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NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 21, l985

INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM A. KNOWLTON

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General Knowlton's residence, Arlington, Virginia

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

G: All right, sir, shall we begin with the years you were in the Pentagon in 1965 and 1966. What were you doing then?

K: Well, let me put this in perspective, if I may. In 1963 I came back from North Africa and went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, where I commanded the First Armored Training Brigade. In 1964 I came back to the Pentagon to the office of the secretary general staff. This is an office in which I had served several times before, each time at a successively higher level. In 1947 to 1949 I had handled all the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff], CCS [Combined Chiefs of Staff], political, military, strategic intelligence and other papers of that kind for General [Dwight] Eisenhower and General [Omar] Bradley in terms of assembling the books for the JCS meetings and writing the briefs and the recommendations and all that sort of stuff. One of the people I had met at that point was a Colonel Vernon P. Mock, Phil Mock, who served down in the office of DESOPS [Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations]. When I was in Tunisia, he became the secretary of the general staff-- job I held later--and he wrote me asking me to come back. I told him that I had to go to brigade level command first, but I would come back after that.

So, in 1964, I came into the office of the secretary general staff of the army heading the strategy and policy division, which was kind of a deep-think tank for the chief of staff. While I was in that post, the new chief of staff, Harold K. Johnson, was appointed. Harold Johnson was a man I had not known before. He came up from the position of DESOPS, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, who is the army's strategic planner, and he came up with a burr under his saddle over the fact that the SGS, Secretary General Staff--I'll call it SGS from now on--the SGS office had a strategy and policy division, but [inaudible] my God there was only one strategy and policy outfit and that was his! So he changed the name of my division to Special Projects but then found it was an extremely useful sort of think tank, a fire brigade for long-term projects. And I got to know the man very well and worked very closely with him.

While I was in there the question of a replacement for Al [Alexander] Haig came up in Joe Califano's office. Joe Califano was the special assistant to the secretary and deputy secretary of defense. When Joe went up to that position, he brought Al Haig along with him because Al had worked for him when Joe was general counsel of the army. A year before, the army had furnished a replacement lieutenant colonel for Al, a man who I had known before and had worked with who just apparently did not work out. And after several months they told Al he would have to stay one more year, and the so-called replacement was shipped back to whatever else the army wanted to do with him. I was called up by Joe Califano and asked if I would like the job. I was then a colonel, Al was a lieutenant colonel, but for a couple of reasons the army wanted to up that one grade. I told Joe that I was not interested in going up there, that I had been away from the army staff for a very long time, and I needed to get my credentials again and meet my peers and I was

doing that down in the army staff and I did not particularly want to come up. Upshot were orders ordering me up there. It turned out to be extremely interesting and a very important period in my life. I overlapped about four months with Al Haig. After about two months, my wife finally said to me, "Will you stop talking about that Lieutenant Colonel Haig? Nobody can be that good." (Laughter) I said, "Oh, yes, they can." He's just a hell of a good man. So Al and I became very good friends and I was very impressed with the job that he did up there.

I might explain at this point what Joe Califano did and a little bit about that job because it did relate to the White House. When Joe Califano came into that post--well, let me go back a little bit. The army has always had a secretary of the general staff, which is sort of a chief of staff position to the man they don't call the commander but call the chief of staff of the army. It is the job of the SGS to be kind of the waist in the hourglass. Everything coming up to the chief of staff goes through the SGS so he can assure that it is in the kind of shape ready for the chief of staff's decision; that those people who should have coordinated on it have coordinated, or, if not, why they haven't; that it is in accord with current policy or, if not, why it's not; and, if there are things for the chief to approve or to sign, that they are on the proper form for him to approve. The purpose being to save the very valuable time of the chief of staff and absolutely minimize it if you can. At the same time, any directives coming down from the chief of staff or the vice chief of staff come down through the secretary general staff and then fan from him out to the staff. The task, obviously, is to be a waist in an hourglass and not a bottleneck.

When the air force separated off from the army, they tried to be a little different. So although they organized somewhat like the army, they decided they didn't need a staff

secretary and never have had one and have had problems as a result. In the JCS, on the other hand, there has always been a secretary to the joint staff--to the joint chiefs of staff. There was no such post up in OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense]. When Joe Califano came in as the special assistant to the secretary he in effect became the secretary general staff to the secretary of defense. He went down and carved a little bit off of everybody's job--all of the assistant secretaries--and came back there--Joe was probably one of the best in-fighters in the power structure in Washington that I have ever seen. And it got to the point where no assistant secretary could send a paper in to the secretary of defense without it going through Joe Califano's office, and, in essence, Al Haig and I and Ray Peat and Alex [Alexander] Butterfield, who also worked up there, would do the same thing we had done before in the SGS office in the army. We would put the cover memo on it saying, "To Secretary McNamara: This paper tries to accomplish what you asked in your new initiative number such and such. This is a lousy paper, we recommend you sign the memo at tab A sending it back to be redone," or, "This is a good paper, but it needs to be developed a little bit, we recommend you sign the memorandum going back, ask them to develop this facet a little bit," or, "This is a fine paper, you should approve it just as it stands." So much of the work that we did there was sort of SGS-type work. We used to say that Joe Califano was SGS to the world.

When Al Haig had left to go to the Army War College and I was there as the executive officer to Joe, Joe got a call from Lyndon Johnson asking him to come down to the Ranch. Joe went down to the Ranch and the President put the bite on him and said, "When are you going to come over and serve in the White House?" So Joe came back, agonized over it, but said, "You know, what can you say when the Commander-in-Chief

asks you?" So Joe went over to the White House. There was a rather interesting little story there. When Joe went over, the White House staff panicked at this wonderful in-fighter coming in and they went down to the basement and took a room that had been the dispensary and cleaned it all up and painted it and everything and made a little office for Joe. And they came over to me and said, "Now, we've got a wonderful little office for him right down there." And my response was "Joe Califano never stayed in a basement in his life. And I give him three months and he's going to be up there in one of those offices right up close to the President." And, by golly, he was about three months later.

When Joe left he took his law school roommate, John Steadman, and had him take over the post. But there was a little nervousness over whether John, with no experience in the Pentagon, would be able to do it. So Adam Yarmolinsky came over to kind of supervise and watch over John. So in effect we had two special assistants that were kind of in each other's hair in a way. Ray Peat, the navy captain, who had been working down in our office and who never liked the fact the army guy was the executive officer to the special assistant, got himself closely involved with Adam Yarmolinsky. And when Adam went up to ISA, International Security Affairs, Ray Peat went up with him; Alex Butterfield and I were left back with John Steadman. I used to say to John Steadman, "John, this looks like a meadow but it's a damn jungle. If you don't fight to hang onto this job, all those fellas from whom Joe Califano carved off a piece are going to come back and take the piece back down the hall. And that's in effect what happened.

G: Yes.

K: And ultimately, that job before I left it wound up really being the point of contact for the Democratic National Committee. I'm the only New Hampshire Republican, so honored I

might say, and they've put me in some really very interesting situations, as all these guys from the Kennedy offices and other places had called over to get friends excused from the draft or put into a reserve outfit right away because otherwise they might have to go into the army and go to Vietnam. So that's basically what I did in the Pentagon in 1965-1966.

In February of 1966, I went to John Steadman and said, "I want to go to Vietnam. I want to get out of here." He said okay. I went to the intelligence folks. I had some special clearances. They said, "You can't go until--if you stop those special clearances you have to wait six months, so the information you have is obsolete before you can go to Vietnam." So I went to Vietnam in August of 1966. The minute I arrived they said, "The first thing you have to do is get you these special intelligence clearances." I said, "I had them and I couldn't come out here because I had them." So that's the way life is. I left for Vietnam in August 1966. I worked right up in that office, John Steadman's office, until the last day that I walked out and climbed in the plane.

As a little sidelight, there was an airline strike in that period and I had a horrendous time going to war. It's the first time I have ever had to hitchhike to go to war. My wife took me over to Andrews [Air Force Base]. I found some presidential appointee had a Jetstar and was on his way to Los Angeles. I got him to take me, my footlocker, my duffel bag, my suitcases and so on--they threw them all on the plane. We arrived, and of course he went to the military side. I then had to get myself and all this equipment, about 250 pounds of it, around to the civilian side in order to get up to San Francisco. When I got to the civilian side, I discovered that I would have to lug all of the 250 pounds out every time there was a plane because I was standby. So I went down instead and took a cab to the bus station, got an all-night bus to San Francisco full of Jehovah's Witnesses on the way to a

convention, and we stopped at every jerkwater town between Los Angeles and San Francisco. I got into San Francisco at dawn to find the bus was not allowed inside the gate of the airport, because it was a monopoly inside the gate. About a mile away from the gate was the terminal where I had to go to Vietnam, and over the next two hours I moved two suitcases or a footlocker or whatever at the time, as far as the eye could see, then go back and pick up the next ones, and shuttled myself gradually up to the terminal until I was finally able to get the Pan Am plane and take off and go to Vietnam. So that was in early August 1966.

G: I don't know that I've heard of anybody who had so much trouble trying to go to war.

K: Yes. It really was amazing.

Now you've asked here what my assignment was when I first arrived in Vietnam, and that goes back a little to how I happened to get there.

We have now in the army quite a formal structure on a secondary specialty. We in effect--for example, my oldest son is a major in the army. He's an armored officer, but his secondary specialty is personnel. My son-in-law is an airborne infantry officer, but his secondary specialty is operations. My secondary specialty over the years really developed as a secretary general staff, or chief of staff, which are very similar in structure, and that was basically my secondary MOS [Military Occupation Specialty]--*de facto*, because there was no such system at the time. When SHAPE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe] started in 1951, early 1951, I was yanked out of Fort Sill, Oklahoma, by General Eisenhower, with whom I had worked in the late forties in the SGS office, and was brought over to SHAPE and was put in the office of the secretary of the staff at SHAPE. There were only about thirty Americans on that first list that Eisenhower gave the army, and we

really got that place formed and going and played a much more vital role than it looks like if you just look at an organization chart. Most of the Europeans who came in as we began to flush out that international staff--a lot of the smaller countries, their officers had missed the war. They'd been sitting in prison camps the whole time and had no experience in higher-level staff work, so we had to train, teach, and also do substantive work that really wasn't our job according to the table of organization.

One of the officers with whom I worked very closely was a lieutenant colonel named Rosson, Bill Rosson. About the time that I wanted to go to Vietnam, Bill Rosson was chief of staff to General [William] Westmoreland. So I wrote Bill a letter and said, "You know, [there] must be something that a colonel can do in Vietnam. I would like to go to Vietnam and do whatever you guys would like me to do." As it happened, General Westmoreland, the year before, 1965-1966, had as his secretary of the joint staff a West Point classmate of mine named Elvy Roberts, who had been an assistant secretary general staff when Westmoreland himself was SGS in the army. But Roberts was due to go home; it was a one-year tour for colonels and Westy had run out of candidates to take over that post. I had never met General Westmoreland. I had met him maybe socially, but I really didn't know him. Bill Rosson walked in and said, "I've got just the guy who's had a lot of experience in SGS work to come in and become the secretary of the joint staff." So General Westmoreland with some trepidation agreed. I came out--the night I arrived there was a goodbye party for Elvy Roberts. Off he went and I threw myself into the job.

As a sidelight I might say that for the first couple of weeks I wasn't sure I was going to survive. It took General Westmoreland and myself a little time to get used to one another, and there were moments when I was sure that I was probably going to not survive

in that post at all. In fact, my wife tells me that I so wrote her on a couple of occasions. But just as we were beginning to get used to one another and to our method of operation, the brigadier general list for that year came out. There were five from our West Point class on it--it was first list that we'd been on--and I was number three of the five that were on it. So that meant that I was going to make brigadier general sometime that fall. General Westmoreland called me up and congratulated me, showed me the back channel, which had come in. I remember going over to the operations center and calling my wife to tell her.

