

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 24, 1984  
INTERVIEWEE: JONATHAN F. LADD  
INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger  
PLACE: Colonel Ladd's office, Washington, D.C.

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G: Mr. Ladd, or Colonel Ladd?

L: I don't care. Mr. Ladd is what everybody calls me, but it doesn't make any difference to me. Whatever you--

G: I come from the part of the country where you never lose a title.

L: Yes, in fact, I tell--of course, when I went to the State Department I made it a point not to be called colonel, because I thought that was the biggest mistake. Nobody did, generally. Oh, some of my damn contemporaries and classmates used to get mad because they were colonels, and again, I was by that time like a major general in equivalent rank in the State Department, and they would *insist* on calling me colonel. But I never paid any attention. Around here, of course, everybody calls me mister.

Okay, shoot.

G: All right. Mr. Ladd, when was your first service in Southeast Asia?

L: In June of 1962.

G: June of 1962. And you were assigned as what, as a division adviser at that time?

L: I went in there as the corps G-3 adviser under Colonel Dan Porter and very shortly after that he transferred me to the Twenty-first Division, where I became the division adviser.

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G: And the Twenty-first Division was operating where?

L: It was south of the Bassac River and included the entire lower end of the Ca Mau Peninsula.

G: Right. Did you get any special training or briefing or anything in preparation for this assignment?

L: Not particularly, no. I'd been fortunate in having been at the corps G-3 adviser's and I was able to observe during that time the divisions and the division advisers that were there. But no particular training.

G: You have any linguistic skills that helped you?

L: I spoke a little French and that helped a little, but--

G: Right. What was the general situation in the Delta when you took over? How would you characterize the state of the insurgency when you went down there?

L: It was pretty well controlled by the Viet Cong, the countryside. Larger towns than the villages were controlled by the Vietnamese government, but the vast areas of that particular part of Vietnam, mostly very flat rice lands, and the countryside, was controlled by the Viet Cong. There were no schools out there; there were no post offices, there were no teachers. If they were there, they got killed. So the government controlled the cities and the enemy controlled the countryside.

G: Now, when you say controlled, let me be clear: Could the Viet Cong keep the government from going wherever it wanted to go, let us say, in the daytime?

L: Not completely. Of course, there was a network of roads and then, as I say, these vast, flooded rice paddies. So one moving down there was pretty well confined to the road net. Now, if there was a convoy--the

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government often moved its principal officers and its paymasters and that kind of thing along the road nets, and they'd have a convoy of perhaps two or three companies of infantry [which] would move with them. Now, they could move from Ca Mau to Bac Lieu to Rach Gia, various places like that.

But an interesting example of moving through the countryside: I was sitting one time--we had gone to Rach Gia where we were going to have an exercise or an operation against what we were led to believe was an enemy concentration. And we'd moved the troops in along the road nets. And the helicopters we were going to use, of course, required gasoline, JP-4 fuel, and the gasoline tanker trucks which were run by Esso or Texaco or someone of that nature hadn't arrived. And I was beginning to raise hell with the people where they were, because we couldn't begin the operation unless we had gasoline for these things. So pretty soon way down the road I saw this cloud of dust and here come two of these tankers, and they had, as many of our large trucks do, a whole array of lights on them. There were blue lights and amber lights and green lights, and they were all lit up. So these things arrived and they began the operation. I went out with them when they put down and then I came back, and I asked to talk to the drivers of the tankers. Of course, they would travel the roads all by themselves.

G: These were Vietnamese drivers?

L: Oh, yes, Vietnamese drivers. It was just curious how the hell they got around when we had to have a convoy. One fellow said, "Well, you see all those lights up there? They're coded so the Viet Cong know we've already paid the taxes to come through, and they let us through. If the

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lights are right, they just let us go on through." So when I say controlled the countryside, the civilian traffic could get through fine if they paid the VC [Viet Cong] taxes to go through, including Texaco and Esso and the others. I imagine they paid it right in Saigon, and they didn't pay it along the way in doling it out. I think it was paid to someone right there in Saigon.

Then also in my area down in the Ca Mau forest, they made a lot of charcoal that they would sell, but they would take it on barges up the canals and rivers to Saigon or the other areas. But they also paid taxes to the VC in order to move that produce. So the VC controlled the countryside, but they did it to their full advantage. I mean, they didn't stop all business, because they had to get funds. So they would allow--it was rather a unique situation down there, because it--

G: It sounds like they had a real administration in place.

L: Oh, they did. So I say they knew what they were doing and it was pretty well--so the countryside where I lived and where John Vann was, north of the Bassac River, between the Bassac and Saigon, was pretty well controlled by the enemy when we were there. And wherever we went, if you'd take along a few companies or a battalion, you could go anyplace you wanted to go. Once in a while they'd get ambushed. They ambushed convoys along the road, for instance, to get ammunition and weapons and that kind of thing. General Train's son--

G: How do you spell that, sir?

L: T-R-A-I-N. General Train had a son, I believe he was a captain or a lieutenant. But just about the time I arrived there he and another officer were going from their advisory post somewhere north of Saigon--

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they were going down to Saigon for a weekend. They were driving their jeep, and they reached this town where a convoy was making up to go to Saigon. And of course it was much safer to go with a convoy than to go by yourself. So they hooked onto the convoy and were somewhere in the convoy, I don't know whether the middle or--but en route there was a pre-planned ambush, obviously pre-planned. And the enemy attacked that convoy and both young Train and the other fellow, an army officer, were killed.

Now, John Vann and I often moved around without a convoy, because we felt that any time you organized a movement of troops, the enemy knew about it, either through the Vietnamese staff of the division where you were working, or the villagers where you were making up heard about it or knew about it, or somebody in the families of the soldiers knew about it, and these ambushes would happen. But if you would just be talking, as you and I are, and then decide let's go to Saigon, and get in your jeep, we never were bothered at all; we'd just go right on through. They didn't expect you; they didn't know you were coming. We only had a couple of cases where two or three people who appeared to us to be not the--they had the sort of people's force, RF [Regional Forces] or something, they called them. I've forgotten the name. But they would be along the roads occasionally, and we felt that on a couple of occasions when we were traveling alone like that, that they were not RF, that they were VC just by the way they looked at us and followed us. But of course they didn't know whether anybody was right behind us or they didn't know what was going on, so we often would just go without--

G: You never got sniped at?

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L: Oh, you'd get sniped at occasionally. Of course, the airport outside of the little town [of] Bac Lieu where our headquarters was, I used to drive back and forth to that, which was two or three miles out of town, and occasionally you'd get a shot fired at you. But it was too close to a big concentration. The division headquarters was there and one of the regiments was there, and there were troops out guarding the airfield, although they weren't along the road where you'd go.

But basically back to your question, yes. They controlled the countryside and our people or the Vietnamese government controlled the cities.

G: What was the nature of the job of an adviser? What were you supposed to do?

L: Well, we were supposed to assist the division commander--in my case a division adviser; same thing would be if you were a battalion adviser--in any planning he may have or in his strategy of what he was going to do, assist in controlling certain U.S. supplies going into that division. The advisers, I really think, in those days--well, one, there weren't very many of them to begin with and it would depend on the individual. If he was interested in what he was doing, he could make himself very valuable and very influential as far as what that division did, if he made it a point to become respected by the division commander, his counterpart and his staff. Some of the advisers over there simply didn't want to be there in the first place, and some of them made absolutely no effort to be anything more than an American who had a certain amount of authority, not command authority over the division, but he could get helicopters, for instance. We got the helicopters.

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They were all in those days our helicopters; there were no Vietnamese helicopters, and our air force really controlled the fighter planes that would come over and give you air support. And we controlled the C-130s and the other logistic system of aircraft. So you had a certain amount of clout with them.

