4 was where most of the road cuts took place. They were evidently infiltrating through this village. They said, "We have to do something about this right now. Okay, we'll authorize you to clear that village out, just take everybody out." There were maybe a thousand people in it or thereabouts. Well, we were beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel and I said, "Well, I'd just as soon not. I think we've got the thing going." Eventually we cleaned it out, but that's the only time I ever got a directive, or an implied directive, to really clean a village out.

Let's see, after Route 4, then we went into what you'd just call general operations in Long An, Dinh Tuong, and Go Cong, just to get the VC and eventually the NVA down to where they couldn't interfere with pacification, and this just meant beating up on them night and

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day until they just weren't capable of interfering. One fortunate thing, now you'll notice on these charts where we really peaked--

G: You're quoting from a book called Sharpening the Combat Edge.

E: Yes. Where we really peaked, this was either probably December 1968 or January 1969, the NVA--VC, but the NVA actually ran the show-- decided they were going to conduct a big offensive. Well, this was just great, not that their offensive amounted to a hill of beans, but instead of spending all of their time evading they at least were going through the motions of trying to attack the U.S., ARVN, RF, PF. We were just beginning to really get our act together, and as a result they played into our hands and part of our success was the fact that they were being more aggressive than normal.

Then we began to put more emphasis on pacification, not directly, although as you can see in here, we built bridges and opened up secondary roads, which I think is worth mentioning. At the MACV level their main effort was to open up and improve the main highways. Well, that didn't help the poor farmer; he was five or ten kilometers out in the country and as far as the farmer was concerned the situation was no better than it ever was. So we put a lot of effort on repairing or rebuilding those little bridges and secondary roads, just little tracks that went all over the place. There is no doubt in my mind that in, I can remember specifically an area south of Saigon, it was sort of messy and we went in and rebuilt all the secondary roads and the VC just moved away. They didn't like the feel of it.

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Well, anyway, we then put more effort into pacification, but always as a secondary, not a primary effort. And then we got things going so well in Dinh Tuong and Long An and Go Cong the IV Corps Senior Adviser decided to put us in Kien Hoa, and the 2nd Brigade, the riverine brigade, was given the mission of, I guess you'd say, pacifying Kien Hoa.

Now the idea of guidance. There is no doubt that Abrams--he'd been there some months as Westmoreland's deputy, but he'd had a chance to get around a lot and sort of feel things out--at the tactical level he had a very good feel as to how he wanted to go about operations, and more by word of mouth--in other [words], he'd kind of come around and talk to you and tell you what he had in mind--he got his ideas across. I guess the key thing was what he called "working the enemy system." I don't know if you've heard of that.

G: Tell us about that.

E: Well, take III Corps. You had the enemy in Cambodia and you had a few units down near Saigon, a few more in the middle and quite a few up by the border, and you had these LOCs that came down and then you had their equivalent of the RF/PF provincial battalion, maybe a hundred and fifty men, a district company, and a hamlet squad or something similar. His approach, which worked like a charm and we all more or less arrived at the same conclusion at the same time, was to put pressure on them everywhere, on every element of the enemy system. You'd patrol and beat up on the units; you'd interdict their lines of communication and wherever there were units that were deeper in country

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you'd put pressure on them and you'd attrite the whole system. The end result, which I think was clearly brought out in III Corps and was probably the easiest to operate in because the terrain wasn't so difficult, was that they were just sort of pushed out by attrition and pulled out by interdiction. Not completely, but just before the Cambodian incursion I'd say about 90 per cent of the NVA were in Cambodia. They had just about had to get out of South Vietnam completely due to this tremendous pressure.