General Westmoreland, realizing that he couldn't keep me in the SJS job when I became a brigadier general, was concerned about revolutionary development and how it was going in Vietnam. He also felt that a time would come when all of those responsibilities would be given to him as the military commander. In anticipation of that, he called me and said, "What I want you to do is to go over to the J-3, where they have a revolutionary development support section within the J-3 division, and I want you to build that into a directorate--the revolutionary development support directorate." The initials are important: RDSD. "And then when ultimately the president--and I don't know when it's going to happen, but at some point he's going to give me these responsibilities, I think, and when he does, then I want to have your directorate be ready to take over all these other responsibilities. And I will make you the assistant chief of staff for whatever it's going to be called at the time." I stayed as the SJS until--I guess it was October when my promotion came through and at that point I went over to the J-3 and took over the revolutionary development support section.

This was a rather interesting section because it was not in the MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] compound. Instead, the offices were down in

administrative revolutionary development run by Major General Nguyen Duc Thang who now lives in Greenwich, Connecticut. Tong was a very interesting Vietnamese: extremely honest, rather poor, very competent, originally from North Vietnam, still lived downtown in a little house that he had owned for a number of years, did not move into the JGS compound into the big houses with the other Vietnamese generals. And really a very fine man.

Before I go on and talk about that office, let me go back because in your questions here you've indicated something about relationships, and I will tell you about how and why things developed, as I saw it, as my little piece, but it's the way I saw it at the time. Historically it may be wrong but this is the way I saw it. I had not been in Vietnam very long, and I don't know whether it was still August or early September when Secretary [of Defense Robert] McNamara came over on a staff visit. And a whole series of briefings were put on for him there in MACV. Military guys are pretty well used to giving briefings and the military briefings just went click, click, click right down the pike and were great. Then we came to the question of the civilian side of revolutionary development. Someone from the embassy--I can't remember who it was--some civilian got up and started to brief on revolutionary development and it was absolutely awful; one of the worst briefs that I'd ever heard in my life. We felt as we left that meeting that Secretary McNamara came out of that briefing with a feeling that if there was one thing wrong with revolutionary development it was civilians and we better get them out of that act right now and give the thing to General Westmoreland. It is alleged that such a message went back to Washington, but Ambassador [William] Porter, the deputy ambassador, happened to be back in Washington at the time. Fifteenth-hand, we hear--and it may be apocryphal but I'm

not sure it is--that Porter went in fighting a delaying action and said, "No, no, no, now I see what it is that you really wanted me to do, and I now understand. And I am going to go back and I will get all the civilian side and pull them all together and knock heads and really pull this together." So we did not go all the way to the Westmoreland responsibility at that point. Instead, we came to Ambassador Porter having been given the responsibility very clearly to pull together the whole civilian side.

He really didn't do that. What he did was he set up, we thought, a patsy in terms of Wade Lathram and made Wade Lathram the head of the Office of Civil Operations. And he, in turn, was in the supervisory level above him. Those of us on the ground at the time thought it was Porter's way of getting out from under so if it didn't go well he could say, "Well, gee, I should have spent more time supervising Lathram and getting that thing off the ground." And if it did go well, he could say, "Well, of course, that's what I did to get it going and pull it all together." Wade Lathram I had not known before that time--an absolutely superb human being, very honest, a great guy, and I got along with him very well. Wade, in a building downtown--I forget the number of the building, MACV Two or something, or it didn't have a MACV number; it was an embassy number, I forget the number. But, anyway, in that building he then pulled together the civil side of this thing into the Office of Civil Operations. My revolutionary development support directorate moved basically out of the Vietnamese Ministry of Revolutionary Development, although we kept a couple of guys there, and moved in, in order to be able to cooperate better with Wade Lathram and his folks.

When the Guam conference came up I went with General Westmoreland because he developed a habit when he went to one of these conferences--he did it in Manila--of

taking me along as kind of a one-man staff. So if he had to have a paper written, if he had to have some work done, there would be somebody there who could do some substantive work for him. That had happened at Manila--I had done a lot of work at Manila for him, and so I came to Guam to do the same sort of thing. There was not as much to do at Guam for me as there had been at Manila, and I had the chance to see a little bit of the island. I watched Lyndon Johnson decorate ten airmen with air medals, one of whom happened to be a young man who had gone to the same prep school that I went to in Massachusetts [and] who had been one of my students at West Point, who has just now finished a tour as the defense attaché in London and now works for DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] here in town--a kid named Alan Renshaw. And I was able to see Alan receive his first air medal for his B-52 flights over Vietnam.

The meeting went on, and that's the meeting where it was decided, of course, to give all the responsibilities to Westmoreland and to send [Robert] Komer out there as the deputy. On the way back in the airplane--I will never forget the scene--Westy called me up to the front of the airplane. We're banging around in the sky, and it's one of those military ones that wasn't furnished in a very plush manner. He called me up by the door as we're hanging on to the side of the plane, bouncing around, he said, "Bill, I know that I told you that when these responsibilities came to me that I would make you the assistant chief of staff for that function. However," he said, "at Guam the President made it very clear that he wanted a civilian to run that operation." And he said, "And furthermore, he and Komer want Wade Lathram, who has been running OCO [Office of Civil Operations], to run the new organization. I would like you to stay on as the deputy. Can you work for Wade Lathram?" I said, "General Westmoreland, I'm out here to serve. If you want me to work

for Wade, I would be delighted to work for Wade. We've worked side by side. We know one another well, and there will, I'm sure, be no problem." So the CO from the Office of Civil Operations and the RDS from the revolutionary development support directorate became CORDS [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support] as we pulled this whole bit together. And Wade and I began then to work as a team.

Now it must be understood that we were at the level of the assistant chief of staff. We were under the chief of staff, who after General Rosson's departure was General [Walter T.] Kerwin as I recall, and then, of course, under General Westmoreland. Now we get to the point of Komer coming over as the deputy, and there are some pretty interesting facets to that. Komer, as you well know--and I know him well and I see him quite often and I worked with him when I was in Brussels and I worked with him, of course, in Vietnam. And as you know, he has a reputation for being a blowtorch--you know, a hundred ideas a minute, some of them are good and some of the are not--and a personality that is a rather unusual personality.

There were some interesting developments when he went to come to Vietnam. He had a U.S. Army colonel, a lieutenant colonel at the time, who had been working for him named Bob [Robert] Montague who had made himself really *persona non grata* to almost every one of the military men out there in Vietnam to the point that General Harold K. Johnson sent a back-channel to General Rosson and said, "Komer tells me he wants to bring Montague along as his sort of deputy, his helper, but I am informed that there may be some resistance to that among the military folks in Vietnam. Will you give me your frank opinion on this?" General Rosson went back--and he was a master of words--with a cable for General Johnson saying that in effect Montague had so blotted his copy book with all

the military folks out there that under no circumstances should he be sent out there with Komer. What Komer did to get around this was pay no attention to it; he brought Montague out there on permanent TDY, temporary duty. And so that went on for I think well over a year before the army began to realize it was paying a horrendous amount of money in TDY and *per diem* for Montague and eventually he was permitted to be put on orders to go out there.

Komer's relationship was, of course, basically at the level of Komer's MACV and General Westmoreland, and that level. Our relationship was with the chief of staff and the other staff sections. Wade Lathram, however--there was sort of a stovepipe from Lathram to Komer back up and down. Because, although Komer as the deputy was supposed to go through the chief of staff to the assistant chief of staff for CORDS, in actual practice he didn't do that. My job when we first pulled these sections together was to try to hang on to some of the good things that we were doing and to see that they were preserved and would continue on in the face of the new broom--"We're going to sweep everything clean, none of you guys know what you're doing and we're going to go ahead and reorganize everything." I remember one day, I was living in a house into which General [Creighton] Abrams had moved temporarily. General Abrams was an interesting person and he did not like anyone to talk at breakfast. We didn't learn this at first when he moved in and we very rapidly began to realize that you said nothing at breakfast unless you were spoken to. One morning at breakfast, General Abrams broke the pattern, and he turned to me and he said, "How are you coming getting that new fellow, that Komer guy, straightened out here?" And it came at just the wrong moment and I unloaded, ventilated and said, "I just object to the way he is going about these things. I object to half of what he is trying to do. I object to a whole

series of things and I just want to get out of here, General Abrams, and go and fight." General Abrams put down his paper and gave me a very long, homely lecture in which he said, "You know more about revolutionary development than anybody else in this staff. You've got to see that we can preserve and hang on to the good things that have been done. And you're going to have to take all kinds of expletive deleted [sic], in the course of this. But it is too important to the nation, and you've just got to hang in there and take this chunk and just see if you can preserve what you can and see that something comes out of this which will work." I said, "General Abrams, I appreciate that. I really needed it. I kind of lost my perspective." So I went back again and kept on going to work as we got used to operating with each other.

The question of pulling these disparate elements together was a very interesting one. I had had out there a very fine executive officer named Denny Rosche, an engineer officer. When Denny was due to leave, I was getting in a very good, well qualified U.S. Army officer to come in and be the new executive officer. Well, the new one couldn't come in for a while, and a young man came in that I had never met before named Tom Fitzpatrick. A real feisty little guy, a superb officer. And I asked him if he would act as my executive officer for a couple of weeks until the other guy got here, and he was then going to go and be a planner. And Fitzpatrick said that he would. Well, he turned out to have that knack for SGS-type work, for executive officer work. Good SGSs are born; they are not made. They just have that knack for seeing thirty-five glass balls flying in the air and knowing which one is about to go out of orbit and catching it before it hits the ground. So I made him my executive officer and when the executive officer came in I made him the planner and it turned out in both cases to be very good. Incidentally, I later had Fitzpatrick

extend for six months, got him a battalion in the Big Red One over the objection of a lot of the people in the Big Red One, the first infantry division. They gave him the worst battalion of the division [and] within one month it was the strike battalion of the division, the one that they gave all the dirty jobs to. He won three silver stars on the ground with his troops in the course of that and ran up an absolutely fabulous reputation as one of the best battalion commanders in Vietnam.

But the interesting thing, with respect to the questions you've asked me about OCO and RDSD and CORDS, is that when Fitzpatrick became the executive officer of this new conglomerate operation, he turned out to have a real knack with civilians. And I frankly didn't expect this. I thought he would be too abrupt, too harshly spoken for them, because, frankly, the civilians who came in were not used to meeting administrative deadlines. They were not used to putting their papers in the kind of format that they needed to be in to go through the system. They just weren't disciplined, and our task was to take this disparate mass of civilians and turn them into disciplined staff officers who would accomplish things at the level which General Westmoreland wished. Fitzpatrick played a key role in this and turned out to be absolutely just great and I think you will find--I don't know if Wade mentioned him or not, probably didn't--but Wade also was very, very fond of Fitz also, and thought he was just great. He did a really exceptional job in a very odd situation, and the mix of civilians and military there really began to work pretty well and mesh together pretty well.

We stayed for a while down in that building downtown and then when the MACV compound was finished out at Tan Son Nhut, we moved out there and moved into the Tan Son Nhut offices. I stayed there until January 1968 and then left to go with the Ninth

Division. That exercise deserves, I think, a little elaboration. General Westmoreland had several times said, "There are two people that are never going to leave my staff for another job. One of them is Don [Donald] McGovern, my J-1"--who was invaluable in the personnel function, particularly in the assignment of generals and colonels--"and the other is Bill Knowlton in the revolutionary development business." So I was resigned to staying up there and never getting off to fight, but there was a brigadier general named Earl Cole who had been the adjutant general at West Point when Westmoreland was superintendent. He became infamous later on when he was involved in a bunch of allegations of corrupt activity, was busted back to colonel, was given a jail sentence which I don't think he ever served, and who left the army--a lot of his decorations were rescinded--and now lives in Munich somewhere.