But some of them did nothing but do that and made no effort, for instance, to get to know, if he was a division adviser, the division commander and get to know his family, how does he live, what are his ambitions, what's his background, where did he come from. Some of them hadn't any idea; they didn't give a damn. They were simply there putting in their time and they were going to go home. And that applied to people--there were so few division advisers. I don't think there were more than fifteen or eighteen at that time in the whole of Vietnam. But there were a lot of battalion advisers that were out with the battalions. Now they were forced to live--in my case, I made all my people go out and live with them. And, say a captain would be a battalion adviser and he would have two enlisted men with him, and they would live where that battalion--wherever its home garrison was, that's where they were, and they stayed there.

Once a month I'd have a division advisers' meeting, and we'd go and pick them all up and bring them in, or if they could drive in, they'd come in; we'd sit down. And then I would see them often because I had transportation and I could fly around and visit them. But they generally stayed with their command, whatever it may be. Others I knew that I visited, for instance, when I was the corps G-3 adviser, they all lived in one central place, and when something was going on the bat-

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talion adviser would go out and join his battalion for a day or two, but he lived back at the main division compound, where I made mine go out and stay there. They just lived out there. John Vann did the same thing; his stayed out with his people. But I think that both John and I, and I don't know too many of the others, were both very interested in--we enjoyed being an adviser; we were having a good time learning, ourselves. But now my division commander and I really became very close friends after a period of time.

G: Who was he?

L: His name was Bui H. Nhon, N-H-O-N, and he now lives in California, if he is not deceased.

G: Is it B-U-I?

L: B-U-I, and then H--I don't know what the H stands for--N-H-O-N. He was a colonel when I was a division commander and later promoted to general. Then John Vann's adviser [division commander ?] was a fellow named [Huynh Van] Cao, C-A-O. Now, John didn't like Cao and Cao really didn't like him. They got along--Cao was a very ambitious kind of guy and he knew John had a lot of goodies that he needed plus John had a lot of clout and could help him. I mean, John was a very active, gung-ho type person. But just the difference in how--John knew Cao and he knew Cao's family, but they really--he didn't like Cao. [The answer to] your question is, each adviser was different; it depended on how he wanted to act. I think that in my case, I enjoyed it. I liked General Nhon--Colonel Nhon, then. I used to go have dinner with him and his family maybe once every two weeks, or had him over to our mess. He really didn't like our food that much, but once in a while I would have him



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over, but not his family. And I had my wife send Christmas presents for his little children at Christmas time.

And I thoroughly enjoyed my tour there and being an adviser, but I guess my point [is], each one is different. It would depend on the personality of the adviser, what his objectives were in being there. I had to fire a couple of mine because they really didn't do anything, except that once they got out there they took on a Vietnamese dame or two. And I happened to show up at this one place one time and he didn't know I was there. I was flying around in this little L-19 and landed in the street and went up to his headquarters, walked up there. And there was more scurrying around, and they finally got him out; it was about ten o'clock in the morning. They weren't going to let me in the house at first; then he came down in his pajamas and about two minutes later this babe came down the stairs in her nightgown. He lasted about as soon as I could get him the hell out of there, because that was not what I wanted my advisers doing out there.

G: You hear stories that there was a good deal of pressure to get along with your counterpart. Is that an accurate picture or is it too simplified?

L: I think it's really too simplified, because you go up--and I used to say--now let me jump ahead; we were back in [the] 1962 period. [Let me] jump up to when I was with the special forces in 1967 and 1968 over there. One of the things I noticed most about Saigon was, and I couldn't understand it--of course, my experience had been with the Twenty-first Division before. Then I went to the special forces, which is very closely tied in. My counterpart in the special forces was a

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general named Quang, Q-U-A-N-G, Dang Van Quang, and he and I became very--same way. I made it a point to get to know him and get to know his family and get him to rely on me. I think that helped a lot with the special forces. And I insisted that my people do the same thing working with the Vietnamese Special Forces. But you go to Saigon--and I'll give you an example, I don't think General Westmoreland ever had dinner with whoever his counterpart might have been, say the chief of the staff of the Vietnamese army.

G: [Cao Van] Vien, was that it?

L: Vien was a hell of a nice guy; Vien was a very nice fellow, but I don't think Westy was ever in his house. I don't think he ever knew what his wife looked like. He didn't give a shit. And yet in effect he was an adviser, too. I don't think that many of them did. Now, General [Charles] Timmes, who was there as the MAAG [Military Advisory Assistance Group] chief when I was there, he tried hard to get to know them. Colonel Porter, Dan Porter. I think a lot of it, again, comes on how close your relationship was with people like Porter and Timmes. And mine was fairly close. I worked directly for Porter for a few weeks, and of course got to know Timmes. Then Timmes would visit quite often. He liked to come down--well, Vann and I were the only ones where there was any real fighting going on. And you'd have to say that with tongue in cheek because we really didn't--so many times, as you've heard about, we'd go off on an operation and we knew exactly where the hell they were, and the operation would be planned for a quarter of a mile going past them this way and turn around and come this way. Never going right where they are and never putting some--even though we'd try to get them

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to do it--somebody behind where they couldn't get out, because then somebody's liable to get hurt if you do that, and the Vietnamese generally didn't like that. I mean, at that time and period of time, they were armed with the old carbines from World War II and the Korean War and some of them that I had had the old French weapons that they used. The Vietnamese army, I understand later when they got the M-16 rifles, they really had--in the whole division--our artillery was so fractured up that we'd have like two guns at one place and then there'd be two guns ten miles up the river at some place and two more over here. So you never got an artillery battery together to give you support. You had one or two guns. The same way when you'd plan and get air strikes.

But to give you an example that was different--and I did the same thing and Vann did the same thing. My my G-3 adviser, his office--because I knew Bui H. Nhon and he sat in the desk beside their division G-3. The G-4 adviser was down the street in the logistics office, and the G-1 adviser was with the--not that we had much to do with their personnel system, but we had an adviser there. And they worked together. When we would plan an operation, they would plan it together. [In] some of the divisions, I know the Vietnamese would plan the operation and then come tell the Americans what they were going to go, whereas in our case the guys worked it out together, and I think it worked a lot better, even though, as I say, even in our case it was awful hard to get them--they'd at least go out.

For instance, now General Nhon, Colonel Nhon with me, was the only one--and it took me about three months encouragement--that when we went on operations that he would go with me and land with the assault troops,

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and it made all the difference in their regimental commanders, how they responded if the goddamn division commander was out there. They had never seen him out there before. He was one of the few, and David Halberstam I think commented on that in one of his books, that was actually there. He'd go out; now he couldn't stay if it was going to be a two-day operation. He'd go out, he'd be there two or three hours, and then he'd fly back. And then he'd go over to another part where another group of them were, say, the blocking force, and he'd see how they were doing.

G: Why was there this tendency in those days to avoid contact with the--?

L: Oh, I think that, one, they were criticized by [Ngo Dinh] Diem if they lost a lot of people; they didn't like it, they didn't like to have losses, the troops were not that well trained, and the VC was pretty damn good in those days. They weren't in the numbers that they could fight, say, a two-regiment attack, but they were damn good at setting up defenses and they were good at ambushes, and they were good at escape and evasion. Christ, they could get away from--they had all kinds of ways to get away from you. But I just think that it was a--they didn't like to get hurt and if they did get hurt, it was a reflection on the commander. The only way you fight a war is to go out and somebody's going to get hurt; both sides are, but one side more than the other. But they would simply avoid it, and they would go through all the motions of the thing. It would all be there, but they knew damn well, and we knew, that the enemy was there, he wasn't where we were going.

G: How do you deal with that? Now, you're supposed to be making these guys--

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L: Well, I would, I could discuss it with him, and as I say, Colonel Nhon got to where he was a little bit better. He'd put a blocking force behind him and go in on the front, but you can't be everywhere at once and even your own advisers can't control them. I mean you had no command authority over these people.

Now, in the special forces that was entirely different. We had technically mercenaries hired by us, but as an adviser you didn't have any command of that. That was what used to get John Vann so damn mad, because he'd know, he'd be sitting there, and come back in and they're getting away, you could fly out and see them. And he'd want to move somebody around and then they wouldn't move. They'd say, "Well, we'll have to get Corps permission to do that," or all kinds of excuses. And before you know it, they're all gone. It was a very frustrating kind of thing to get--and of course, as I say, where I was, except in the dry season, it was totally flooded, the whole damn area. If you've seen pictures of it, it just looks like glass or a mirror, with little dikes and things along the side of it. And then there'll be a big canal going through there, canals that just run for miles.