Of course, when you get down to the tactical level the counterpart was constant pressure, which was day and night, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, et cetera, et cetera. That's where many U.S. units couldn't hack it, couldn't do night ambushes, or not very well. They tended to go out on sweeps, you know, five days and then stand down for a week, et cetera. Whereas in the Ninth, and in the II Field Force after I took over, and after some considerable resistance, you operated twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, every day, and you just kept grinding the enemy down. That's very tough to do because night ambush is hard to do, and for a battalion it meant that a battalion instead of being on again, off again, on again, off again, they were in the field every day, twenty-four hours a day. A terrific load on the battalion commander even though he could catnap occasionally. We ran a survey in the Ninth and we found that the tempo was so high that after about four months the battalion commander began to burn out. Now, maybe he had a little gangplank fever in addition but it was very apparent that we were putting a heavy load on them.

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We sort of backed into this down in the Delta. I mentioned how difficult it was to operate down there, that historically you couldn't conduct military operations in the Delta, that what you call paddy foot was so bad that after a week or two or three or four your outfit was essentially non-effective. Some months after I took over we finally got into the companies and really went through them, we found that 50 per cent of the men couldn't go in the field. Their feet were just shot. Well, without going through a long dissertation, with the help of the medical corps, civilian research, et cetera, we finally discovered that if you operated forty-eight hours you could take it. On the forty-ninth hour your foot casualties began to go up exponentially. If you stayed out three or four days you'd have 20 per cent of the men out for a week or two or three and some forever. So really one of the keys to the Ninth's success was that due to troop management, and good medical support, we were able to master the paddy-foot problem (almost). If we hadn't been able to do that, we couldn't have done as well as we did. This forty-eight-hour limit meant that you had to rotate your companies. I said a battalion was in the field continuously; the way they'd do it, they would take, say, two companies out for forty-eight hours and then put two other companies in for forty-eight. The typical duty cycle, if you could call it that, for a company was forty-eight hours in the field, night and day, daylight patrolling, jitterbugging, night ambush, et cetera. Then twenty-four hours out, clean up, clean their equipment, retrain,

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out again. But the battalion and brigade commanders were in the field all the time.

So that's what I call the constant pressure concept, and the effect of it was terrific. For one thing, if you operated in the daytime only, of course the VC counter was to operate at night. But if you operated well in the day it would squeeze them into the night and then if you're conducting good night ambushes it would squeeze them out of the night and they didn't really know what to do. I mean they were just sort of doing the best they could.

G: Any particular operations or incidents that you remembered as great successes, things that stick in your mind?

E: Well, yes, I guess nothing too dramatic. I mentioned several things we had to do down in the Delta, all of which we were able to do fairly well. I don't think the Vietnamese War was the type where you had these dramatic battles where after you won the battle, everything was Sunday at the beach, but I think we did pretty well.

In II Field Force it's a little harder to put your finger on a great success. I think the main achievement was to substantially get the NVA out of III Corps. I'm not saying that the ARVN and the RF/PF didn't do their job, because RF/PF, one measure of their success was they were there and they gave a presence. As far as fighting was concerned they usually didn't do much, although I think that they could have been trained up to do better. The ARVN--not entirely their fault; I know the 25th ARVN got a new division commander and we tried to juice him up and achieved some success. I know that they got up to

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where their exchange ratio was twenty-five to one, which for an ARVN unit was really water-walking.

But on the other hand we had the 5th ARVN, which had a division commander who I suspect was a crony of [Nguyen Van] Thieu's, the president, and this misguided soul believed in the enclave theory. He felt as long as you had the enemy out in the jungle and you were in the populated area everything's great. Well, I'm willing to go on record that the enclave theory in Vietnam was a good way to lose the war automatically, because the communists were either going down or up, and if they were back in the jungle, and if you weren't pushing them down, you'd know they're going up, and sooner or later they're just going to come out of there and really kick you around. But this guy, the enclave theory was just an article of faith with him, and I don't think you could have done anything to change his mind but shoot him. He was all right but he had this major flaw, and some of the U.S. people had the same idea, I might add. Then the--what was it?-- the Eighteenth ARVN, which had the reputation of being the worst division in Vietnam. I went out there and finally I found out that this division had three regiments with a total of four battalions. Well, what kind of mission can a four-battalion division accomplish? Everybody was poor-mouthing them, saying, "Why don't you do this, why don't you do that?" et cetera. I said, "How [are] they going [to] do anything, with only four battalions?"