But Earl Cole at that point was what is known as an operator. He was the deputy chief of staff for administration in U.S. Army Vietnam under General [Bruce] Palmer. Earl was very interested in proving--and I'm second-guessing this, but this is my philosophy of how this came about--in proving that he was more than just an adjutant general or a personnel type. So he thought that while he was in Vietnam--and it was a two-year tour for generals--that he probably ought to get a job over in MACV. And as he looked at the jobs in MACV, almost all of them were in an area that called for military expertise he didn't have--intelligence, operations, things of that sort. But revolutionary development--nobody knew a hell of a lot about that. So, why didn't he just come over and if he could ease me out, he could take my place. So he went to General Palmer and said to General Palmer, "Sir, you have four stars. You really ought to be assigning some of the general officers in Vietnam. General Westmoreland has been assigning them all. Why don't you get General

Westmoreland to let you assign the brigadier generals and he can assign the major generals." That agreement was ultimately worked out.

And then Earl Cole said, "Now, I think the thing you ought to do is put Bill Knowlton down in the Delta with the Ninth Division to replace Bill [William] Fulton, who is leaving in January, and I could go over and take his position in CORDS as the deputy assistant chief of staff for CORDS to Wade Lathram." And General Palmer went along with this and the next thing you know to my great pleasure I found that I was ordered out of MACV down to the Ninth Division. I left in early January. I had hoped to take a day or two and go shopping because I hadn't even had time to do that there and I didn't own the kind of elephant that people brought back, the ceramic elephants, or anything else. But my secretary Joan Unger got moved up to be Wade Lathram's secretary, I had a whole bunch of efficiency reports to write, they gave me a very pretty young WAC [Women's Army Corps?] who had been the receptionist in the office of the secretary of the army who could not take dictation worth a hoot, and I had to spend those three days before I went to the Delta sitting down and writing out by hand every one of the thousands of efficiency reports--not thousands, ten or twenty efficiency reports--that I had to write before I left and went down to the Delta.

(Interruption)

G: I was just going to ask you about OCO. Did OCO get a chance to perform its function or was that kind of an interim step?

K: No. I don't think it really ever did. I think it was sort of an interim thing. It turned out to have been very useful because it was the first step in what had to be done to pull the whole thing together.

And at this point, I would like to make one point that is not always understood. The one operation that did not come under us at our level, the assistant chief of staff level, of all of the civilian ones was the Phoenix operation. We had nothing to do with that. That was held at a level above us, presumably at the Komer level or the Westmoreland level or whatever, to the extent that MACV had anything to say about it. That was one--and, incidentally, I am a strong supporter of the Phoenix program. I think it gets badly maligned. I think it was an extremely useful program. But it was one we had nothing to do with.

As it turned out, if we were going to go ultimately all the way to the CORDS organization, OCO was a useful first step. The military side was already one piece--pulled together the military support for the revolutionary development program. The civil side--that was the first step towards pulling the pieces together, and then when we finally became CORDS part of the work had already been done, and it made it a little easier to pull these things together.

I'd like at this point to go back before I go on to the Delta or anything else [and] mention one subject which I think is very badly misunderstood and which gets a very bad play from the press because I don't think the press ever understood it. And that is something called the Hamlet Evaluation System: the HES, the H-E-S. If you read the history books they give Komer the credit for having instituted the Hamlet Evaluation System. That's absolute hooey, and I need to get the record straight on this point. This is one of those things I had to fight out with Komer and Montague and those bright young fellows who came over from Washington.

Within RDSD was a young colonel named Erwin Brigham who presently is retired, lives out here in McLean. He and a guy, a young lieutenant colonel named Rick Ansen who is now a major general and a young fellow named--major named Ray Ketchum who had been a cadet under me at West Point when I was associate professor and who now is a signal corps colonel. They had been working on this question of how one evaluates progress. I need to set the background to this, because before that basically you had secure hamlets, VC [Viet Cong]-controlled, and then contested hamlets in the middle. What we were finding was that when the government of Vietnam moved in and took over and asserted its control in a VC hamlet, and it became a secure hamlet, if you wandered through in the first week here was an absolutely dead town. People sitting looking sort of sullenly at you in the doorstep, nothing much going on. But, yes, it was a secure hamlet. You go down there a month and a half later and the place would be booming, and the market was going and people were smiling and people running back and forth on bicycles. The whole place was absolutely totally different, but there were was nothing to measure this. It was still just a secure hamlet.

So Erwin Brigham had decided that there really ought to be some kind of system involved which could measure this kind of rate of change. As he worked on it, he decided that this should be a system which was susceptible to being computerized. The only computer we could work with there was the computer that was used by the contractors and they didn't use it at night and so we would go in and get time at night on the computer, and this is when I--my first exposure really to computer work was when we did this.

And we went out to each one of the advisors--and let me interject here that, of course, in Vietnam you had first of all the four corps areas, which is where the four corps of

the army were, and then you had the forty-four provinces, and then you had the 244 districts and then you had the villages and each village was made up of anywhere from one to eleven hamlets. In each district we had U.S. advisors, military advisors. So we went out to each one of them and said, "Will you send us in the coordinates and the name of every hamlet in your area?" And all of these then came back to us and we then fed them all into the computer. The computer had a gigantic map of Indochina, and then we punched the button and all these little hamlets popped up. Well, about 73 popped up in the China Sea so it was apparently that somebody couldn't read coordinates and we had to go back and get that straightened out.

Ultimately, we got it all straightened out and we had located then all the extant hamlets in Vietnam and also got from these guys, "What's the population of that little hamlet? They got one hundred, three hundred, they got fifty; what have they got in them?" Because the problem with the government of Vietnam is that the maps they had and the names they had--they had hamlets that had long since been abandoned, where nobody lived. They didn't have some of the hamlets that people had moved and set up and were going--really going firm.

Thus the first thing we did in getting the Hamlet Evaluation System established was really create the first gazetteer for the government of Vietnam which told them where the hell their hamlets were, because they really didn't know. And we got it in the computer. The second thing is, for the first time in history for about the last twenty or thirty years they had a census, and a reasonably accurate census, because an advisor could walk into a hamlet and tell roughly whether there were three hundred, two hundred, one hundred, seventy-five or however many people there were. And to their surprise they found they

had about a million and a half more people than they thought they had. And [they had] hamlets they didn't know existed and didn't have hamlets they thought existed. Then there came the question of how can we rate them, particularly so we can see progress.

While Erwin was working on that and getting this set up, over came Komer the Blowtorch with his gang of straphangers from Washington, and they were going to jam a rating system down everybody's throat. They had developed it in Washington, and it was something like 278 questions that every advisor would answer every month for every one of the hamlets in Vietnam. You know, absolute nonsense. It was physically impossible. It couldn't be done, but they had the power. And it was one of those things that I was fighting him on. He was just going to jam it down our throat. So I said to Brigham, "Let's bring this thing to fruition, let's finish it as fast as we can, because if we can get something going we can fight Komer off with this terrible system of his that isn't going to work. And what we came up with was a system: there were eighteen categories, eighteen basic questions that the advisor had to answer about each one of the hamlets in his particular district. We gave him a little card and the card was of a size that would fit in the pocket on the fatigue so he could put a bunch of these cards in his pocket and have them right there and fill it out very easily. Now, we said, the first month is going to be awful, the month that you have to go out and establish the data. But then, only send in changes.

Of these eighteen things that we measured, nine had nothing to do with military or security. They had to do with economics; they had to do with health; they had to do with schooling, all that sort of thing. And you got a rating, one to five, depending upon--well, for example, in schooling: was there a high school in the hamlet? Was there a grade school? Was there a sort of up to the fourth grade school? Was there a kindergarten? Was

there adult education? These kinds of questions. So you could get a feel for incremental increase if they built a school and then the school was eventually used. Nine of them had to do with military factors, some directly and some indirectly. So only half of the things they were rated on had to do with the question of military insecurity.

Tape 1, Side 2

It turned out to be a very valuable system. We got extremely accurate readings out of it. When these things would appear and pop up on a map and you could put them on in colors, you could anticipate where the VC were going to begin--to start trying some activity. You could almost see it develop in front of your eyes. As things would begin to deteriorate individually in a bunch of hamlets you knew the VC were getting ready to move there; you could then take your steps and move your military forces and be ready when it came. It did not go inevitably up. There was no pressure on anyone to say you must make it better every month. In fact, we made it very clear to the advisors: what we want is an accurate reading with the changes that are accurate as they go along.

The problem came in that the press--when Komer had a big press conference and tried to announce this wonderful new system he'd put in, the press began saying, "How does it relate to this other system?" And we had five different categories, sort of one, two, three, four, and five--five was VC-controlled, in terms of the way we pull together the rating of the eighteen things and put them together. We roughly grouped them that way. In an effort to make the new system relate to the old, Komer or someone said, "Well, the first and second groupings in this come up with roughly the same number of hamlets that we used to have in secured hamlets. The third and fourth groupings come up with roughly the same number we used to have in contested, and the VC-controlled is not the same." So

they related an old system which had to do only with military security to a new system which had to do with a lot of other things. What that meant was that a hamlet could get better and better ratings because they finished a school, they got a dispensary, a trained nurse came into the town, and the figures for that hamlet were rocketing up. Then the VC would hit it a week later, and the press would say, "You see, you're dishonest reporting. You said it was getting better and better and yet here were the VC ready to come in." If you looked only at the military part of it, the security part, you would see clear indications that the VC were coming, but in the overall when you tried to compare it to the old system it was hidden by the fact that a lot of other things were getting better. So the Hamlet Evaluation System gets a very bad report by the press. It was not a system designed to insure ever-upward progress. As a matter of fact, it didn't do that.

We did have one problem, however. And this comes out because of an audit--I'm reminded of this because of an article in the magazine of the Retired Officers Association where some professor in the Midwest who got enamored of the Marine Corps wrote in and was saying the marines had the answer to everything in their CAPS, their Civil Action Platoons, that went into these places. As a matter of fact, while the rest of Vietnam was beginning to go down the drain at Tet, why, the Marine Corps had a steadily increasing security in their areas. Well, the reason is he was looking at Marine Corps reports, not our reports. And we had quite a bit of difficulty with this, because you see the Marine Corps was not under General Westmoreland's--they were under his operational control but they were reporting back to the guy in Hawaii. I am told--I never saw the document itself, but I am told by the marines that as they reported in their system, they were required to show increasing progress in their area constantly. I can tell you right now that Hamlet Evaluation

System did not show that in the marine area, and so at the same kind of ups and downs as the VC moved around or tried to come in together for operating and so on that the rest of Vietnam did. So this professor who wrote this article was comparing apples and oranges; he was comparing marine reports to Hawaii that showed everything getting better and better and wonderful even when it was going to pieces and our HES reports which were valid, accurate, and showed exactly what was happening on the ground.

The Vietnamese reaction to the Hamlet Evaluation System was very interesting. Nguyen Duc Thang's helper, a colonel whose name I now forget, said, "You know this is an absolutely wonderful system, but it will only work so long as Americans are doing the ratings," because the Vietnamese would lie, and we can't count on it. One of the reasons we developed this for him is he had come to us and said, "You know, I can't find out what's going on out in the boonies." He said, "We provide a lot of cement for a district chief who says he wants to build a dispensary or a school in a little town, and then he tells us it's finished. We never know if it really is finished. One guy sent in the same picture for three different schools that he said he'd built down there. We know that probably some of the cement went into a house for him. But we can't get hold of this kind of thing." I said, "You get hold of it very clearly with the Hamlet Evaluation System." Nguyen Duc Thang himself, the minister, wasn't sure the system was worth a damn until it came to election time. And he came to us, and he said, "I've got a problem. You know, I'm afraid that as each district chief or province chief looks at his area, that some of them will try to say [that] some hamlets are too insecure to vote because the vote's gonna go against them. On the other hand, they will say some are secure enough to vote that are really insecure because they feel the vote will go for them. How can I check on this?" We said, "Take these

eighteen ratings. Which ones of these eighteen do you think are valid for the kind of thing that you want to know?" He picked out four or five of the--maybe six of the eighteen. And I said okay and we punched it into the computer and out district by district spewed a list showing from top to bottom, on those six items only, the ratings of every single hamlet in the district. And he was absolutely thrilled, and he said, "This is just great. It's precisely what I need to know. Because in this district here I know that his guy has said that there should not be voting here, here, and here, and you tell me they're way up high in terms of ready--with security for voting and everything else. On the other hand, these down here are quite obviously--we shouldn't be having any vote down there," because it was going to be dangerous; people would get blown up, and it probably isn't going to count for anything. So the Vietnamese belatedly became quite enthralled with and good users of the Hamlet Evaluation System.