They had this program of strategic hamlets going on at that time, and in my area, as I say, there were these long canals and dikes and the people's homes were built along those canals; it wasn't like Washington, D.C. where there's a house every ten feet. But maybe a hundred yards, two hundred yards apart, there'd be a home and they would farm the lands out on either side of these canals, primarily. The strategic hamlet had--and I forget now, but there [were] four or five, maybe six criteria for a strategic hamlet. You had to have a fence around it, some sort of

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a barricade or a fence. You had to have a school in there. There had to be a group of people who were sort of the elders who ran the thing, the village chief and the doctor and so forth. Well, you just get into those things. Up in the northern part of Vietnam and the central part of Vietnam where people actually lived in villages, you could put a fence around it. But in my place where it ran forty miles up the thing and along that canal may live three hundred people in these houses, well, how do you put a damn fence around them? Well, the only way to do it is to congregate them all at one place, which that was one of the stupid things they did at Saigon. They went out with the troops with bayonets. They ran them all the way up the end of these canals, and then they'd get up at one canal junction and they'd have two or three hundred people corralled. But the guy's farm was thirty kilometers down the canal. He couldn't work his farm. So what you had was a bunch of disgruntled farmers. Then they put a barbed wire fence around them and wouldn't let them out. Half of them were VC anyway, so you had half the VC inside the fence, and then there was no place for a school or anything like that. They couldn't do anything; they couldn't even make any money; they couldn't raise their rice, couldn't get to it and back and walk down and back. And so it was just utterly hopeless, and Colonel Nhon and I would talk and he would agree, it was just ridiculous here to think of a strategic hamlet. It just doesn't lend itself to it as it does up in the highlands.

So it got to the point where it became a statistical competition among province chiefs, particularly, and the province chief was usually the division commander. Or maybe he would have two provinces or some-

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thing, but there'd be province chiefs, a statistical competition of them, so they could report to Saigon, because they went so far overboard on this in Saigon that a man's success would depend on how many strategic hamlets he had.

Well, in our area I had a rather unpleasant experience one time with General [Paul] Harkins. We'd had a large briefing down there, and it was to brief the people from Saigon--Vietnamese--and General Harkins was there and General Timmes, all the big-shot Americans had come down to hear this briefing on strategic hamlets south of the Bassac River. Well, actually there were about three of them. One was in the city of Ca Mau itself, which was a nice little city, and Bac Lieu, the little town where I lived, and then over toward Rach Gia, they had another one over there. But the rest of this damn thing, there was just nothing out there. Now, they had the Vietnamese river forces who in one case had taken up maybe fifty tons of barbed wire on these rolls and dumped it off at a canal junction, and it was sitting there rusting except for what the VC used. I mean, they'd take it themselves, a little bit. But they called it a strategic hamlet and there wasn't a goddamn soul, living soul, there; it was just a big pile of barbed wire rusting away on this canal bank.

And they gave this briefing and the province chiefs were briefing about how in my province I have thirty-two hamlets and over here--and then the other guy would get up and say, "In mine I have forty-four, and the total for the whole area is a hundred and two," or some other goddamn thing. There were actually about three plus all this other crap. Some places up near--I forget what they called the Black Virgin Mountain

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up there. That was in my area. They had a bunch of them all corralled up with bayonets and living in a barbed wire entanglement.

So after this whole thing was over--and by the way, Colonel Nhon had invited Halberstam and [Neil] Sheehan and four or five of the newspapermen that he liked to come down, so that they could hear this briefing. And he knew as well as I did that they were going to give them a whole bunch of lies--I'm talking about Nhon knew it. So we went out to the airfield and we were waiting for General Harkins' plane to come pick him up and I asked if I could see him alone. And we stepped off about fifteen or twenty feet from where--and these other guys were going to go back. They had a Caribou [aircraft] that was going to come down and pick them up and take them all back to Saigon. And Harkins had a little two-engine, looked like a Beechcraft, something or other, but that wasn't there yet, and they were all waiting for him to go. So I was explaining to him, "This has been a very fine briefing and we've worked hard to teach them how to brief." And he said, "Oh, yes, it was great." And the Americans had nothing to do with it, it was all Vietnamese talking, and then the Vietnamese had their own translator there who could speak in English to tell them what the guy was saying.

Now, Nhon himself spoke English pretty well, so he was unique in that for a man of his age. They all spoke French. I mean, Christ, all those guys, they'd been in the French army. So I said, "This has been great, but General, before you go back and report anything, you've got to know that 90 per cent of it was not true. There are not a hundred and four hamlets here; there are about three." And I started to tell him, "Some places are these piles of barbed wire and other places



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they've just got a bunch of peasants all corralled in." But, Jesus, he got--he said, "Are you telling me those people lied?" And I said, "Well, General, if they don't, they'll get fired. That's the whole point of this thing." Well, he kept getting--of course, Halberstam and Sheehan and the others [were] listening, they could hear it. He was yelling at me by this time. He said, "Anybody who'd say they're liars"--I said, "I'm not ly--look, we're two Americans talking to each other about a situation in which the Vietnamese are there. I'm not accusing them of anything. I'm simply telling you what are the facts. If you want to see them, I'll take you out there and show you that there aren't"--well, anyway, he was livid with me. But Halberstam picked all this up and sat down there and made notes and then he wrote an article for the *New York Times* about--

G: Did that have any repercussions for you?

L: Oh, I think indirectly it did. Yes. But Harkins, he couldn't fight the fact--General Harkins and I got along pretty well, but he just didn't want to hear that kind of thing. I think John Vann had the same kind of thing. Now, I was talking to him. John got it from talking to the press; he'd talk to Halberstam and Sheehan. I didn't make complaints. I was complaining--not complaining, I was telling him what was a fact, and he was shouting back at me so loud that they could hear him. So when it did come out in the *New York Times*, he knew that I hadn't gone to the press; it was his goddamn--he was honest enough to know that, that it was his fault that it got in the [papers]--and it wasn't my fault the press was there, although I had made it a point with General Nhon. I said, "We've got so much bad press from Halberstam, who is very

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critical, and Sheehan, but you run pretty good operations. You should invite them down, because I can't." Because our thing was, stay away from them. But if the division commander wanted them, there wasn't a fucking thing the Americans could do. So he would invite them and Mert Perry and a bunch of others would come down and they would go on the operation. Of course, Nhon was there with us, and he didn't get such bad publicity out of that. I suppose some of the Vietnamese commanders hated his guts because of the Americans that wrote, "This guy does go out--one of the few that we've ever seen of that rank, division commander--in the field with his troops where the bullets are flying." But anyway, David wrote this article and it didn't do me any good, but it wasn't as bad as it could have been.

Now, John Vann was criticized quite a bit by Harkins and his people for talking to the press. Now, I talked to them sitting around at night and whatnot, but I wouldn't sit down and deliberately--he didn't like Cao, and John Vann, I remember one article where he said Cao was a coward. Well, I have never said things like that about Nhon, and Nhon was my friend to begin with and I wasn't about to--John was a little more intense, I think, than I, and his philosophy of how to get along with the Vietnamese was different. In the earlier part of our conversation, I alluded to that, that each adviser had a different technique of how he handled it. We were just different in those ways. But that was the thing that I have always regretted.

Later I saw General Harkins at the War College. He came as a speaker one time and I asked to be his escort officer. They made me the escort officer, and he and I got along just fine. I mean, there was no particular resentment on his part.

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And we did; we had a pretty good operation going on down there *under the circumstances*, for the times. And of course it was so damn far from Saigon that it was sort of the bread basket of--part of the bread basket--of Vietnam. But nobody, the Vietnamese didn't like to travel down there very much. Now I had quite a few visitors; the American visitors would come down. Harkins' staff itself very seldom came down.