G: You mean they had three regiments, and two of them had a battalion each and one had two battalions?

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E: And one had two. Yes.

G: They were headquartered to death.

E: Yes. Well, finally once GVN instituted the universal service or whatever they called it, which was in about May or June of 1968--which by the way was tremendously helpful--but anyway, once they introduced that and they began to get more recruits, et cetera, they began to build this division up. I've been told in the last days when the North Vietnamese came down towards Saigon, the Eighteenthth Division had a really good scrap and racked up about three NVA divisions for three or four days until they began to leak around them.

But to get back to universal service, prior to that time the VC and the NVA by either pressure, propaganda, or whatever, a combination of all, could keep recruiting, and you'd knock off ten and they'd recruit ten. But when they put in the universal draft it soaked up all these kids and they didn't have anybody to recruit, and as a result they had so many fewer people to recruit that they lost their ability to regenerate, to a certain extent. Once you began to beat on them and got them away from the populated areas the peasants wouldn't help them much, particularly carrying parties and things of that sort. Down in our area the peasants wouldn't touch it with a forty-foot pole, because if they went out on a carrying party they weren't going to come back. You know at night we had a curfew and anybody that was out there was fair game. So you'd have five VC and twenty peasants carrying mortar ammunition. You'd knock off five or six. It's true that probably two were VC and four were peasants but they weren't

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supposed to be out there. So that's tough luck, but with their recruiting base cut off and with their inability to coerce the peasants into helping them, they didn't have the luxury of swanning around and just fighting. They had to fight, they had to supply themselves, they had to dig their own bunkers, et cetera, and it cut down on their effectiveness tremendously.

Let's see what else. Of course, I'd say our failures--oh, I think one great success we had in II Field Force, sometime in I guess 1969, we'd cleaned out the populated areas and were getting into the jungle and the corps commander and I--General Tri, really top-notch--we decided that we were going to have to get the ARVN out of their base camps and start mixing it up. So we set up this program called Dong Thien, which means "progress together," and what it meant was you'd pair up a battalion of U.S. and a battalion of ARVN, in simplest terms, and they would operate together but the U.S. would not support the ARVN unduly. They'd make them do their own dirty work. If they had choppers they had to handle the choppers, whatever, I mean they had to do it. Of course they had advisers who could help them, but in most joint operations in Vietnam, you'd have the units mixed together so much that the ARVN could just sort of tag along and the U.S. units would do the coordinating, the air support, the artillery and all that. But over a period of months, by working through the ARVN divisions in II Field Force, we got them to where they knew how to stand on their own two feet. They were willing to go out in the jungle and mix it up and were doing quite well. The end result was when they

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went into Cambodia, instead of being thrust into ice cold water on their own, they were used to being more or less on their own and did a pretty good job, quite different from this excursion they had up north in, oh, I guess it was 1970, you know, when they cut into Laos.

G: Lam Son?

E: Yes, Lam Son. Those units up north had done lots of combined operations, but they'd done it with the U.S. so intimately that they weren't used to operating on their own and they had all sorts of problems. So I think Dong Thien was a great help.

Let's see what else. Vietnamization, that went off all right. Of course, as you probably know, Vietnamization was making a virtue of necessity. I mean we had to get out of there, politically, and there was some talk about Vietnamization, that this was the greatest thing since night baseball. Well, if you sat down in a closet and figured out what's going to happen when we got out of there, you'd know the chances were about 50-50 or 75-25 that they were going down the tube, particularly if the North Vietnamese upped the ante on them, which they did.