One of the things which Ambassador Komer focused on, and which again we were able to use the base which we had established with the ACS [?] for, was the attention given to the regional forces and regional [popular] forces. The regional forces are kind of equivalent to the National Guard, and the popular forces sort of to a State Guard.

There were a lot of problems with the RF [regional forces] and PF [popular forces], or RufPuf, as they were sometimes called. The first one was that again the government of Vietnam centrally really didn't know how many people there were in the RufPuf. They knew what were being reported up from below and the districts would report, provinces would consolidate, corps area would consolidate and they would say we have 1,642,000 people or something, but nobody really knew if there were that many or not. There were often ghosts on the rolls. One of the reason there were ghosts--it was not necessarily

corruption, but Vietnam had no VA [Veterans Administration] system. They had no system of pensions, so if a member of a regional force or popular force got killed, the district chief was supposed to put on a fabulous funeral for him and there were no monies for him to do this. Or if a guy was wounded and had a leg shot off and became a cripple, there was no system set up to take care of him. So in a great many cases, the district chief or province chief were keeping them on the rolls as a ghost in order to get the money to take care of him. Now, when you have a system that is that loose, of course, it is susceptible to being misused and there were cases when it was. But not all; there were often a lot of legitimate reasons.

What Komer really wanted to know was how many of these people can fight and what kind of equipment have they got. We went down on a one-time basis to our district advisors and said, "You know where all your hamlets are. Will you now tell us where all the regional force platoons are and all the regional force companies? And will you locate them by the hamlet that they are closest to, because that hamlet's on a map up here? And will you tell us how many radios they have, how many machine guns, how many mortars, how many rifles, how many pistols, et cetera?" Back came--with a lot of squawking from the district advisors, because it was a lot of work for them to do this for the first time--but all of a sudden back came through the computer a system that told us for the first time how many people there were in the regional forces and popular forces, where they were located, what kind of arms and ammunition they had, and what sort of radios they had. You could see right away where the areas of weakness were, you could see where the areas of strength were, and [it] enabled us then better to run the program from Saigon in terms of improvement of the RF and PF.

I would say that my quarrels with Komer came not so much over aims and ends; we were all after the same thing. It was just that very often a new team comes in and says everything we done here before was wrong and now I'm here, going to tell you how it's going to be done. And a lot of things had been done right out there. It was necessary to save those things that were right and to go on and continue on from there.

(Interruption)

G: All right. So you were going to say something about General Forsythe.

K: Yes. I had not known General [George I.] Forsythe before he came out. He really was put in a very difficult position when he came out there. I've mentioned already that the Komer level was well above mine and he was, of course, the deputy to Ambassador Komer, so that my connection with him was not close.

(Interruption)

As I was saying before we stopped, because his relationship was with Ambassador Komer and General Westmoreland and General Abrams at that level, I did not have very much to do with him directly. However, any military guy in uniform in that position would find himself caught occasionally between the demands of Komer and the contrary desires of the folks in military uniform who might rank him. It was a very difficult job to put a fellow in, and in a way we felt a little sorry for him being put in that position. So as I say, I can't say too much about him. It's interesting that his son and my son eventually were classmates at West Point in the class of 1970 and then later came back and taught in the same department of behavioral science and leadership. So I can't fill you in very much on specifics of his role because it was something that--

G: Right.

K: I spent a lot of my time trying to get out to the field to see what was going on. I kept a map of Vietnam with every district on it, and as I visited each district I would shade it in, so the map always gave me a clear indication of where I had not been. So by the time I left Vietnam I had hit every one of the 244 districts and given the district advisors a chance to show me what they were doing and that sort of thing. I felt it very important that someone get out to the boonies, particularly the places where nobody ever went, and give these very fine young people from State or the Agency or AID [Aid for International Development] or whatever a chance to tell somebody what they were doing out there and how things were going. There were special places like Long An where everybody always went who came out, and they would go there constantly over and over and over again, but there were a lot of places were nobody ever went.

G: Yes.

K: Except for General [John A.] Heintges, who was the Deputy COMUSMACV [Commander United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam]. General Heintges used to make a career out of going out to the remote areas as well. In fact, for a while we ran a kind of race. Every time he hit one of those remote areas he'd say, "Has General Knowlton been here?" So that [he would] find whether he was the first one or whether I was the first one. But we did it because we felt [that] for the morale of the folks out there, they needed to have somebody come and show some interest in what they were doing because they were doing a very fine job basically unrewarded.

On the civilian-military mix of personnel, yes, it posed some problems along the way. It was the first time we'd ever done this kind of thing. It is a little hard to mix the civilian and military chain of command. One of the problems was that the military

guys--I'm sure the civilians felt the same way, but the military guys worried whether a rating by some FSO-2 was going to mean the same thing to someone going up the line that a rating from a military guy with words that are understood.

The efficiency report system is very strange in each service. And words mean different things in different services. For example, in the army, "outstanding" is one of the top things you can say; "superior" is considerably less than outstanding and not that good. In the air force, "superior" is the absolutely top rating, and an air force officer rating an army guy will often nick him inadvertently. That kind of problem was complicated in spades when you began getting State Department guys, AID guys, and so on. I'm sure in the same way when a military guy filled out a State Department report, which tends to be much longer and much more discursive, as to whether they really did value to it or not.

The other problem is, of course, that the military guy eventually on leaving probably got himself a Bronze Star, got a medal, and the poor civilian who was doing exactly the same thing and in the same kind of hazard and danger didn't get anything in terms of a decoration. So you had those odd little anomalies that we better work out the next time, that we didn't work out this time, that you get when you thrust people into this sort of chain. It wasn't so bad up at the level where we were, although I do remember one case.

We had a young fellow named [Clay] McManaway who came in--he's now an ambassador--was a civilian within the CORDS apparatus, and he had three absolutely superb army strategic planners underneath him. They knew so much more about strategic planning than he did it wasn't even funny. I mean they were real pros. And yet in his sort of funny State Department way he really nipped them on the efficiency reports. And I had

to go in and say, "If you really want to destroy these guys, okay, but I must tell you, from where I sit, they know far more than you do about this. They're doing most of your work for you, and you have killed them." He said, "Well, I didn't mean to kill them. I was giving them the kind of report"--and I said, "Yes, but in the military terms the report you've given them is going to kill them dead. So if you kill them dead I suspect that I may well kill you dead, because I just think you're doing a disservice to some very fine guys," some of whom, incidentally, went on to as high as major general, because they were extremely good people.

So there are problems when you mix the different cultures, basically. The forms read differently. Words mean different things. The Agency, for example, never says anybody is tremendous. They all sort of damn with faint praise. The military tend to go the other way. But we can understand each other's wording and we know when we read something the words sound great to the kid they're being written about, but we know that this fellow is in effect saying, "Don't ever promote this guy ever," even though it sounds great. That cross-cultural problem, particularly in reports, is one that did cause some problems and will continue to cause some problems.

Let's see what else we have here that--before I left to go down as to questions that you might want me to go into a little more detail.

G: Did you have occasion to brief Lyndon Johnson when he came to Vietnam?

K: No. I remember--the one briefing I do remember was when Kennedy came out there. And when Teddy Kennedy came, it was without a doubt one of the most dishonest operations I've ever seen in my life. Kennedy would send out a bunch of kids about a month ahead of time. Their task was to find areas of difficulty or problems that might have slipped our

attention that they could run and give to him and that he could then embarrass us about when he got out there. So that he would arrive and go to a particular base and they would be ready to brief him and take him around and he'd say, "I want to go to Warehouse Two and look in the back left-hand corner." And they would take him down there and here'd be a mess of stuff that something or other was wrong with. So he really came out with his mind made up. The purpose of Kennedy's trips was to confirm what he was going to write anyway by saying "I was there and . . ." even though it was already written ahead of time.

General Westmoreland on one of his trips said it was very important that I be at the final debriefing before he left. So I went in--Kennedy came in and then he asked me a question. He said, "General such and such" and then turned and began reading the paper. So I just stopped talking and there was dead silence for four minutes. He didn't even realize it, and then suddenly he looked over his paper at me and I said, "When you're ready, Senator, I'll continue." He said, "Oh," and then closed the paper. But the kind of arrogance that that individual would show is just demonstrated by that little scene. He just really didn't give a damn what we were going to say. He was not about to listen to it, and furthermore, he thought of us as being such *unter menschen* that he really didn't have to associate with us or even listen to anything we were going to say.

We had a lot of those trips particularly as we got into the late 1967 and 1968 period. People were coming out there basically to bless their preconceived notions, not to find out what was really happening and what was really going on.

I did, however--if I may sidetrack, if you want a couple of Lyndon Johnson stories--

G: Go ahead.

K: I mentioned Joe Califano's job. One of the jobs we got from the White House when we were up there--Lyndon Johnson was making great waves about reducing the White House staff, and at the same time that he was dismissing one or two people [inaudible] staff, he added over eight hundred. And we were given the task through Joe Califano of hiding those 850--or however many there were--people in various defense agencies. And my job at that time was to take each of the defense agencies and to direct them how many of these people they had to take onto their rolls at what grade, in order to take the 800 and some odd people.

Many of these folks were for the photographic lab. I don't know if you've run into this story before, but Kennedy--there was a photographic lab that had been set up in Military 1 which processed photographs that were taken of the president. When Lyndon Johnson came in, he had his own personal photographer, [Yoichi] Okamoto, who went running around taking pictures of him. And the pictures were being sent over to this lab and they were coming back about a week later and that was not enough. President Johnson said, "I want a first-class lab that will work all night and will produce shots so that in the morning at breakfast I can sit"--he had like a little jeweler's thing he'd put in his eye--"and I can look at the negatives taken the night before." They hired away the head of the photographic lab at *Life* and at *Look* and brought them in at tremendously high grades. I think GS-13 and GS-12, brought a lot of their assistants, brought hundreds of people in and set up this gigantic photographic lab so that every night the two or three hundred pictures that Okamoto had taken during the day could be then processed during that night and at breakfast Lyndon Johnson would have them to be able to look at them and say, "All right, I want this one, this one, this one, this one and this one." The ones he selected were then

immediately produced in three copies: 8 by 10 color, so that there would be one for his book, one he could autograph for the guy, and one for the official book. I never thought that I would be in the business of sorting out slots like that and trying to hide these folks in various places.

But I was amused because I did get to go to the White House a couple of times. The first time came when Lyndon Johnson decided that he was going to have the cabinet in two sections. He'd have half of them one day and half the next week, and really talk to them about saving money and turning off the lights at night and all that sort of stuff. And he always, for these sessions, would get [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara and [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk to come in and talk--and McNamara's charts. He had a bunch of charts he would talk from and I was the guy who always carried the charts over to the White House. So I came carrying the charts over one day and set them up, and Joe Califano was there; the cabinet were to come in. I said to Joe, "Where will I go? Do you want me to step out of the room?" He said, "No. Just sit in one of the chairs there." So I'm sitting in the middle of the cabinet--well, half of the cabinet was there. And Lyndon starts talking and he's telling them Texas stories and he's pointing his finger at each of these fellows saying, "Now, Charlie, I want you do this, and now Tom this." And he comes along the second row and he come to me. And he keeps talking and the finger moves on to the next guy and the next fellow, and all the time he's looking at me, obviously thinking, "Who the hell is this? I don't remember this guy in my cabinet." And I'm sitting there laughing at the Texas jokes and looking serious when I'm supposed to look serious. Well, the day went by all right, the cabinet left, and I picked up all my charts and departed, and a week later we came to the other half of the cabinet. Once

again I went in and sat there, and Lyndon got up and he was saying, "Now Bob," and--the same thing. He comes to me, and his eyes halt, focus on me. He keeps talking, and his finger keeps pointing and he keeps talking as [inaudible] staring at me. So I thought this was kind of amusing. And I left.