G: Did you see General [Joseph] Stillwell? Did he come down?

L: Oh, yes, old Crazy Joe. He used to come down all the time. Joe liked it, because you'd get an operation and he liked to fly around in his helicopters and sit there with a gun and shoot them. Colonel Nhon said to me one time--he came in to land and refuel and Stillwell got out, and of course he would always have on his little jump suit, that gray thing that air force people wear, zippers in all the pockets. He had on his flak jacket and jumped back in and sitting at his gun as they took off. And Colonel Nhon said to me, "Doesn't he have anything better to do than do that? The rest of them all have corporals and sergeants there." I said, "Colonel Nhon, I don't know." But he knew damn well; he was just sticking the needle in me.

And then Joe came down one time; we had an operation. And General Timmes came down, and he [Stillwell] came down with the helicopters. Well, then he heard that Timmes was going to go in on the operation. There was a very fine captain; his name was Posey, Kern Posey [?], and he was the battalion adviser of this battalion, and they were having a bitch of a fight in this village, in getting the village away from the enemy. Well, they finally pushed them on out, and I had told him I had

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General Timmes, who was the MAAG chief, and Stillwell with me, and I was about three kilometers away, waiting. And you could hear this fight going on down here in the village. He said, "Don't bring them in now, because it's really kind of hairy in here at the moment." And then he called back on the radio and he said, "It's okay now. We've got them out of the village. Bring them in and I'll have a panel out and we'll throw some smoke and you come in there."

Well, what had happened was they cleaned out the village and then the enemy, some of them had gone around the village and behind it. So when we came in on the--the village was here and there was--pineapple fields was what it was there. As we were coming in to land, we got down to about thirty feet. I could hear all this putt, putt, putt; they were shooting at us. Some of them hit the helicopter like a big hammer hitting the helicopter and the pilot said, "Christ, they're all around." So I said, "You can't do anything else. Go ahead and land." So he was up there waiting for us, Posey was there. So we landed, jumped out and all fell down in the pineapple plants and the helicopters got the hell out of there. So then we went into the village; the village had canals in it, like that. And we were in the ditches and the canals and the fight was going on, and Christ, old Joe Stillwell was running around. And what they had done--their wounded they had put on sampans and had them in these canal ditches, so that they were out of the line of fire.

G: You're talking about the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] wounded?

L: The ARVN wounded. Our own guys--the ARVN wounded were in these sampans and we had jumped over these ditches, going over to get into the center where Posey's command post was. He had all these radios there and his

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battalion commander. And Christ, we looked around and there's Stillwell picking up these people out of the canals and bringing them up to where we were. I said, "General, for Christ's sake, just sit down. One, I don't want to get you killed, and two, they have them down there to keep them out of fire." He said, "Oh, I thought they were abandoning them." Well, of course, shit, nobody was abandoning anybody; nobody was going anyplace, to begin with. Well, this fight went on and eventually--they did break the perimeter once and got in pretty close, close enough to where we could shoot from where we were. And Timmes was very good, because he would do exactly what I told him to do. But then Stillwell was still running around with this flak jacket on, he was, I could see, getting gray just from sweating so much.

G: Heat.

L: Heat. So I gave him my canteen and some salt pills that I had, and I said, "Now, General, please stay here with General Timmes and don't run around here. You're causing us more trouble than you're doing good." And he listened. So he stayed there, but he didn't feel very well either. Anyhow, as soon as we got the place fairly well cleared and he sent some people to pursue the enemy, I called in the helicopters and we got the wounded out. And then one of the last helicopters I asked Timmes, "Would you please get out of here now, so we can really operate? Because, one, you got the battalion commander so scared that if you or Stillwell get killed here, they'll just shoot them." So he said, "Sure," and Stillwell and he left. And they went back to Bac Lieu, which was where my headquarters was. And then I stayed and we got things pretty well organized. Then I caught a helicopter out and I went

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home. And they were still there when I got there, and then they had a plane pick them up from Saigon. But it was one of the only times--and now somebody was along, I've forgotten who, Perry [?] or someone was along, one of the newspapermen, and reported that. That was about the only time a general--an American general--ever damn near got into a fire fight to begin with. Timmes still remembers that when I see him now at the old retired spooks convention; we have a meeting every quarter.

G: How is he doing?

L: Apparently he's doing fine. I don't think he's working; I don't know whether he's working or not. But it's called AFIO, Association of Former Intelligence Officers, and we meet about every quarter. It's CIA, FBI, military, NSA [National Security Agency]--but you have to be retired to belong to it; you can't still be active.

G: Right.

L: So I see General Timmes at those things.

G: Excuse me for asking, but I don't recall the intelligence part of your background. Where does that come in?

L: I started off in the intelligence business in World War II when I was with the Philippine guerrillas. Then I was an intelligence officer in an infantry regiment, and the intelligence part of the whole intelligence business with the special forces, cross-border operations and this kind of thing.

G: I see.

L: Then I was operations intelligence officer on one of the atomic testing programs, so it's run through the whole thing. But I tell you some of these old biddies, particularly from the CIA analysts that come out of

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the woodwork, Jesus, they're right of Attila the Hun, and they come to these meetings. They hate everybody that writes bad things about the intelligence or the CIA, and this guy [Frank] Snepp and whatnot. They could cut his throat if they could ever get to him. But it's fun to go because I also see people like Timmes and other--Timmes was, of course, with the CIA for a while.

But anyway, they got General Timmes out of that fight. I don't know what I was leading up to on the thing, except that that was one of the times that they did get a general out, but most of the people in Saigon say that General Harkins' chief of staff and General Harkins' intelligence officer, they didn't ever want to come down there. They weren't about to leave their little handy place at whatever that hotel's name was--I forget it.

G: The Caravelle?

L: No, not the Caravelle, that's a civilian hotel. This was Europa Nova [?]; it was a hotel where all the MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] guys at that time--

G: The Brink?

L: No, the Brink was a junior officers [hotel]. This was downtown; it was right downtown, and it was right across the way from the Caravelle.

G: I should know the name of that, but I can't recall.

L: It's where General--some of them, like Timmes, had his wife over there at the time and he lived in a villa, but everybody else, the bachelor types, either got together and lived in a villa--the generals--or they lived in this--and the funny part is I lived there myself and I can't remember. My doctor, I told him one time I'm getting to the point I

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forget things that I ought to remember. He said, "You're just having a minor hemorrhage as you get older. Just forget it. It will come back to you sometime." And it will. Probably about the time you and I break up today, I'll remember the name of that damn hotel, and you will, too, because it was there and they always had the big steak fries on Friday evenings on the roof.

I remember that he had an air force guy who was his intelligence guy, G-2, whoever he was, but he got drunk and fell down the stairs, and I used to think--I was a young, eager-beaver lieutenant colonel, brand-new lieutenant colonel. I thought it was disgusting to see these generals 1) shacking up with all these dames, 2) falling down the steps drunk, 3) they didn't have guts enough to get up and come out and see what we were doing in the field. I mean, they had no intention of ever doing it. I'm not talking about the Harkins' and the Timmes' and--there was a guy there, a little guy that was the G-3 adviser, I can't remember his name, but he was a World War II battalion commander and he had got two or three distinguished service crosses, and he obviously was damn good. But by the time he got to Vietnam, he still thought World War II was going on.