But within the framework of Vietnamization, as we were faced with it, it worked pretty well. I guess the problem was the troop density in III Corps was the highest in all of Vietnam; it was about six to one, six friendlies to one enemy. Of course the classic ratio is about ten to one for successful counterinsurgency operations. I think six to one worked well because you had choppers. You had so much mobility that your six became ten or twelve or something. But as

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soon as you pulled out the U.S. and you pulled out 75 per cent of the choppers, they were working at about three to one. Never make it; never make it. But as a corps commander you weren't going to write the President a letter and tell him that the Vietnamization program is not going to work. But the way some people came in, they'd say, "Well, you're making progress," et cetera, et cetera, and everything. I'd say, "Yes, we're doing great, but Vietnam is like crossing the mountains; you climb up this mountain range and you get to the crest, and you think, 'God, that's great,' and you look out here and here's another one just as big, so you have to go up again, here's another one." With the strategy you had in Vietnam and the tremendous determination of the North Vietnamese, which I don't think we, or I, or anybody had any idea how determined they were, and our willingness to conduct a very limited war when they were conducting a general war, you just couldn't win.

G: Is that what you were referring to before when you expressed reservations about our strategy?

E: Yes. I'm not saying we should have bombed Hanoi back to the stone age or something but--well, I think the worst example I can think of [is] down at Dong Tam, which was Ninth Division headquarters, right on the Mekong's main navigable channel. I looked out one day and here was a Red Chinese oil tanker going up the Mekong River with its flag flying. Couldn't believe it. It wasn't a big tanker. It was sort of a medium or little tanker; it was just chugging along. I got on the phone and called whomever, I guess the navy commander or something, I said,

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"What the hell's going on around here? Why don't you guys stop this thing?" They said, "That's an international waterway; we can't interfere with commerce on an international waterway." I said, "I don't believe it." Well, how dumb can you get? And then, as you know, the NVA and Sihanouk had this deal where Sihanouk would countenance their presence and claim not to know anything about it. To make it worse, there was this port down in southern Cambodia called Sihanoukville or Kompong Som or something like that, and most of the communist supplies for the southern area came in through this port. Sihanouk wouldn't let them run their own highway units. He had his own, and he'd charge them to haul their supplies up to wherever they wanted them. He was making money hand over fist.

Well, I could see why the U.S. wouldn't slap a complete blockade on Cambodia, but it seemed to me that--you know, there are ten different kinds of blockades--they could have a blockade where they didn't allow any materials of war to be shipped into Cambodia. That would have dealt the NVA fits because most of their supplies in the South didn't come down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, it came in from China through Sihanoukville. I know we'd pick up boxes of grenades or mortar shells or whatever; they looked like they had been delivered from the factory that week. I mean, beautiful little boxes, clean and all that. They'd been brought in to Sihanoukville up to opposite IV Corps and then brought down on sampans to the units.

As to bombing, I don't know, although I did notice that as soon

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as they really pulled the bombs on Haiphong and Hanoi, which was when, about 1972-73 when they bombed, actually used B-52's on them?

G: When they resumed the bombing? The Christmas bombing?

E: Yes. It took about two weeks and the NVA said, "We just decided we've changed our mind; we're going to sign," although the paper they signed was to their advantage anyway. There is no doubt in my mind that if they'd blockaded Haiphong, Hanoi, what the hell could the Russians and the Chinese have done about it, anyway? And if they bombed Hanoi, what could they have done about it? This gradualism thing that [Robert] McNamara was so entranced with, they were so adaptable, you know, if you escalated ten feet, three months later they'd adjust and you weren't doing them any harm at all. The only way I think you could really have gotten to them is just put so much excruciating pressure on them they'd quit. Then they probably wouldn't have quit for about five years anyway but. . . . Well, that's a big subject, I didn't mean to get into strategy. But I think if you look in our history, even the Civil War, after about four years the North was almost willing to quit. You really have to read the history books closely to figure that out, but I think it's historical fact that a four-year war even that's successful is about all the U.S. can tolerate.