Well, shortly thereafter, he had one of these things where you get all kinds of industrialists in to the East Room and he would then have McNamara and Rusk put on this dog-and-pony show. And I went in and brought all the charts in and set them up down there, and then I went back and stood in the far corner of the room by the door. As you know, Lyndon Johnson had a big throne that he would bring in and put around these places--a huge chair that was much bigger than any other chair; it was like a little throne. And he sat there and he'd very personally run all these briefings and decide when he wanted drinks brought to be served to everybody, and half the time Rusk and McNamara were briefing to the set of bobbing little black bottoms on these black trousers that these waiters who were back to them, but who were [saying], "What would you like, sir, would you like a whiskey?" and so on, as they went along serving all these drinks.

Well, as the President got up to talk to these industrialists, and I was standing way back in the corner by the door, I thought, "Gee, if I were conceited I'd think the President was looking at me!" Well, I went--and he went and sat down and he called and [Jack] Valenti came running over to the throne. And Valenti looks back at me and then he comes running over and then the next thing you know a commissioned guy comes around--because I was in civilian clothes--comes around and says, "Excuse me, who are you?" And I said, "Well, I'm Colonel Knowlton. I'm here with McNamara carrying McNamara's charts." And he goes running back to Valenti again, and then he comes back

and says, "Do you have some kind of ID?" (Laughter) I said, "Yes," so I produced my ID and he goes running back again, and they all have a big conference. And then Lyndon calls over Joe Califano. He talks to Joe Califano and I could see Joe look up and see where I was and I could read his mouth as he went "Oh no!" and goes back again. And quite obviously I was about to be thrown out of the White House, because what had happened was President Johnson thought, "I've seen that guy before, and I've seen him on a couple of other occasions," and his fear was that he had seen me at press conferences and that I was a member of the press who had somehow slipped in there and gotten in the door. Because he knew my face; he had seen my face some place or other.

G: That's typical.

K: So I came very close to being thrown out of the White House at that time.

I never did brief President Johnson myself. I briefed an awful lot of the visitors who came over there on the CORDS business. After Komer came they tended to do a lot of that at his level, but during the period before Komer came I did an awful lot of it at my level.

G: I see.

K: There is one more other story that I think I need to tell you, about the Manila Conference which is kind of fascinating. As you know, the Manila Conference came very shortly after I had arrived in Vietnam. I had not been able to get out of Saigon for very many trips. I had planned to go and see certain things, and I had already made one or two trips to II Field Force and to a couple of other places, but I had never been, for example, to Cam Ranh Bay.

When the Manila Conference came, this was the first time that General Westmoreland decided to take me as kind of a one-man staff. So we flew over in General

Westmoreland's plane to Clark Field, where he had, basically, his quarters. His wife, his kids were there, and he and the aides got off there. Then the plane flew me down to Manila. And I went into town to the Army-Navy Club and stayed in town at the Army-Navy Club.

During the time the conference went on, I was running back and forth and writing and re-writing papers for General Westmoreland, and a lot of this running was back and forth to the hotel, where President Johnson had taken over the famous big suite in the hotel, and, incidentally, he had this--he had them rebuild the suite before he got there in order to put in a special length bathtub so that he would be able to take a bath in there, and they rebuilt the whole suite in the hotel so that it would be ready for the President to take his bath. And General Westmoreland and I and Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge and Sam Wilson, who was at that point being selected to become the first civilian to run a province advisory team in Long An, were all over there and we had really a very pleasant time. And when the day came that we were getting ready to leave, and I thought I was going back to Vietnam with General Westmoreland, General Westmoreland suddenly called me over and he said, "Bill, I don't want you to go back with me." He said, "There's something going on and Bill Moyers has something he wants you to do. So," he said, "I want you to report to Bill Moyers this morning, and you will [be] coming back in a day or two.

What had happened was, they had decided that the President would go to Vietnam, to Cam Ranh Bay, have the big ceremony in which he decorated the guys and so on--the famous pictures were always shown of that. And the problem was, of course, they didn't want the press to know they were going until they were on the plane and going out there. So I reported to Bill Moyers, and Bill said, "Here's our problem. We've got to get these

guys out there to the plane. I want you to be damn sure that none of them get at a telephone as they're on their way to the airplane." And I had never seen as many excuses people pulled. They had to call their doctor--(Laughter)--they had to do this and that. We said, "Negative." I had MPs [military police] at every phone. Nobody was permitted to use the phone. And they were told merely the President was going to look at some agriculture things in the Philippines and so a lot of them said, "Well, hell, I'm not going" and missed the beat of their life.

We got on the airplane, and as the airplane took off and started and Bill Moyers got up and he said, "I'm going to tell you, we're not going out to look at [an] agricultural project. We are going to Vietnam. We are going to Cam Ranh Bay, where the President is going to do such and such." Consternation among all the press, horror that they were going to the combat zone, and all the screams. And all the questions started and Bill Moyers said, "Well, President--General Westmoreland has sent his great expert on Cam Ranh Bay along on the plane and he'll answer any of your questions." I didn't know anything about Cam Ranh Bay! I had never been there in my life. I had never seen the damn place; I had seen one aerial photo of it once. So I got up there and attempted to do my best. It was all right because mostly what they wanted to know was how far away is the front line, are we going to get mortar rounds on us while we're covering all of this. I was able to say, "No, you may get an occasional mortar round, but I don't think you're going to during all of this."

And then when the President left Cam Ranh Bay and everybody else left, I was left to try and hitchhike a ride with all my baggage and stuff back to Saigon. I managed to do it that night and come back. But I will never forget that scene on the plane and the horror on the faces of the press as they realized that they were going into a combat zone and had

absolutely no idea what they were going into. But it was a very good visit, the visit to Cam Ranh Bay.

I think we may well have exhausted the CORDS bit at this point.

G: All right, sir.

K: As I say, Earl Cole came in to replace me. I went then down to the Ninth Division. I arrived at the Ninth Division--it was sort of the end of the first week in January before Tet. Bill Fulton, who had very much built the Riverine Brigade--he had been the first brigade commander, then became the assistant division commander--had really worked with it from scratch.

The Ninth Division was organized in a peculiar fashion. In most divisions the two assistant division commanders, A and B--A was tactical and he went out and did the tactical running of the troops; B was essentially logistical and he looked after the repair, the maintenance, the logistics, and all of that stuff. That's not the way we worked in the Ninth Division. General Moe Roseborough was the ADCA and I was the ADCB. Because the Ninth Division was at Bear Cat in the III Corps area with the Thai regiment and one of the brigades, and because either one or two brigades were way down in the Delta on the IV Corps area, ADCB, the assistant division commander B, was also tactical. He wound up really as the tactical commander of those forces down in the Delta.

So the first thing I had to do down there was create kind of a small ersatz staff, even though things like ammunition and stuff I didn't have to worry that much about. It was run out of the division. I still needed some planners, intelligence, operational people of my own down there so we would know what we were doing. It had been the pattern before I got there that the assistant division commander in charge of those operations lived at Bear

Cat, and that's where my trailer was--up at Bear Cat. And he would fly down in the morning and stay there for whatever fighting was going to go on, go on back at night for the evening briefing back at the division. I did this a couple of days, and it became apparent to me that somebody had to stay down there on the ground with those folks at Dong Tam, which was the base that we had popped up out of the river--taken an old beat-up rice paddy that nobody wanted and converted it into a base where ultimately the whole Ninth Division came. But somebody had to stay there and share the hazards, because that place was taking an awful number of rounds of mortar fire and rocket fire during the night.

And the real panic that brought it to my attention was the hospital. It was not the nurses. It was the doctors. The nurses were just setting their jaw and living through this, but the doctors got in a great turmoil and were writing great poop sheets about they wanted to be relieved and moved, and they couldn't do adequate medical care down there and so on. So I did two things. First, I moved down there and almost never went back to Bear Cat. I was only back at Bear Cat two or three times before I left Vietnam, but the rest of the time I stayed right down there in the Delta. The second thing is, every night of my life I went into that hospital and went through and talked to my wounded--not only just to talk to the wounded, but also talk to the doctors and calm them down and to the nurses. And I had to explain to the doctors and nurses why it was that when we'd get rocketed at night they wouldn't hear answering rounds immediately. That illustrates, I think, a great American misunderstanding of how things worked in Vietnam.

Where we were was not a free-fire zone. Our free-fire zone has gotten the reputation among the folks who don't know much about it as meaning you could kill

anything that was in the area. That isn't it at all. All it means is that if you came under fire, you could return the fire without having to check through the local Vietnamese commanders. When I was fired on at night--and there was a district command post about a mile away from my CP and it was usually from that general area that we would get fired on--I was not allowed to fire back until I would check through the Vietnamese province chief to his Vietnamese district chief as to whether he had any patrols in that area or whether I would be hitting his people if I were to fire back. And, of course, by the time I would then get permission to fire, the Viet Cong would have long since finished firing their mortars, packed them away, buried them in the ground and departed, and everything was over. So it was very frustrating for me, but it was even more frustrating for the doctors who didn't understand and were saying, "We get shot at and nobody even fires back" and they just can't understand why not.

So I started a whole program to try to inform the doctors and the nurses to let them know what was going on, tell them about the battles, go in and visit the wounded every night, talk with them, and it turned out very helpful from the point of view of the morale of the wounded. I have since the war occasionally run into people saying, "Sir, you don't remember me, but you're the only general officer I ever met. I was lying wounded in a bed and you came to see me that night and told me about the battle." And that's the other thing that I did.

When someone has been wounded, the--something very personal has just happened to them, and the world has come to an end. And it's necessary really to go in by the end of the day and say, "Look, it looked awful at the time you were hit, but, by golly, we cleaned their whistle, we completely wiped out that VC battalion. There are over three hundred

bodies lying around that field out there and, you know, it was a tremendous success. You were in at the early part of it when things were tough, but by the end of it we really cleaned their whistle." And it was necessary for them to know this. Otherwise they'd think, "I just got hit for nothing, for no reason."

And that, I think, is one of the problems of television today. I learned when I was a young officer, if you want to know what is happening on the battlefield, don't ask the wounded. Something very personal has just happened to them and it is going to color everything they're saying. And those damn television cameras would usually get up as far as the aid station, and they have it green jungle, white bandages, and red blood. And it made for a very colorful presentation, and they would interview the folks in the aid station and they can't tell you what's happening up at the battlefield because they really just don't know.

The Ninth Division--I was there--well, let me go back. General G. G. O'Connor brought the division over, and the original "Old Reliables," which is the name of the division that came over with him, were still there just finishing up their eleventh or twelfth month when I was ordered in and came in. Julian Ewell came in as the new division commander about a month after I was there, and he brought with him a whole bunch of hotshots that he had picked up in his talent hunt and brought out with him. And they were some really good people. So I was neither an old "Old Reliable" nor was I a product of the Julian Ewell talent hunt; I was kind of a "tweeny." I was caught in between the two.

When General Ewell first got out to Vietnam, he came down to the Delta, moved into the trailer down there, and decided that he would experiment, try a lot of things down there. He drove me absolutely up the wall. I wrote a letter to my wife and said, "It is quite

obvious that I'm going to be fired very shortly and come home. Nothing I'm doing is right. You know, I'm just having an awful time adjusting to this fellow." But as it turned out, once he tried a bunch of things and found they didn't work and that what I was doing was working better, I came back one day from the battlefield at noontime and everybody was packing up. And I said, "What's this?" They said, "Well, the general's going back after lunch." We had lunch, and after lunch General Ewell got up and in that sort of nasal voice of his said, "Well, I'm on my way to Bear Cat. If you get a good fight, let me know. If you need any help, let me know." And with that he departed, and from that point on I could not have asked for a more supportive, better division commander. But apparently he just had to get out of his system coming down, trying a bunch of things himself--he was a very innovative man. And as I say, it drove me just absolutely up the wall. But once having done this, and once having gotten some confidence in me, then he went up, he let me run my own show and we were able to do a great many things down there because I was left alone. I never went up to the staff meetings. I'd send some guy up to find out what was going on. But I just tactically ran my own show down there, all the way down till early June when I came home.