For instance, he came down to my place and we were going on this operation and he wanted to go. We had just started to issue these people boots; we hadn't; we had given them the goddamn combat boots, jungle boots and the Vietnamese were issuing them. Well, Christ, most Vietnamese don't even wear shoes. If they wear those flip-flops, they're lucky. So anyway, he came down and we were going off on an operation and the guys had on these flip-flops; they didn't have shoes on. And he



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was just raising hell with this company commander, and of course the company commander couldn't understand a word he said. So I got over there and [said], "General, what the hell's wrong?" "Well, they haven't got any shoes on." And I stopped one of the soldiers and I picked up his foot; the bottom of it looked like a truck tire. I said, "General, he doesn't need it. In the first place, they hurt his feet and he doesn't want to wear boots. Now, they will wear them for a parade, but around here when we go out, they never use them." He said, "You can't be a soldier unless you have boots." And I said, "Well, the Viet Cong don't wear them and they're pretty fucking good soldiers. They don't wear shoes or boots." "Well, we can't have it." And helmets, he wanted all of them to wear a helmet. Most of us wore those floppy hats and they were nice; they kept the rain off. Some of the guys used to turn them up on the side to look like the Aussies, but I usually let mine hang down. Plus it protected you from the sun. And then you looked like all the rest of them, which I tried to do. We were all bigger, but I thought, "I don't want to get shot." I tried to look as much like them as I could, even to the point of carrying a rifle or a carbine, because the officers who normally were strutting around with their pistol on their side, I always felt they were good targets. If I were a VC, I'd shoot them, I wouldn't shoot the other ones.

So, anyhow, that was one of the--

G: You can't recall this man's name?

L: Oh, I'm trying to think of it, and again I'll--

G: It wasn't Robert York?

L: No, no, Bob York. No, I know him well. No. This was--oh, my God, what is his name? His wife was there and I went to dinner at their house. A

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feisty little fellow, but about eight years behind the times. He hadn't any idea how unconventional warfare was run. For instance, he said, "Everybody has got to"--well, they have these little monkey bridges, that's nothing but a cross thing and a piece of bamboo in between and you walk across that. Of course, he fell in the canal trying to get across one of these things. He said, "Every soldier here should have thirty feet of rope, and then they can throw it across and they can make rope [bridges]." I said, "General, if we gave them thirty feet of rope, they wouldn't use it for that. They'd sell it in the bazaar; they aren't going to use it for what you want. It's just like the shoes; they won't wear shoes." I was constantly fighting this battle. I used to think, "How archaic can you be?" and yet he meant well, he would come down and--

G: But he was worse than no help, I gather.

L: He was worse than no help, a big pain in the ass every time he--and John Vann felt the same way about him. I mean, when he'd come--he didn't like to go to Vann's anyway, because--

G: I can imagine.

L: But General Nhon was so funny on that General Stillwell--he looked at me and very slyly said, "Hasn't he got anything better to do than ride around in a--?"

G: What about other visits from VIPs? Did you ever get visited by people like [Robert] McNamara and General [Maxwell] Taylor?

L: No. When I was there, General [Earle] Wheeler was the chief of staff and he came down one time, and we flew down--I was thinking about this not long ago. They had used the defoliants down in the Ca Mau forests,

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and he had never seen what it looked like, and so we flew down to show him from the air how they really cleared an opening where you could see down into the woods and whatnot. It was on the way back, and one of the things I think that I did that was right--some people think it was wrong--[was] I had people out with these battalions. Now, in those days they didn't send you infantry officers. Christ, you had anybody they could drum up and grab. I had artillerymen, transportation [men], all kinds of people, and I had them out as advisers to infantry battalions. I'd had about three of them killed and several of them wounded. And I was telling Wheeler that I thought these kids ought to get the combat infantry badge, because they were with the infantry, they lived with them, they were getting killed with them. And I said, "In World War II, the regiment I was in, even the cooks got it. You didn't have to be under fire; if you were just assigned to the regiment and they were in a fire fight, then everybody in the regiment got the combat infantry badge. But these kids are out there actually living under combat conditions every day and they don't have U.S. logistical support." So he got his aide over and he took down all this information and I gave it to him, and about four months later the regulations were changed that the infantry advisers at the battalion level could get the combat infantry badge. And some of them still remember; there's an artilleryman here, retired, named Raisig who was one of my best advisers.

G: What was his name?

L: Paul Raisig.

G: Would you spell it?

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L: R-A-I-S-I-G, Raisig. Outstanding young man, and to this day, he's--but he was an artillery officer, one of the few artillery officers in the U.S. Army that ever had the combat infantry badge.

G: Well, I knew several of them at Fort Sill that you probably got the combat infantry badge for.

L: Probably got it for them. But then of course it spread out over the whole thing rather than just--but as Wheeler said to me, "Is there anything that I can do for you?" And I said, "Well, not really, but that's one thing I wish you would consider, because I think they ought to have it." So they did get it.

But now he came, but I never saw General Taylor; I didn't see McNamara. I saw from the Congress Dorothy Fosdick--I don't know whether you ever knew of her, but she worked for Senator [Stuart] Symington for a long time and she's now retired here in town. But she was a member of the Foreign Relations Committee staff, and she came.

G: Sounds like an interesting visit. What was she--?

L: She was a very--Senator Symington was on the Foreign Relations Committee and Miss Fosdick, Dorothy Fosdick--her father was an educator here, named something Fosdick, in the United States, quite well known in the academic field. But she was a tough little cookie. She'd come down and people like Halberstam and others had told her; I guess Ed Rowny, too, had told her. Major General Rowny was the head of the army test thing on helicopters that they were doing out there.

G: That's a name I'm not familiar with.

L: Edward L. Rowny, R-O-W-N-Y. He's here in Washington now. He's now the U.S. strategic arms representative with the Russians.

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G: Yes.

L: But at that time he was Slavich's boss and really Stillwell's boss, but he headed up the whole thing of testing out gunships and helicopters and troop carriers and where they're having this big study program to do it. But he had told her, too, that she ought to--if she wanted to see something really going on, she ought to go down to either Vann's or my place, and she came down to my place. I guess she spent the night and went out on an operation. But she was one of the chief staff members of the Foreign Relations Committee staff. I see her every now and then up in Georgetown. She lives up there someplace; she's retired now. She must be about seventy, I'd guess.

G: You said that you knew General York.

L: Oh, yes.

G: What was he doing? What was his--?

L: He was kind of like Rowny. He was there on a special studies group that--I've got a diary. Sometime if you are ever in town a day or two, I'll show you that diary that I wrote while I was there with pictures of everything. It may say in there what York is. I should have brought it over with me today, but I just didn't think about it.

Whatever Bob York did, toward the end of my tour he had been invited to go to Singapore, and I had made arrangements to go to the British jungle school which was up near Kuala Lumpur. So he said, "Why don't you fly down with me?" And so I did. We flew down to Singapore and I always remember--I had known him professionally there in Vietnam, but he was like Rowny; he was on a special studies group, and he would come down and observe what was going on, and he had colonels around taking notes.

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But anyway, we went to Singapore. The night we were there he was invited to this guy Shaw['s home]--Run-Run Shaw, who runs the movie business or used to run it, I don't know the--to their home for dinner and he included me. So I went there and I wrote to my wife, "Beautiful home with these orchids and the garden. And after dinner--lovely dinner--we went in and he had a little theater that sat about thirty people and we watched a new movie." And the next day I went off to the British jungle school.

But I'll bet that diary of mine says what his job is, because I made a note. Every day I just kept it. I started just out of sheer boredom, in the evenings. Then I began to take pictures and then I would put them in. So I've got pictures of this fight where Timmes almost got killed. I've got some good shots of that.

G: You'll excuse me, but that sounds like a valuable historical document.

L: Oh, I think it is. Sheehan thinks it's outstanding. I mean, it--

G: What are you going to do with it?

L: I don't know yet. I was always going to write a book about something, and my wife says, "You ought to just publish it exactly like it is." She says, "Don't change anything. Just leave the pictures in it, and--" I mean, I even make comments in there, "Well, Nutty Joe Stillwell arrived today, sitting behind his machine gun." But Sheehan says it's all dates, times, people's names, jobs, operations.

G: I'd really love to see that.

L: All right, we'll see when we get through here, we may walk over and you can take a look at it.

G: Oh, you don't have to do it now. I'm going to be back in September, but I really would like to see it.

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L: Yes.

G: But whenever would suit your convenience.

L: Sure.

G: We've mentioned the press a lot. Was there a press policy for your guidance?