Well, anything else?

G: Let me have a look at my questions here and see what. . . .

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- G: What are your views on this subject: that as the war went on, the general overall quality of the army began to decline?
- E: Well, to begin with I think that I was very lucky in that the drugs, the fragging, the whatever---syndrome, if you can call it that, came after I left. I was lucky. I'm not kidding myself that if I had been there six months later I might not have had problems, but I would say that as far as drugs, it hadn't gotten to be a problem; there probably was some but it wasn't a major problem. And as far as the men not doing their job, never had a problem with that. My reaction to the officers and men in general was quite good. I didn't detect any slacking off. Down through majors were really good, I thought, mainly because there were only so many jobs, and you tended to get people who were eager to go and were pretty good and had a lot of experience. No doubt in my mind that [at] the brigade and battalion commander level, these guys were much more experienced than in World War II. In World War II a typical unit going into combat the first time, nobody knew anything about anything. I mean just what they'd been able to pick up in training. In Vietnam at captain level, okay; lieutenant, pretty green. I don't know that it's really pertinent, but down in the Delta we found that the independent platoons didn't work very well. If you had a company of three platoons working under the company commander, it worked quite well. Independent platoons didn't seem to work for some reason. I don't know why.

NCOs, you were pretty thin. I don't know what the fill was or anything like that but we didn't have the number of qualified NCOs

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you'd like, and this was very important because, as I've mentioned, down in the Delta our operations were basically at the squad level; the actual cutting edge was almost the rifleman or the squad. And the amount of discipline required called for tough, experienced NCOs who'd tell them, "Now come on, do it." We just kind of worked around it by just beating into these kids that they had to do their night ambush, they had to do daylight patrolling, et cetera. The individual rifleman at that level, private, PFC, Spec 5, I thought was pretty good. Blacks were no problem whatsoever.

There are two vignettes I think are interesting. When I heard that I was going to take over the Ninth, after talking to a few people I found that the glamour divisions were scarfing off the hot-shots either just by the appeal of their prestige or by design or whatever; they were getting the hotshots and the 9th was sort of a tail-end Charlie. Well, I talked to the DCSPER [Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel] in Washington and got in touch with the U.S. Army, Vietnam who at that time was Bruce Palmer. Much to my surprise, they said, "Yes, if you want to recruit officers, you just tell us who they are and we'll send them to the Ninth Division." I couldn't believe it. As a matter of fact, that's not easy to do, because to pick--if you take ten officers and say now which one of these colonels is going to be a good brigade commander in combat, there is no magic formula for that. But, anyway, we got a full set of officers for a whole year and most of them were really hot. The only mistake we made, for instance we got three brigade commanders and I think we ran through nine on

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either sick, wounded, whatever. I think one I finally had to waive out, but I had no way of knowing it would take nine instead of three and battalion commanders saying, "Well, you ran out."

Anyway, I would say much of our success in the Ninth was to due to the fact that we had some really top-notch people. For instance, I had one brigade commander who was a tactical genius. This guy was a genuine genius, and much of our success was just watching the way he operated and copying him. On the down side, at some time I think in, oh, I guess it was before Tet even, they took the cav squadron out of the 9th and sent it up to I Corps where they needed a little more muscle up there. So we were short one combat battalion and the Americal Division was slated to have twelve battalions. So--I didn't even think of it, somebody in MACV did--MACV sent us one of their battalions as it came in country. I think this was the last battalion that had been formed in the States and brought into the theater, and there is no doubt that they had really gotten down near the bottom of the barrel, not so much with the men but with the officers. That battalion never could get up to speed. I suppose if I had gone in and sacked half the people and put in new people it would have, but that's not my style. I just kept trying to work with them and they did all right, but nothing spectacular.