I was supposed to come home in August, but about March, Harold K. Johnson told me that he wanted me to come in August and take over the recruiting command. About March, General Westmoreland said, "What's that job you're going to go back and take?" And I said, "I'm going to go back to the recruiting command, sir." About April, Bruce Palmer came down and said, "Now, when is it you're going back, and what is it you're going to do?" And I said, "Sir," and went through all of this again. In late May, Bruce came down and said, "Bill, Westy has gotten those orders changed. He wants you to come

back and become his SGS." And since he himself had been the SGS at one point, I felt this was reasonably flattering. Because he brought me back as SGS and Bruce Palmer back as vice chief and that little triumvirate really kind of runs the army--the *Washington Post* used to refer to me as a member of the "Westmoreland Team." But in fact I really had not ever met General Westmoreland or known him well until I went to Vietnam. But it is true that he brought me back and Bruce Palmer back at the same time. We all arrived back at the time he came back to take over the army, and I became the SGS.

I was the SGS for almost two years. It was planned that I would go to helicopter training and then go out and take over the First Cavalry Division in Vietnam. I had already selected some of my brigade commanders. They were working up their lists of company commanders, and the summer of 1970 was when I was going to go off and do this. Then the My Lai thing began to flare up and it became apparent that Sam [Samuel] Koster's name was going to be involved in it. And one day General Westmoreland turned to me and said, "Get up and take over that place." So I had about forty-eight hours' notice to get up and take over West Point. And went up there, left my wife and family down here while I went charging up there. It was a very difficult situation up there because Sam Koster and I had been classmates at the National War College when all of a sudden the world dropped out from underneath him. He really went into sort of a state of psychotic shock. And, I think, as is natural sometimes in these cases, "If I don't think about it it'll just go away and it may never have happened." So he stayed on living in the house. I was living in a room down at the Hotel Thayer trying to run the base, and yet he was still living there and going over and playing basketball at noontime with his faithful helpers and all that, and I was unable to get into the house.

And finally it was Bill DePuy who brought this to a head--who is a tremendous officer, incidentally. I am very fond of him. He's acid and he's tough, and there are people who don't like him, but I think he's absolutely great and I just enjoy him tremendously. Bill DePuy went to General Westmoreland and said, "Westy, you've got to put a stop to this. You've got to get Koster out of there." So Westy sent a messenger up and said, "On Wednesday, next week, I am coming up to talk to the cadets. I want the superintendent to entertain me in his quarters at four o'clock that afternoon." I went to Sam and said, "You've got to get out of here. I've got to be in this house by that time." He said, "I'll be out Monday." He actually got out Wednesday at about two in the afternoon and I had to put on a party at four in a house I had not been in--didn't even know if there were going to be lightbulbs in the lights--but managed to get in and take it over. But it was difficult, and I sympathized with Sam. I understood why he reacted the way he did. I mean it's just--here was his whole life just disappearing out from underneath him.

I don't know whether it's in the scope of your thing here but I would like to talk for a moment about My Lai if I might, because this is a very much-misunderstood thing. In fact, that miserable S.O.B. Hodding Carter a while back came out with an article in which he perpetuated the myth that that awful person Seymour Hersh had won a Pulitzer Prize for exposing the My Lai massacre which the army had covered up. That is an absolute dead lie and I think the whole story needs to be told in terms of the organization and looking into it and such.

As the SGS, of course, I saw all the correspondence that came through and particularly stuff came over from the White House and everything else. And this photographer named [Ron] Haeberle was the guy who started all this My Lai business.

There was a funny thing about Vietnam and that is that you went over in a plane and then everybody dispersed from that plane and went to different organizations. And if we had tried to do it, we couldn't do it, but by pure happenstance a year later those same people would walk back and get on the same plane--those who were left alive--to come back. My son, who was a parachute infantry private when he went out, said that when he came back the same twins sat in front of him that had been on the way out, the same guy sat behind him on the way out. He said everybody was either a sergeant or a private. They had either been busted back for misbehavior or something or they had made sergeant as he had.

Well, Haeberle, who was a photographer--when he got on the plane and they came back, many of the same guys were on the plane with him and these are people who turned out to have been in what turned out to be the Eleventh Brigade. Relaxing on the way home, telling war stories, they started talking about a town called Pinkville and Haeberle got very interested in all of this and began taking little notes. He sat down and he wrote a letter--he wrote it to Teddy Kennedy, he wrote one to the president, he wrote it to a couple of people--in which he said, and he named a Captain--I can't think of his name now [Captain Ernest Medina]; it's a Hispanic name--who turned out to be the company commander, and a Lieutenant Kali [Calley], K-A-L-I is the way he spelled it. He said in a town named Pinkville and then he gave a number of a unit--and the number was not the right number--and he said, "I am convinced that something terrible happened that day in Pinkville and someone should look into it."

When this letter came through and I read this copy, I went in to see Bruce Palmer.

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

K: I said to Bruce, "I've checked this out. We have no Lieutenant K-A-L-I in the army. There is a captain by this name; there are a couple of captains by this Hispanic name. This particular outfit the number is wrong. I can't find anything about Pinkville, but I'm worried because there is enough detail in this letter here that I think something happened. Now, we've already tried about forty-three war criminals out there in Vietnam up to now. I think we need [to] take a very good look into this thing here." Bruce said, "I'll tell you what you do first before you start something. Go out backchannel to U.S. Army-Vietnam and ask them if they have any record of a case like this because we had some similar cases that I tried out there." Well, he came back about a week later and said, "Nope, we don't have anything that seems to resemble that." So I then called in the inspector general and said, "Okay, we now need to look into this, and will you take this project over?" In the meantime I called in John Hill, who was a colonel across the hall working for me who later became major general. And I said to John, "Once a week I want you to call this guy Haeberle and tell him where we are in the investigation so that he won't think that it's just swallowed up and gone."

I think almost a year went by and not much happened, the reason being that nobody would talk until they got out of the army. Finally, one day the IG [inspector general] came in to me--and this was on, I guess, either a Friday or a Monday; the days of the week may be wrong but the story is roughly correct--he said, "We now think there is sufficient evidence for the CID, the Criminal Investigation folks [Department], to take this thing over. But they said, "We have pinpointed this to a Lieutenant William Calley who was going to get out of the army on Thursday, and once he gets out of the army he can never be tried

ever again for this. We strongly recommend you flag his file and prefer charges on him in order to hold him in active duty so he don't get off."

(Interruption)

K: To go back in this, the IG said that if we did not flag his file and charge him and hold him on active duty, Calley would leave duty in a couple of days. I, therefore, turned the case over to the CID. As I recall, we preferred the charges at that time. In fact, I think I signed the charges. At the same time, we made a release to the press. We announced that a Lieutenant Calley had been charged, retained on active duty, charged with suspicion of multiple murder. So we didn't try to conceal it. It was put out in the press. We didn't go into great excruciating detail, but we did put it out.

As it turned out, Seymour Hersh had gotten in trouble in the Pentagon and had been canned from the Pentagon press corps--this is, I get third-hand; I may be wrong in this, but this is my understanding. He was drifting around the country looking for something to do, got down to Fort Benning, and someone said, "You ought to talk to that guy down at the end of the bar there, this lieutenant; he's been charged with something or other." He talked to him, saw the opportunity for a big story, and played it as though the army had hidden it. And we never hid it. We'd even made a press announcement of it. But the thing that really hurt me was that Haeberle. After all I had done to keep him scrupulously informed once a week to exactly where we were, Haeberle saw a chance to make a name for himself, came out and said, "The damn army tried to cover it up and they never did a thing. I gave them the information and they never did anything." After I had called him once a week and we'd kept him up to snuff.

There was also further confusion on that because of the Peers Report [the Peers Inquiry]. The Secretary of the Army decided that they would get a respected lieutenant general, [William] Ray Peers, and a respected lawyer from New York and that they would go in and do a preliminary parallel look into this to be sure that we couldn't be accused of cover-up. The difficulty with the Peers Report is that there was no opportunity in that for cross-examination, and I regret the fact that that Peers Report has now been published commercially--has been put all over the place--because when, in our investigation, the people being accused were permitted cross-examination, an awful lot of what was listed as fact in the Peers Report absolutely disappeared. The witnesses began to recant, began to back off. Several said, "As a matter of fact, I guess that's not right." So the Peers Report is a very warped, biased report of accusations not yet mellowed down by the ability to cross-examine and pull things together.

Now, in the case of Sam Koster, who had been the division commander out there, there was absolutely no evidence of any kind that involved him in any way with cover-up, with anything else--anything criminal. However, as we'd done in other cases, we took administrative action, because we said, "Had the army known the true state of affairs in your division, you would not have received the DSM [Distinguished Service Medal] nor would you have been promoted to temporary major general." Therefore, administratively, he was replaced back down to his permanent rank of brigadier general and award of the DSM was taken away from him. Nothing punitive in this; it's merely that had the board known these things, they never would have done it. We did the same thing with the Sergeant-Major of the army when he turned out to be a crook. We took away from him the DSM that Harold K. Johnson had awarded him, and the same way, did it administratively,

and said that had Harold K. Johnson known he was a crook and doing these things, he never would have given him the DSM.

But people have difficulty distinguishing between punitive and administrative action. And in the case of Sam Koster, there is, somehow, residually, the sentiment out among the people that thinks that either the army covered-up and just slapped Sam's wrists--or alternately that Sam, even though there was nothing punitive, he still nevertheless--the army punished him by doing something about it. It was just purely an administrative action.

If I were to criticize Sam Koster's regime in the division, I would say that a couple of things he did, and I know why he did them--in retrospect historically, if he had done them differently he might still be in active duty or might have gone on much higher. That division, the Americal Division, was an ersatz division. We had had several independent brigades in Vietnam before that time. The eleventh was the last of those independent brigades to go out. The independent brigades were larger because they had to have their own supply and maintenance and all that kind of stuff, and Westy ultimately decided that the three independent brigades fighting up there in the north ought to be put under, originally, Task Force Oregon with General [William] Rosson, and then turn it into a division headquarters and call it the Americal Division.

Well, the brigade commanders were obviously upset at now finding themselves under a division hierarchy, and so Sam Koster attempted to win the brigade commanders onto his side by showing his trust and confidence in them. So when he first began to get reports that something funny had gone on down in the My Lai area, in order to show his confidence to the brigade commander he called him and had him do the initial

investigation. When it came back, Sam said, "Inadequate. Go back and do it again." And the guy went back and did it again and came up and for a second time Sam said, "Inadequate. Go back and do it again." And by the time it was done the third time, Sam had left and gone to West Point to take over as superintendent.

If at any time he had turned to his CID or to his IG and said, "Look into this," he would still be, as I say, on duty or would have stayed on duty a lot longer. Yet I can understand his reasons for trying to get the brigade commander to do it.

If I were to look at My Lai and say, "At what level did people know what really went on?"--obviously at company level, Mendoza [Medina], I think, was the guy's name. Mendoza and Calley knew. In fact, Mendoza got off and then afterwards cheerfully said, "I lied under oath. That's how I got out of it," and couldn't be retried. The battalion commander--did he know? We are never going to know because he was killed three days later. So [there is] no way of knowing. "Did the brigade commander know?" Probably not. Dave Henderson, I think, was a brigade commander [Oran Henderson], and is fairly sure that he did not know anything about what had gone on.

The war in Vietnam was quite decentralized. It was very hard from the air to know specifically what was going on on the ground, and it was hard to get down to the ground and spend a lot of time with the troops. And, in fact, there was a school of thought represented by G. G. O'Connor, who said to me, "I don't want you on the ground nor do I want you doing heroic things and getting individual decorations. Your job is to see that the folks that are fighting--that you can dispose the extra support, the artillery, bring up what they need and every thing else."