L: Well, I think yes, there was a press policy that you are supposed to cooperate with the press to the extent necessary. But there was more of an unwritten press thing of "stay away from them," because they never wrote anything good. Well, I found that a lot of the things they wrote simply happened to be true. But that wasn't what the authorities on the American side wanted; they didn't want the truth as it really was. They wanted the truth as they considered it to be. When I came back I went to the War College as an instructor, and Christ, they had me on the road making speeches to all kinds of people, schools and clubs and women's organizations, down to the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff].

G: What was the message you were--?

L: Well, I would tell them anything I wanted. I'd just tell them what the hell it was all about, as far as I could see. For instance, I went up to Amherst; I was invited up to Amherst to speak over there.

[Archibald] MacLeish was there and whatnot, and they had to have a series of things on Vietnam, most of them anti-Vietnam. Well, when I got there, I gave this talk and I was--I've got a great letter from the guy who was the head of the program up there. It was written to the army. They thanked them for letting me come because of all the speakers, including Archibald MacLeish, I was better received by the students. Well, I was just honest with them. I mean, they were coming

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up about "Should we or should we not commit U.S. troops?" Well, my thing was, "Absolutely not," that you can't win a war like that, that's based on economic and social and religious problems. You don't win it with bullets. You've got to get in there and change it. Then I used an example and said that it made as much sense to me to commit U.S. forces--that is divisions--in Vietnam as it would if President Johnson were to ask Chiang Kai-shek to give him twelve divisions to put along the Mason-Dixon line and separate the whites from the blacks. It would have made about that much sense to put U.S. forces in Vietnam.

I said, "In the first place, both sides are going to hate you. Whether you like it or not, they are, the same way they would with these chinks. If you had them all spread along the Mason-Dixon line, the whites wouldn't like you and the blacks wouldn't like you either." And I said, "What are you going to do, bottle up all the blacks? Or are you going to bottle up all the whites? What are you going to do in Vietnam? Are you going to bottle up the Viet Cong or are you just going to keep them away from the population? *You* can't solve the problem. The Chinese can't solve the black-white problem in the United States. Sooner or later they are all going to have to go home. And about that time it was "Hooray."

And that night I went back to my hotel, and Christ, I got a call from this guy that was the head of the program and he said, "There are about eight student leaders that would like to talk to you." I had already gone to bed. And I said, "Well, have them come on over. I'll get dressed." He said, "No, they'll come up to your room. You don't have to get dressed." So I just stayed in my pajamas. I forgot about



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girls. There were about two girls up there and I was sitting around in my pajamas. And they talked until about four o'clock in the morning. But they had never talked to anybody in the army who said things like that.

G: I can imagine.

L: So then the next day their student union paper came out and it says, "Army Speaker States U.S. Should Not Put Troops in Vietnam."

Well, I got back to the War College, and the next thing I knew they wanted to see me in the Pentagon. And so I went down there and I had an appointment with this general who was the head of public relations. I went in there and he said, "Have you seen this?" And I said, "No, I heard about it, but I haven't seen it." And he said, "Well, what have you got [to say]?" I said, "Nothing. It's absolutely true. That's the way I feel, that it would be a terrible mistake to commit U.S. forces in Vietnam." Finally, after he got over being initially angry, I explained to him what I felt and the problems in Vietnam were not solvable by Yankee bullets and bombs. That's not how you solve what's wrong in Vietnam. So then he began to agree with me, that maybe I was right. He said, "Well, be careful," and whatnot.

So I went away, and I didn't hear of it again until they did commit the marines and then on that day the War College got a cable from Washington that [said], "Cut Colonel Ladd off. He's not to speak any more about U.S. forces in Vietnam." Well, I wouldn't have. And once they did it, I was a good, honest, loyal soldier; I wasn't going to criticize them after they did it. But up to the time--and I to this day think it was a dumb fucking mistake by people--what I was getting at is

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when I got back I was astounded at the crap that later Mr. Kennedy was--no, that was before, wasn't it? Kennedy was before Johnson--how Kennedy and Mr. Johnson could be misled by reports that were coming out of Saigon. For instance, the [Daniel] Porter report laid it pretty well on the goddamn line in 1963, what the problem was south of Saigon. We didn't address the North, didn't know anything about it. But that was held out and nobody got to read the Porter report except a few people at the Saigon headquarters.

G: That was not normal procedure, was it?

L: No, it wasn't. Your end-of-tour reports were all sent to Washington, but this thing was just squelched. But no wonder they made mistakes, Kennedy, Johnson, with the shit--pardon me--the misinformation they were getting as to what was actually happening in Vietnam; no wonder they made mistakes. I mean, everything is peachy keen. Well, sure, it's peachy keen in Saigon; it's peachy keen in Nha Trang. But anybody who steps outside of the city boundaries at night, you're dead. And many of them never got out of there; they didn't even leave to go places like where I lived.

G: Did you know Rufus Phillips?

L: No.

G: Okay.

L: Is he military?

G: Well, he was an old Vietnam hand who had a lot to do with strategic hamlets.

L: Well, no, but I knew the Australian guy.

G: [Frank] Serong.

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L: Serong was there. And as I used to say--I came back on these same stories about strategic hamlets--and even while I was there, that his-- in Malaysia, which I was happy to go back there and go to the British jungle school because I got to look at it. They had basically an existing operating system of police forces that were connected out to the villages by telephone and radio, and police forces in the villages and the rebels, or whatever they called them down there--the Chinese--were operating in between the tentacles of the government that was already there in place. In Vietnam there weren't any tentacles. The government was a big body and then all around it was the enemy. And technically that was what was true. There weren't any tentacles sticking out and even the roads weren't safe, but there weren't any police stations out in the little villages; there weren't any government-operated PTTs, telephone systems, operating. They didn't operate anyplace except in Saigon.

So the whole concept of how--plus when you get down to where I lived in the Delta, the terrain didn't lend itself to a strategic hamlet. That worked fine in Malaysia where people lived in villages at creek junctions and things like that. And up north in Dalat and in northern and central Vietnam where they again lived in villages, you could have a strategic hamlet. But down where we were, were these long, damn canals and then nothing in between but flooded rice fields or dry-as-a-bone rice fields in the dry season, it just didn't lend itself. And I used to say, "This just won't work here." And that was part of the Harkins thing. It's a shame that Mr. Diem and his crowd had been sold on this strategic hamlet thing. It's fine for the North, but don't

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hold the division commanders down here responsible--which they did--that they were to have the same thing. It simply wouldn't work. But I didn't know the man you mentioned, but Serong I knew. I'd met him, talked to him, talked to him at the War College later. He came over as a speaker.

G: Did you know Bob Montague?

L: Oh, yes, I knew him quite well.

G: He worked for you at one time.

L: He worked for me when I was the III Corps G-3 adviser; he was there at the time. He had just come about the time I went down to the Twenty-first Division. But he was in the G-3 section for a brief period of time before I left. And then I saw him subsequent to that, and then he was a student when I was an instructor at the Army War College.

G: He got quite a reputation with this pacification [program].

L: Well, he got all involved in this pacification shit. Again, I think it's fine if you don't just apply it, say, to the United States of America. What are you going to do with it in the middle of Arizona? I mean, it'll work great maybe up in Ohio or someplace like that. But you get out in the desert and what do you want a strategic hamlet for? Are you going to round up all those damn people and bring them into one town? Then you've got a bunch of disgruntled people. As I always said, half of them, in the Vietnam case, were Viet Cong anyway; they were out there. I wrote some articles, one about--"The Viet Cong Portrait," I called it, and I wrote it for the *Infantry Journal*--about the family; it was written as though you were in a Vietnamese family and how the two sons would have dinner and then get up at night and move out and be gone

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all night and then come back. The sons were the Viet Cong at night; in the daytime they ran the family grocery store, or whatever the hell they did during the daytime. And the ARVN didn't like to fight at night. So you didn't get out very much at night. You'd get out in the daytime; very seldom do we ever get them out at night.

G: That seems to have been a general complaint about the ARVN. They didn't like night patrols and they didn't set ambushes.

L: No.

G: How would you assess the situation in the lower Delta when you left with that when you arrived? Had things gone uphill, downhill, on even keel? Is it possible to judge it?