Of course, one problem, and I don't know whether other people feel this way or not, but I think if you'd take a hundred outstanding officers, that--to begin with, Vietnam was weird, very untypical from classic western combat, and I'd say about 25 per cent of them never

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could understand it, 50 per cent would do okay and 25 per cent will do great. Well, you know that's pretty tough. Here you have a hundred outstanding officers and say, "Well, you twenty-five drop dead, you're fair, you're okay," and "You, you're really great." I don't know how you get around that.

For instance, I had one division commander when I first got up to II Field Force, two as a matter of fact, and this one officer--well, he had a disadvantage that his division had been trained up in a very heavy style of combat. I don't know if you are familiar with what's known as cloverleafing in jungle. You know, you have the whole battalion in hand, cloverleaf, you dig in, very heavy style. Well, the NVA would just sidestep and they would spend 90 per cent of their time boring holes in the jungle. This officer, he just couldn't understand this very quick, aggressive, small-unit style that we were using. He couldn't understand it and the men and NCOs hated it. When you told an NCO or rifleman that the way to get things done around here and not get hurt is to really mix it up, they would think, "Are you kidding? Not me." I should have canned this commander but he only had about three months to go so I let him go unscathed and got in a new division commander whom, just incidentally, I had known before. I got him in and I said, "Now listen, you're going to turn this division on its head. Now, I want you to do this, this, this, this, this. Now write it down. You got it?" He took that division which was doing about six to one, admittedly in scrub jungle, it wasn't deep jungle, and the last month before that division left the theater their exchange ratio

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was fifty-five to one, 800 per cent improvement. But he had had to take this damn division and stand it on its head.

Then we had another division which was an air assault division, name unstated, and they had gotten so entranced with their helicopters that they spent their whole time swanning around in helicopters. They weren't there to fight, they were there to look down and admire the jungle from the helicopters or something of the sort. Well, fortunately, their commander was only there for three more months. Should have canned him, too. But he left and just by accident, I had nothing to do with it, I guess the Lord looked down and favored me, they put a general in who had been the ADC in the Ninth under me in the Delta. Well, we had a few discussions and we knew where we stood, and he got them turned around.

I think typical of that division, shortly after I took the corps over I went up to see them and they had this big briefing, and the keynote of the briefing was a color movie of their engineer battalion building a fire support base in six or eight hours with these little teeny tractors and everything they had. It was a nice movie for a chamber of commerce or something. About halfway through that movie I said, "Let's stop a while. I want to get some fresh air." We went outside and I said, "Now listen, if you ever get me up here again and give me any of this PR baloney I'll kill you. That is terrible. We're here to fight, we aren't here to build fire support bases and impress visitors," et cetera. The division commander turned red. But

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he got the word and they turned that division around and they really did great.

I can remember another example. As you may recall, the air assault division had an air cav squadron with three air cav troops and I think a ground troop, I'm not sure, which was three times what the average division had. I went up there and they were showing me statistics. And in the month of whatever it was the air cav squadron had killed twenty enemy. I said, "Say, is that a misprint or something there? That's twenty." And they said, "No, that's right." "You mean to say that three air cav troops killed twenty men in a month?" They said, "Oh, yes, their job is to go out and find the enemy and see what's going on and then tell the brigade and they'll take care of it." I said, "Well, there's something to that. But I tell you what, on their way to and from work how about knocking off a few people, and if they see something, get down on the ground and see what the hell it is?" Well, two or three months later when I went up there, it's six hundred. I said, "Say, that's a little different than twenty, isn't it?" They said yes. I said, "Is that a kosher figure? That's too much to believe." They said, "That's it." I said, "Okay, you've got the message." So even with division commanders you have to give them firm guidance.

And then I mentioned this brigade commander up country who had gotten entranced with this dancing around the Maypole with the villagers and helping the ARVN learn to shoot. In moderation, okay, but not excessively.