I had gotten a Silver Star in World War II from the 82nd Airborne, but when I got my first Silver Star in Vietnam I was caught at a fire support base on the ground when it came under sudden attack. And what I did was apparently deemed by my subordinates, particularly Hank Emerson, to be worthy of a Silver Star. I wasn't sure it was, but he did it. I got a letter from G. G. saying, "Okay, you were on the ground and I'll accept how that came about. It had to done. But this is an exception to my rule and I don't want you guys doing personal heroic things."

But I felt sorry for Sam Koster because the other thing is that he didn't notify the folks above him. And the reason is, he wanted to know whether he really had a problem before he did it. You have a lot of different philosophies in any organization, whether it's in industry or anywhere else, about whether you tell the guys above you've got a problem or whether you kill the problem first. Let's turn it off for a second.

(Interruption)

K: Well, enough for the My Lai thing. As I say, Sam Koster's sins were of omission. He did not tell the folks above him that there was a brewing problem and he used his chain of command to try to get to the foot of it instead turning and getting an independent outside authority. Both are judgments that I understand why he made. However, they turned out to have been the ones that did him in at the end, which is too bad because he was quite a fine officer.

With respect to the Ninth Division, there were really two Ninth Divisions while I was there. There was the piece I was running in the Delta with one philosophy and then there was the piece that was being run by Julian Ewell and Ira Hunt, who he brought in as his chief of staff up in the other part. I mentioned to you already that Bill Fulton had

formed the Riverine Brigade, had built them up, understood the tactics, the equipment, and everything else. One always looks to see what one can do different. My philosophy has always been that if something is working, leave it alone and wait to see what doesn't work and then go in on it.

One of the things that concerned me as I watched these battles develop down there--and the Delta was a peculiar situation because our task--we had no land responsibilities--was to lash into the base area when we'd find a VC unit, pinpoint it enough where we could nail them, to lash in and take the VC unit on. We were supposed to fight, and we had hoped that the Vietnamese and others and we also would be able to develop where the VC would be so we could go after them. This entailed our lashing out into and coming back from areas where there was no permanent presence of the government of Vietnam or of the Americans. The thing that bothered me is we would move in and pick up big swarms of people, pull them back with us, and talk to them, interrogate them, and a lot of them turned out to be just innocent civilians who were caught up in all of this mess who were just trying to make a living there. I began asking the question, "What happens to these people?" "Well, you know, if it turns out they're innocent we just let them go."

Well, I began to realize that some of these folks had never been more than ten kilometers from home. They are suddenly whirled up in a helicopter, taken up into the sky, moved two provinces away, interviewed, and thrown out into the street with no money or no anything else. And I said, "We're missing a golden opportunity here." And I set up what became known as the--eventually it was given a name, the William A. Knowlton Innocent Civilian Center.

But I set up a little innocent-civilian center there at Dong Tam--a little compound, and I had a nice little billeting house there and a little kitchen where they could cook and the utensils were the kind the Vietnamese used. And I had a shelter right in the middle; it was easy to get to when we were shelled by the VC or the North Vietnamese at night--they could get into it. When they would come in and we would take their photograph, we would talk to them. We would ask them all about life out in the area where they were. We'd keep a little central file on them, and while we were waiting to take them back, we'd have little courses for them. We had television--they normally hadn't seen television--and we'd have television and they would see Vietnamese shows from Saigon, and we would do all sorts of interesting little things. We'd check their health and we'd work them over. And then we would take them back, and we did it through the chain of command. We would fly them to the province chief of the province where they lived and then insured that he, in turn, would welcome them back, give them a little talk, and we would also give them a little pocket money to make up for the fact that they had been away with us as long as they had, so they could buy a little food when they got home. And he would take them to the district chief, who would then be able to talk to them and show his interest in them, and then they would be able to go home to the little hamlet where they lived.

It's funny because, of course, there were several of the cynical troops who called it Knowlton's VC R & R Center. We began to get occasionally some of the same folks. When we get the same folks in then it was very easy. I'd say, "Okay"--because we could tell by the pictures and everything else--"What has changed since you were last here?" If they wanted to stay around a couple of days and watch the TV and so on--if they wanted to go right back, why we'd get them back so they could go on back down.

Because of this and several other things, the Vietnamese began giving us information. It was a little more complex than all of this, but I eventually began getting these people giving us information, and they began turning in the Viet Cong who were operating in the area. Every time a fight would develop in a built up area, a village of some kind, I would go down and hit hard right afterwards, and get all the people together and say, "Now, I am sorry that your village, your hamlet, got badly damaged in the course of this fight. But may I point out that the reason it got damaged was because the Viet Cong chose to fight here. Our job is to fight the Viet Cong and we'll fight them wherever they are. And they picked the place, and they picked your village to fight in. Now, the way to keep this from happening again is tell us where the VC are before they get to your village." Then those crafty little eyes begin to take this in, and pretty soon they begin coming and saying, "They're two villages away and they're on their way over here," and then we'd be able to nail them out in the middle of nowhere.

When Tet came on--and I think Tet needs a little separate section all by itself--there were a few things that the American public doesn't understand. The first is that every year at Tet, there was a mutual cease-fire between us and the Communists, because Tet is the time of the year when everybody goes back to his home. Question: "General, didn't you think it peculiar that a whole lot of Viet Cong began turning up in your area?" Answer: "No. This happened every year. They would come back to see their families--to go back to family reunions." And as a matter of fact, we used to get a tremendous number of deserters from the Viet Cong during the Tet period because it was the one time when they would be away from the very strict, tough discipline, gun-in-the-back that held them in the VC unit. The thing we missed was that they had their guns there. They had gotten a whole

bunch of guns in; they had gotten them cached. We did not know about the caches; we knew about some, but not to the extent that they did it.

The second thing is because it was a mutual cease-fire, 50 per cent of the Vietnamese Army was off on holiday and had gone home. And the third thing is, because it was a mutual cease-fire, in my case, the only U.S. major fighting force in the Delta, my mission was to get out and deploy along the Cambodian border because they might try to run a bunch of ammunition and arms in during that period and I was to stop that. Thus when the district headquarters, the district capitals, and the province capitals began brewing up with great fires and everything else, I was deployed along the Cambodian border.

The thing that controlled my redeployment from the Cambodian border were the 155-millimeter howitzers I had out there. They could not be carried on our boats. They had to be lifted out by helicopter, and I could not move back and take the security away until I got those howitzers out of there. So I had to ask for the helicopters, and everybody wanted a helicopter in that early period. And it was a day or more before I could get those helicopters in to get the 155s out. Once we did that, then we put on the boats all the rest of the folks. Knowing they were going to be ambushed, we would have two 105-millimeter howitzers to a barge and we had them so one was aimed to one side and one was aimed to the other and loaded with beehive, which was a round of ammunition that was sort of like shrapnel; a whole bunch of little fleshettes go out of the end of this thing. And, sure enough, the VC tried to ambush the column on the way back, and when they did the artillery just pulled the lanyard and wiped out the VC unit on each side of the canal. And they came back in, and then I was able to start putting out the fires and getting around--meanwhile, it was like a gigantic chess match. As fast as I would form up one

little group to put out a fire here, another one would brew up here and I would form another little group and I would split this outfit in half and give this guy half and put him over here to try to protect this airfield while I move somebody else over here.

The great advantage to us in Tet was that the Vietnamese Communists gave orders to their people to stay surfaced. Before that when we would have a fight we just killed rear-rank spear carriers, because the officers and the key commanders would all slip away in the middle of the fight, so we never killed them. We knew the rules were different when in the course of one day the 514 VC Battalion, which was one of the key VC battalions in their forces--it had an assistant battalion in Cuba and it had all kinds of special things--we killed three different commanders of the 514 in the course of one day. And then it was obvious to us [that] we were really getting at the leadership. That was beginning of the end, really, Tet was, for the VC forces because they began to lose leadership that they could not replace.

Eventually, down there in the Delta--the first thing we did was drive them away from the road, get them out of the populated places. Route 4, which was the lifeline to Saigon, was being blown up every night in as many as two hundred places with large land mines and everything else. The VC sapper units were the key elite units that used to do this kind of thing, but they had gotten so elite--they got all the best wine, the best women, the best rice, all that kind of stuff--that they would get the local peasants to dig the hole to bring the Chinese mine over. Then the sappers would come in and just put in the detonator. To lick that, we had the district chief put out an order saying, "After dusk anything that moves on Route 4 is fair game and will be shot--so, curfew at dusk, nobody is to go onto Route 4. Then we were able through radar and such to pretty well watch Route 4, and

anytime we saw somebody we would just drop a bunch of artillery down on top of it, and that way we'd get their attention.

I knew we were finally beginning to succeed when we came up one morning and right at the edge of one of the little towns along Route 4 were three gigantic Chinese land mines and they had obviously been unable to get anybody to dig the holes to put them in. I said, "Okay, now we've gotten to the point [where] the sappers are going to have to dig the holes themselves. So now we're going to watch on either side of the road, and the message is 'Kill sappers.'" And as the sappers began to try to come and do the work themselves, we began killing them. And they were pretty elite guys and they were tough to replace. I said, "They're going to be followed by Viet Cong battalions [who will] try to come in and do this." So we began to drive them back from the road, and back into the uninhabited areas. We finally were able to drive them back into the Plain of Reeds, and that's where we had most of our fights from then on until I left.

The final blow came--the VC got very angry with me because they were beginning to have terrible problems recruiting down there. The people didn't want to go with them anymore; the population didn't support them, even though this is where the revolution started. So, I began flying propaganda missions over the areas with a tape. One tape basically said, "Mothers of the base area, the 514 is going to be coming around trying to draft your sons for service in the 514. For God's sake, don't let your children serve in the 514. They are so inept they get everybody killed. 261 or 263 or 267 or 269, that's much better. But not the 514; it's a terrible outfit."

Well, the 514 really got upset and they decided they were going to come in and clean my whistle. And one night--it was late afternoon and I was out on a reconnaissance

with one of my choppers, and way up to the north along a canal I saw a little guy in black pajamas hiding down in the mud. So we swooped down and picked him up and pulled him out. I said, "Who the hell are you?" He said, "I'm in the third company of the 514." I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Well, my family lives up there, and before the big battle I was given a chance to go home and say hello to the family." I said, "What big battle?" "Oh," he said, "we're going to really clean you guys out." He said, "This district capital is right next to your base. My company has been given the task of killing the American advisors there. The first company is going to come from the south, the fourth company is going to go from here. The second company is going to do this." And I had seen no signs of any of this. I said, "Where are these guys all going to assemble that are going to do this?" He said, "The woods to the west of the district capital. Out in that little woods, they're all going to assemble." Well, it was fairly late in the afternoon, so I sent a light plane that was in the air. I said, "Go over that little woods. See if there is anybody in that woods." The guy said, "The woods are so full of people they are practically spilling out the sides!"

There was a Vietnamese plane coming back that had been in a bombing run and had been unable to release its load and was coming back. I said, "Would you like to bomb something?" He said, "Sure." I said, "Will you bomb the hell out of that woods?" He dropped his bombs in that woods and we saw bodies going up in the air in every direction. And we apparently really cleaned the whistle of the 514. So at that point, they decided to really lower the boom on me. And they collected, as we later learned, the 261, the 263, the 265, the 267, the 269, the 514A, the 514B--they pulled them all together and they were going to attack the provincial capital of My Tho and demonstrate that even one of the

biggest provincial capitals was not safe from them. As luck would have it, when I was working out and had flights going in and testing various areas--and as soon as they would raise a fight, we would then jump on; the problem was find them, and then pile on.