L: I would guess the overall situation was probably about the same. I think all that time that year or year-plus the Viet Cong were getting stronger. I mean, more effective in what they were doing through experience, plus I think they were getting some--well, I know they were getting some help from the North because we--in four or five of our operations--I've gotten down in my storage, again, a couple of then very up-to-date Russian lensatic compasses. They were getting supplies from the North that were coming through the Soviet or from bloc countries. And there was more of that by the time I left than there was when I got there. I think that in the case of the Twenty-first Division, just like the Seventy Division, they were pretty effective for what they did. I mean, they were so--and I think they were better, both--but in my case the Twenty-first Division was a better organized and better operating entity of the Vietnamese government down there than it was when I got there, just like I think Vann's was, in his area, better when he left.

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Now, the guy that relieved me, took my place, was a fellow named Cushman, Jack Cushman, and he had been up in Saigon. I had known Jack in high school; we played football together. But Jack was another one, a very great friend of Montague's and very obsessed with this pacification and [the] strategic hamlet. He wrote to me; he'd write me letters about the oil-spot technique of how you put it and it slowly expands out. Well, I used to think that--again, in the Delta that's a crock of shit; I mean, it won't work there. You have to have a whole different kind of program. But anyway, so he was the division commander [adviser] after I left. And shortly after I left, General Nhon left and went to Saigon and got promoted. He was a colonel; he got promoted to a general, and he went up there and did something else. So I don't know what happened really to the Twenty-first Division much afterwards.

And Jack Cushman is a hell of a good soldier, but I know most of his letters to me in his year there were focused on this pacification business. I had all the respect in the world for pacification, but I just thought it was totally impractical down there, unless some way was found to get the influence of the government out far enough that the people there could rely on it. The trouble is they couldn't. You could be there one day; you could stay there five days, but as soon as you went home, again, the Viet Cong moved in. And they knew that was going to happen. So I felt it was just sort of a rather hopeless thing out there. The way to get them was to get the Viet Cong and try to eliminate them, so that they didn't have this stranglehold. And then that got beyond my capabilities, because you have to really go after who were the leaders down there in my area, and I could never find out who the goddamn leaders were.

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G: The intelligence just wasn't very good.

L: The intelligence wasn't there. "That guy in that village," in Vietnamese intelligence, or they weren't telling us if it was, "is really the head one." Who were they in Saigon? They were all over Saigon, I'm sure; that's where I say the VC taxes were paid. But they weren't doing anything that I could see to get them and close that off. They wanted the trucks to go up and down the road. It was more important than putting the guy in the clink. I mean, I don't know. But I say it was beyond the ability, or the capability, of a division adviser to address what I'm addressing now and make any sense out of it. That's why I say I'm not panning strategic hamlets and pacification. I just think that in the Delta you couldn't do it that way. There had to be another way and the only way I knew to do it was to get the enemy that was causing the trouble, and I couldn't find out who the leaders were. So in a sense I wasn't successful at all.

We helped the division, I think; I think the division was better. It understood more about logistics, on what you needed to support; it understood more about fire support, air and artillery and naval. We used all three in some of the operations. They learned, but I don't think we--I don't think it was--I think the enemy was stronger when I left.

G: Both sides got more proficient.

L: Yes, both sides got more proficient. But the Vietnamese were just not in a position or did not want to put the screws on them hard enough to--

G: I think even the communists later said that 1962 was Diem's year. That was when the first helicopters came in, the first APCs [armored person-

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nel carriers] came in, and the VC found that hard to deal with; but by 1963 they had learned to deal with it fairly well.

L: Well, they dealt with it fairly well. See, the APCs were pretty well confined to the roads. Now, you can get them off, but every time we ever used them, if you used eight of them, four of them would bog down in those goddamn rice paddies, because it wasn't water, it was just deep, thick mud. And they would just stir it up even more, and then they'd get bellied up on the thing, and you'd have to go in and tow them out. So the only place they really worked like a damn was up and down the roads. And they were like having a tank, in effect.

G: You could use them pretty well in the dry season.

L: Oh, yes, in the dry season, drive them across those--but in the dry season the enemy didn't come out and move around that much. You didn't catch him. He was smart enough not to do that. They used to have these great--I felt in many of their movements, they'd burn off the rice fields the stubble that was left in the rice fields. And you'd get these great hazes like a smoke screen over acres or miles and miles of the Delta. And I knew they were moving around under that stuff, because you couldn't see through it from an airplane. I was sure that they were moving things; they were moving things like trucks with radio equipment. They could get all that moved around and nobody would ever know it. Then when the stuff finally goes away two days later everything looks just like it did before. They would dig those goddamn holes in the road. They would look like--they'd do that under the cover of that. They'd do it at night, but in this they could do it all day long; nobody could see what they were doing. Then you'd go to drive down that road



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or fly down it and you'd look and see, shit, they'd dug another thirty holes which--

G: Stops the vehicular traffic.

L: Stops the wheeled vehicular traffic, and of course that's what they relied on mostly for everything, buses. People moved around on buses, produce was moved. Now, down in the Delta they also moved a lot of it on canal boats, but they could block those canals, too. They could put logs and whatnot out and get the canal blocked and then stop them and make them pay tax.

G: Now, you left Vietnam and went to the War College, is that right?

L: I went to the Army War College, yes, as an instructor. I had just graduated from the Army War College when I went there and then I went back as an instructor for three years.

G: What did you teach at the War College?

L: I taught Unconventional Warfare and the Developing Countries.

G: How big a block of instruction was that in the--?

L: I'd say it was about an eighth. The section that was for that was about one-eighth of a course, but it was of course scattered in and out. Other courses, we would have an influence on them, but your basic block of instruction was about I'd say one-eighth, maybe one-ninth of the whole course. See, the basic course of the War College was on strategy and Europe and the Middle East, and this was just a piece of it.

But of course at that time when I went back, when I went there, very few regular army officers had ever been to Vietnam. So I was one of the first over there. Then when I came back a little over a year later to the War College, I was again one of the first that had ever

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been there. It had not then become *the* thing to do, to get your brownie points, was to go over there. So there weren't very goddamn many people that had any experience with it at all, and I was one of them that had. And that was really why I was put in that developing areas and counter-insurgency or insurgency-type forces. And they were just beginning then in the army to recognize that--I don't think they ever have totally recognized the insurgency/counterinsurgency [situation]. I think that was one of the main problems with our forces. After that, when I was there with the special forces, we were on thirty-day long-range patrol. They were never on that. Maybe two companies would be out doing that. They would go out in battalion and regimental-size--I'm talking about the divisions, the various American divisions.

And just as when I was there with the Vietnamese divisions, the enemy knew exactly when they were going and where they were going and they knew exactly what time they were going to leave. I think before they ever left the compounds they knew that, because a lot of these guys, again, were shackled up with women--the soldiers--and they'd tell them, "I'm going to be away for two weeks on an operation." And the next thing you know it would be out, and the enemy would just get out of their way. And so you'd have these great movements of troops and they'd never run into the enemy. They weren't going to fight a U.S. division.

General [Stanley] Swede Larson had the III Corps area, which was the area my troops were in. When he went home, his farewell address to the whole MAAG and MACV was, "Every major engagement that the III Corps U.S. forces were in was initiated by the special forces." Because we'd get out there and get ourselves in a bind where actually you're in the

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middle of an NVA [North Vietnamese Army] or a VC division, and then they'd come and have Operation Hambone or something and be out there for two or three days or weeks and have a pretty good brawl. But he said, "Every single major engagement was initiated by the special forces." When they tried to initiate something, the people would just get out of the way. I used to say, "But if I were the fucking enemy, I'd get out of the way. I wouldn't stand up deliberately and challenge an American division." But if you get caught thinking you are jumping these little special forces rag-tag outfits, and of course we'd get one and I always put one behind where I thought they were, too. Sometimes I was right in the middle of them, but then you get them fighting both ways, and then I'd be screaming like hell to people like Larsen, "Come get us. We're in trouble."