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You read occasionally that the army is getting to be a bunch of managers instead of fighters. I don't think the situation is as bad as some of these Cassandras paint it, but there is an element of that there, there is no doubt in my mind. To begin with, there is no doubt that the U.S. public is effete to a certain extent and the army officer corps is a reflection of the U.S. public. So there is a trace of that even in the army, even though their job is to get in and fight. And then you get people who either through their own desire or no fault of their own have spent maybe fifteen years in the army, they've had one or two years with troops and thirteen or fourteen with various types of headquarters and other essential duties, but jobs that have nothing to do with fighting. These people either aren't professionally qualified or don't have the temperament to really get in there and mix it up. Then when you're deluged with a lot of propaganda about hearts and minds and all that, you really have to stand these people up and say, "Now listen, we're out here to fight. Let's don't go into a lot of fan dancing." So there is something to it.

It was quite different in World War II. I mean you had these low periods and then you'd have a climactic period of a week or two or three or four where you really had to dish it out, and even though the people didn't know their job too well, the guys who were really tough stayed in there and the others fell by the wayside. Well, you didn't have that in Vietnam. You didn't have these knock-down-drag-out situations where a guy really had to deliver or else he was yanked out.

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But I know I had one brigade commander, he was in Long An and he was just skating over the top of the enemy. Long An was very tough because the VC had specialized in staying alive for years. Fortunately he finally left. I pulled that whole brigade out of Long An and put this genius brigade commander in there, and he had one week to "case the joint" before he took over. He took over at noon and by two o'clock he had a major contact, and he had about three or four contacts a week for two or three months and this other colonel never had a major contact. This guy knew how to fight, he was a genius anyway and he was tough as nails. He just tore that province apart. This other guy just skated over the top. What amazed me was that this officer who was so ineffectual, on paper was an ideal counterinsurgency commander. He'd served in Indonesia, he'd served here, he'd studied this and that and if there was anybody who should have been able to understand Vietnam, he was it. But he was just a nice guy. I must say that really, among my peers in Vietnam I kept my mouth shut when I had the Ninth Division and to a certain extent the II Field Force because there was a definite group that thought, as I mentioned, that I was Attila the Hun. This guy was a barbarian or something because I'd get out there and just kick hell out of these people--not our people but the enemy. Oh, well, I wouldn't want to belabor the point too much but I don't know how you get around that.

G: Well, I'm glad that you brought that up. I think that's very interesting, I really do. How did you get tabbed to go to [the peace talks in] Paris? How did that happen?

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E: Well, I don't think anything out of the ordinary. I think to begin with [General Frederick] Weyand was slated to go and be DCSOPS [Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations] or something, so they were looking for a replacement and I was supposed to go to JCS, J-3 operations, and I got in touch with the DCSPER and told him that after two years in Vietnam I was really beat. To digress: one, to operate at that tempo you really had to concentrate; I mean you really had to drive and, boy, after two years I was shot. If I had stayed longer, I could have made out but it would have taken sheer will power. And I'd served in the JCS before and my impression of the JCS wasn't much, particularly the J-3; he was sort of a bookkeeper or something. So I told the DCSPER, "Boy, I'm shot and I'm very unenthusiastic about going to the JCS. Can't you find me another job?" Well, I guess he looked around and said, "Okay, go to Paris."

G: I think there is probably more to it than that but I think they probably picked the man. . . .

E: They insisted on sending someone there who had been in Vietnam and who knew the ropes, so that narrowed it down. But I don't know whether they had any other possibilities or not.

G: Okay, so when you got to Paris, you were the military representative to the delegation. What does the military representative get asked to do?