We found and piled on, and had a horrendous fight just north of Route 4 with about a battalion. And as always happened, we used to kill about 300 of the 400 in the battalion, but I would lose about twenty-nine or thirty guys. We'd lose roughly on a ten-to-one ratio. And I said, "Okay," and it was that time of year where at dawn if you looked very carefully you could see the marks on the marshes where they had moved in leaving and going to the new areas. So we could follow where the remnants had gone. So we jumped on in the next area, and to my horror we had a hell of a fight, and it was just like a brand new outfit! And again we cleaned whistle, we killed about 300 out of 400, and the next morning we got up, we could see again, and we jumped on the next day, and once more there was a horrendous fight. Well, what had happened is that five or six battalions had been pulled together adjacent to one another and the remnants--as we'd kill one battalion, the remnants would fall up against the next one. And so, one by one, inadvertently, we were knocking off the battalions that were going to be used in the attack against My Tho. I think about five of the battalions got nailed before they gave up and said they were ready to go home and get back to the base area and leave and get out of here. And that is the last time that My Tho was ever threatened. It is quite interesting that my intelligence officer, a young lieutenant, went back as a district advisor two years later and said, "You'll never believe it, but I got a speeding ticket at Route 4 which we used to have a hell of a time even keeping from blowing up." But one of the things was it was paved over so they couldn't dig holes in it anymore.

And even after the Communists took over, that area where the revolution started, where I had my part of the Ninth Division, was the last area that they were able to get hold of. And they still have got all kinds of problems down there. So in terms of the impact of the Ninth Division, the part that I had down there, I think [that] we did a hell of a good job. And we took an area that was rebellious by nature and turned it into an area that has been one of the hardest ones for the Communists to control.

After I left Vietnam--the day I left is the day that the rest of the Ninth Division moved down out of Bear Cat and the whole Ninth Division assembled down there. I understand the Ninth Division got the reputation for overusing force during the time that they were down there--the year or so after I left. I cannot comment directly on that, but I do know that was a point of issue between the CORDS folks and the Ninth Division--that they felt that there were a large number of civilian casualties turning up in the hospitals and that force was perhaps being used more indiscriminately than it was in my era.

I also know that the intelligence officer that I had down there, that I worked with when we set up the innocent-civilian center, when we began getting the people to talk to us and give us all this information, he got so upset with what happened after I left that he left the army. I persuaded him to come back in again. He came back in and he went out and was the assistant attaché in Indonesia. He went out later as *the* attaché in Indonesia. He is still out there--got a wonderful career going on. But I always loved the words--he wrote a chapter for a book at Fort Hollowbird that somebody sent me. And he said, "Unfortunately, General Knowlton's enlightened policies did not survive his departure," which I thought was a good way of wording it. However, I'm second-hand reporting on it. The Ninth Division did do such a good job in cleaning out the area that they were the

first--the first two brigades to be pulled out of Vietnam were the first two from the Ninth Division. And as I say, that area stayed completely clean as a whistle right up till the very end. They may have overused force in the later days, I don't know about that. I do know that it was so effective a cleanup job that that area was never a problem ever again.

Now, you ask me--the next question is what was my reaction to LBJ's speech on March 31, 1968. I would tell you that I don't remember the speech. I was up to my waist in Viet Cong. I was living day to day with what was going on on the battlefield. I understood enough that when the bombing was curtailed that this was not good. I was hoping that someone would have the guts to go in to Cambodia, because what would happen is we'd clean the whistle of the 514, they would go back across the border [and] thumb their nose at us, we would sit and watch them retrain, rebuild, get new equipment and everything else, and then come across the border again in a month or month and a half. We'd have another big fight. But I really don't remember that--I was so living day to day my job in Vietnam that I really wasn't concerned with those larger issues.

G: Well, that's understandable.

K: Now, I've told you that when I left Vietnam, I went to the General Staff, I went to the--I became the secretary of the General Staff. One of the things that I did that was kind of an extracurricular thing: I was concerned at the distorted view of Vietnam that was being put on around the country. And as I went around and gave speeches, I was amazed that I would get hit by the same nasty question, loaded questions, in different parts of the country. It was almost like it was being orchestrated. And then a letter came in from a young kid and he said, "Dear President"--whoever it was at the time. He said, "I was a very patriotic young man. I was so patriotic and so fond of the government that I even alienated some of

my friends." He said, "Then I came in the army. And now I'm in the army and I'm beginning to see another side of this thing and I would like to ask you some questions. And if the answers to these questions are 'no' then I will go out and continue to be a good soldier, but if the answers to these questions are 'yes,' then I must presume that it is my duty to protest and fight from within the system and so on." Well, this letter was quite an interesting long letter, so when it came in to me--when it came through me, I said, "Hey, let me answer this, because I have a son who is going to come back from Vietnam and be a drill sergeant. And if somebody asked him these questions, and they're skillfully loaded, he wouldn't know how to answer them, and I would like to put a little intellectual effort into this." So I drew up a rather long answer to this kid and sent it off to him. I said, "First of all, I'm assuming you're individual, not an organization." And so I got the answer back, sort of, "[inaudible] somebody up there heard me, and thank you. And, incidentally, I'm not an organization and if maybe you can use me writing up there," or something like that, "if you think this." I got my guys together, and by this time, Tom Fitzpatrick was also back from Vietnam and working for me in the SGS office, because I knew that he had been selected as an alternate for the National War College. He didn't know that, and he was about to sell his house in Washington and go off somewhere else, and I had him brought in here so he wouldn't sell the house because I knew he was going to need it in the next year. And I had a couple of other guys there. One was Bob Sorley, who is retired but writes an awful lot in magazines these days--Lewis R. Sorley. And another was a guy named King Coffman, who was very religious. And I got this team together and I said, "You know, as I look at it there are about thirty dirty questions that we get all the time. Let's do a little kit, 'The Thirty Dirty Questions on Vietnam,' with a short answer you can use from the platform and

then an explanation so you don't get sandbagged by virtue of the brevity of the answer." And we produced these things. I said, "Now I want these with no heading on them or anything else, and anybody who wants them, we'll give it to them. And the only thing we ask is that it not be for attribution as to where it came from, but we're delighted to have them use it." I produced the first set of the "thirty dirty" and sent it out, and it was fantastic to watch what happened. That thing went like wildfire up and down colleges on the West Coast, then it hopped over to the East Coast and went up and down colleges on the East Coast, then went the middle part of the country, and went up and down the middle part of the country.

[Inaudible] "I don't know where it came from but I've got a great kit here!" I used this an awful lot out on speeches. And I used to use this triumvirate that I had to go out and give talks. I used--Sorley was my women's group guy, because he just had a tremendous effect upon ladies. They want to ruffle his hair and everything else. They thought he was absolutely wonderful. King Coffman, who was a very religious guy, became my religious-group fellow. He's the fellow I sent out to talk to religious groups, and he was great. He would get standing ovations in chapel. And Tom Fitzpatrick was my bulldog and I would send him to the tough groups I knew people were going to get really tough with.

Now, Bobby [Robert] Schweitzer [?], who then was a colonel, now is a lieutenant general over here run the IAD [Inter-American Dialogue?]--Bobby Schweitzer was probably one of the most effective speakers on the platform that I have ever heard. And he used to go out and really take these guys on, like Noam Chomsky and people like that, and do an absolutely fantastic job, because he was trained by the Jesuits. And he would really just kill these guys. So we swapped stuff all the time and worked back and forth, and I did an awful lot

of work in that period on getting out and dealing with academic groups and folks like that that I thought were off on the wrong wicket.

Then Frank Barnett and a group of guys--Maury Liebman from the American Bar Association--formed something called the League to Save Carthage. And I became kind of the unofficial member from the Pentagon of the League to Save Carthage. I said to Bruce Palmer, "Somebody as high ranking as you shouldn't do this, but I ought to and then you can disown me if it turns out to have been wrong. But somebody ought to keep contact." So I worked very closely with Frank Barnett and Maury Liebman, several other guys. One of the things we did, we got three students who were very, very effective speakers for the war. In fact, I ran into one of them the other day who now works in the Pentagon, up in OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense]. One of them was a refugee from the Hungarian revolution. One of them was a real WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant] from Princeton or someplace. I forget where the other one was from. And these guys were so good in debates, and they would take on the government side, that we began helping them with information. Then they got invited by Vietnamese students to go out to Vietnam. And I said, "Okay. The first things you guys have to do is be sure you get yourself made a correspondent of some paper, any paper--a weekly in your hometown or something like that--because you can't get around in Vietnam without a helicopter. And if you are a reporter with a press card you can get in a helicopter." So sure enough they went out there, and they would not have been able to accept the invitation to Hue and the various other places. But they went out and went all around with the Vietnamese, and that made them much more effective debaters in the campus, because when some wild-eyed revolutionary would--the fellow would say, "When were you last in Vietnam?" "Well, I've never been

there." "Well, I just came back. And Vietnamese students invited me. I was their guest in the Vietnamese schools, and let me tell you what it's really like." And we had an awful lot of fun doing those kinds of things.

When I then was suddenly yanked up to go up to West Point, of course, we then ran into the problem of the tremendously anti-military environment in the country, and the cadets were having a great deal of difficulty handling this. They just didn't know what to do. My job was to, as Bruce Palmer once said--he said, "Bill Knowlton took that place up off its ass and got back and got them some pride back in them again, and got them to the point they were ready to go out and take on"--that may be a slight exaggeration, but I did work very hard at talking to the cadets and convincing the cadets that this was a proud profession they belonged to. It was a misunderstood one but that [inaudible] had always happened in America. That it was not different this time, it had always happened. It was like a sine curve going up and down. We were almost to the bottom of the curve, but it was going to come up again.

In fact, it's interesting, when I first spoke to the faculty and gave them that talk, the Department of Social Sciences, my old department, tended to have all the overeducated liberals and they scattered in among these kids. And there was one who is a good friend of mine who said, "You know"--he came to me; I had been at West Point about two and a half years--came in one day and said, "I wanted to come in and see you, sir." He said, "You gave that speech. We were saying this time it's completely different. And you, in effect, told us that it isn't different. We're down near the bottom of the curve and it's going to come back again, and we're not going to do a lot of these things because they're going to come back. There is no point in taking the trip if it isn't necessary." He said, "We--after your speech--we listened

with tremendous interest. We all went down to the coffee bar and sat around and we all agreed that 'God, the old man was really out of touch with reality and he just didn't understand the situation at all.' And our [inaudible] we had to have a guy to come in and run the place that didn't understand." Now he said, "It's two and a half years later and I look around and every damn thing you said was going to happen happened. And I begin to realize there is some virtue in getting old."

And so I do think I was able to do a little bit up there in terms of keeping the morale up. One of the things is that the number of qualified applicants went steadily up the whole time I was there. My last year we had the largest number of qualified applicants we had ever had in our history applying. And I remember a *New York Times* guy came up and was doing a little article and said, "Sir, I'm doing an article on what a hell of time you're having getting students up here." And I said, "Well, would you be interested to know that we aren't. That we've never had better luck." And he said, "Well, that's just not right." I said, "Well, let me show you the figures." He said, "Well, that's not what I'm told." I said, "Who told you?" "I don't remember." I said, "Well, let me give you the accurate figures. Here they are." And he read them through, and he said, "Why is this?" And I couldn't resist it. I said, "Because, young man, there is a vast America that doesn't read the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and doesn't know how it's supposed to think."

But we did do a pretty fair job. We did have an impact, an adverse impact, on one aspect, and that is that we had a combination of factors that led to a situation which was misrepresented again by Seymour Hersh and the *New York Times*. A certain number of instructors resigned from the army during the time they were up there--not while they were serving at West Point. They didn't resign from West Point. They resigned from whatever was in

prospect for them after they left. Seymour Hersh wrote a big article saying, you know, "Sixty-seven instructors have resigned at West Point. The creme of the crème--the very best," and so on. I kept pointing out that this was a two-year figure, not a one-year figure, because when they resign, they all resign at the same time. They resign in May at the end of their tour before they go out. So by taking the period that started in March one year and went to September the next year, you get two annual groups, not one. So the figure was about thirty. And so when you have, you know, 800 instructors or so on up there, that's about a 4 or 5 per cent rotation which in any school isn't bad. You get 4 or 5 per cent who leave. But one of the reasons that I couldn't really answer Hersh in detail is that I knew--because I interviewed every departing officer--exactly why the guy was leaving and I had written a memo on it, and I felt that was privileged information from them to me and that I could not release it.

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End Tape 2 of 2, and Interview I