E: Well, that's a good question. Here's what he did: advised on the meaning of military operations. You know, they'd get all these reports. The head guy, although you were the JCS rep, you were sort

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of under him and he'd ask you, "What's this mean? What's the significance?" et cetera. And then you afforded a direct pipeline to the JCS if they had any questions, what happened or what didn't happen or something, or the NVA says we did so and so, did we or didn't we? et cetera. Then every week they'd have a meeting with the VC and the NVA and the South Vietnamese delegation. You'd go to the meeting, sit there, which was really boring, Dullsville. This meeting usually lasts from ten to twelve and from one to three or thereabouts and then you'd help draft the weekly statements. The delegation would draft a statement for each week and you'd help, just an editing job. Then they'd send it to the State Department, and State Department would edit it and send it back and that's what they'd say. And that's all you did, actually.

Of course, you asked what were the obstacles to an agreement. Well, to begin with, the North Vietnamese--the VC didn't matter; they went through the motions of being an independent entity but it was actually the North Vietnamese. Their objectives, both long-term and political and short-term, were absolutely firm in their mind and they weren't going to move off of them. You could have blown them up and hauled them to the morgue, they would have still been saying the same thing. Of course, the U.S. was trying to achieve peace with honor or something of the sort, which gave us somewhat of a defensive passive role. Of course, we didn't know it at the time but the secret talks were going on, also, so I guess the President and the State Department didn't much care what went on at the peace talks proper.

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One thing I never could understand was that our PR posture was terrible. Of course, the NVA would say any thing they wanted to and the press would duly report whatever they said whether it was true, untrue or whatever and the U.S. would never rebut it. I mean in their statements, or maybe each side would hold a press conference sort of pro forma, and I'd say every week the NVA would say at least one or two things that were blatantly false. The U.S. would never rebut it.

G: Why was that?

E: Goddamn if I know.

G: Was Harold Kaplan still the public information officer?

E: No, it was Phil Habib, and then Bruce.

G: D. K. E. Bruce?

E: Yes.

G: Okay.

E: Great guy. I'd say Bruce was the last real gentleman on earth.

G: Is that right?

E: Yes, or the last gentleman in the United States at least.

G: In this line, in this public relations line, was there a press policy for your guidance in handling press approaches and so on?

E: No, I think the policy was whatever was enunciated in the individual or the collective statements and that was it. They had a press guy; now how he handled inquiries that didn't fit the mold I don't know.

G: Did the press try to get one-on-one with the members of the delegation for background and personal--?

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E: I don't think so. They could get in to see the ambassador and I think that they preferred that to talking to some of the minions.

G: When did you leave Paris?

E: Oh, about June of 1970, something like that.

G: Were there any prospects at the time that you could tell that there was going to be movement, or that there was stonewalling?

E: Well, of course, I don't recall the NVA platform in particular but of course their objective was to reunify Vietnam. Now, whether that was one of their actual stated criteria, I don't recall. But one criteria was all foreign troops out of Vietnam. Their troops weren't foreign, in fact there weren't any NVA in South Vietnam. There might be a few "volunteers" or something. And no military support to the South Vietnamese government, a liquidation of the South Vietnamese government and its replacement with a coalition government of democratic people, et cetera, et cetera. About eight or ten things, and in the aggregate it just meant that, if you understood the communist way of working, it meant that six months after you left you'd have a communist South Vietnam unified with North Vietnamese. And they wouldn't budge on that. In fact, in the final agreement, which I don't even recall, although there is a lot of sophistry and mealy-mouthed words, the actual agreement wasn't a hell of a lot different than that.

G: Well, I think you're right. Their platform was that Vietnam was to be unified in accordance with the program of the National Liberation Front or the political arm of the VC. It's intriguing you didn't know that the secret talks were going on. That was very closely held then.

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E: The ambassador may have known, I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised that he didn't. He might have known, but knowing the way the government works they don't necessarily follow protocol to the nth degree.

Well, I think that's about it.

G: All right, sir.

E: Unfortunately, most of these military tactical and technique problems are so esoteric and so specialized I don't think they'd be of any particular value to your project.

G: Well, I'm not at all sure they're not.

E: You could spend hours going into it. I didn't even scratch the surface.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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