G: Did you have trouble getting him to come get you?

L: No. Hell, no, they loved it. I mean, they liked to--

G: Junction City got started like that.

L: Yes, it got started with the special forces. But they didn't object to it; they liked it a lot. But they couldn't do it by themselves, because again everything they did was known. You just can't crank up a U.S. infantry division and move it out when some guy can just be on the hill, on the side of the hill there. And if he's got a little radio, he can say, "They're getting ready; I can see them all, the tank trucks are all there. They'll probably go out in the next two hours. They're going out this morning; here they go. See, there's one battalion, two battalions; there's a artillery brigade in the middle. The helicopters are now taking off flying north." Because they've only got to have people

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down on the ground listening for them, and they know exactly where the hell they're going. That's why they never ran into anybody. I always liked old Swede Larsen for that, because he gave us credit for at least starting it.

But the reason I got back on that was I don't think the army even today--of course they've got very few people left now who've been involved in that kind of--I'm talking about insurgency, because I don't claim that what the First Division and the Fourth Division or whatnot did in Vietnam--that wasn't counterinsurgency. They just fought "regular." But there aren't many people left. For instance, in the special forces I don't know of anybody who is left.

G: Well, in the special forces there's only about fifteen hundred people in the whole thing.

L: Yes, in the whole damn thing. As I say, they just--and their basic mission in the special forces is to train and send these A teams into areas where they then organize, equip, train, logistically supply and advise indigenous troops. They don't go do the fighting themselves.

G: Right. They are the guerrillas; they are not trying to find the guerrillas.

L: No, and the guerrillas come to them and get their training and then the special forces arranges to have ammunition flown in and weapons brought in by helicopter or by submarine. Then you see to the issuing of it and the training and help them on planning operations.

But you don't go out there like John Wayne--because he played the part I was in, the commander of the Fifth Special Forces. He came to me and said he wanted to see how I dressed, what I wore, and when he got

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through in the whole thing, he said, "What do you think?" And I said, "Well, Duke, the damn--you got in eighty minutes what happened in two and a half years, but it's more than what happened. You just went from one crisis to the other." He had to laugh and said, "Yes, that's true." But he said, "After all, it is a movie." But the special forces really haven't been used for what they were intended for in a hell of a long time. Some of these teams I guess that they send down to El Salvador, or something like that, may do the training and whatnot, but in Vietnam we trained them and although they had their own Vietnamese special forces commander, our guys were right along with them to help them.

G: Was that the LLDB, is that what--?

L: LLDB, yes.

G: That was the Vietnam Special Forces.

L: And they finally became fairly good, but they always had U.S. teams along with them, which is not what happened in the Philippines. The few of us that were down there, we didn't go out there. I mean, we'd help them plan, but they'd go off and ambush the goddamn Japanese; the Americans didn't go off and do it and lead them along in the charge. I wasn't about to get near them. (Laughter)

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

G: All right, sir. Now, after your War College assignment, you, it seems to me, made a kind of a dramatic side-step in your career pattern. You went into special forces. How did that come about?

L: Well, I had been teaching at the War College, or [was] an instructor there, in the developing areas/counterinsurgency field and writing several articles about counterinsurgency-type operations. I'd been down

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to Fort Bragg several times and talked to General [William] Yarborough and some of the others who were in the special forces, Don Blackburn, that crowd. And they sort of encouraged me to go into it, so I felt, why not? It was just about that simple.

So through the efforts of other people--I mean it wasn't a conscious effort on my part to write letters or anything. When my tour was finished with the War College, I was assigned to the First Special Forces Group and then went to Bragg for training and then on out. And I enjoyed it; it was doing the kinds of things that I liked to do.

G: Were you already airborne qualified?

L: Yes. [In] World War II, I was airborne qualified. It just appealed to me more and I thought there was a challenge in the special forces. As you probably know, to a great extent a lot of people resented the special forces, because they were sort of an elite outfit and they had, particularly in Vietnam, where they operated under that special funding process that was not under the army; they were totally separate from the army as far as the funding of the operations. And it just seemed to me to be sort of a challenging thing, to try to bring the special forces around where people would have respect for them. I knew they were capable people, and it just appealed to me.

G: So after you got this special forces training, did you go directly to Okinawa?

L: To the First Special Forces Group in Okinawa.

G: Which was kind of a stepping stone, I gather, toward--

L: Generally that was what had happened. The First Group commander would then go and command the Fifth Group in Vietnam. And the First Group was

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a fascinating assignment. They had what they called--I can't think of the name of it now, but something-Asia, and we had connections with the Koreans, the Filipinos, the Thais, the Vietnamese, the Laotians. All of their special forces groups were tied into special forces planning for future operations that might be more in line with exactly what special forces were supposed to do. For instance, we had teams there that were set out for operations in China; they spoke Chinese. They had teams that were set up for operations in Korea, in the Philippines. And we would go work with the special forces of those countries on operations and maneuvers, joint planning missions.

That was where I had one of my big tangles with some of people in the special forces, because when I was at Bragg I noticed they would have, say, for people to operate in Africa, they'd have a big Nordic blonde guy and he'd stand up and say, "I speak Swahili," and he did speak Swahili. And then they'd have a Mexican, [that] would be his thing, and my whole thought was if you're going have a--having been in the Philippines and been in Vietnam once, [I thought] that if you're going to operate in an enemy country, you at least ought to look like the sons of bitches and not look like somebody that was from--and I used to say that you put a bunch of Japanese in the middle of Nebraska and how the hell long are they going to last? They're not going to last very long. And I don't care whether they speak perfect English or not, they're simply not going to--the farmers are too damn smart. "Look at that gook or whatever it is I've seen out there. What are they doing out there?" I said I think you ought to take your Latin types and Spanish-speaking people for use in South America and build your whole

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team around them, so they look like them. And your people that are going to work in China should be your American Chinese, should be your Nisei Japanese, possibly if we have any second-generation Koreans; one that looks like an oriental ought to be there. But I could never sell that to them, that I think you're just whistling Dixie if you think you're going to get away with sending a bunch of Yankees into the middle of Hunan Province and expect them to last very long.

And we proved that down in Korea. We had an exercise with them which we went in and I had two teams, one I made up of all orientals and the other one was just a standard one. And they were to go in, and they had solicited the help of retired Korean soldiers who were going to--so they would have to do what special forces did, organize guerrilla groups. And of course there was a--the Korean army was in effect the enemy, and so they knew we were going to operate in their area--or in Korea; they didn't know where. But we sent these two teams in by HALO, high altitude-low opening, and got them in, got both teams in. The oriental team lasted till the end of the maneuver. The Caucasian team was scroffed up the second day they were there, and mainly by a little kid going to school. One of the guys had gone to the edge of--they were in the mountains--this trail, and he was taking a leak, and a little kid was walking to school and walked right by him. And as soon as he got to school he told the schoolteacher he'd seen a big old Yankee up there, and he told the police, and the next thing you know they went up and rounded up the whole lot of them.

So anyway, that's neither here nor there. But one of the things that I felt, and I still feel, with the special forces, if you're going



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to operate in Nebraska, you better get some people that look like Nebraska types and speak like Nebraska types, not like guys out of Harlem or something like that, because they don't have that kind of person in Nebraska. So, anyhow, that's how I got it.

And then I went to the First Group and I enjoyed that meeting with all the--one of the fun things was you'd go to all these different places. Japan, I went up and worked with the Japanese. But you jump with them and you wound up with a collection of jump wings from practically every country except North Vietnam in the Far East. I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a lot of fun. It was actually in a way more fun than the special forces in Vietnam.

(Interruption)

But as I was saying, I enjoyed the Okinawa thing. It was quite a challenge and interesting and more of the type thing special forces were supposed to do than in Vietnam, where in effect they were advisers to the Vietnamese special forces.

G: When you finally went back to Vietnam and took command of the Fifth Special Forces, what general categories of missions were assigned to the 5th Special Forces? What were they doing at this period?

L: They were doing mostly reconnaissance, intelligence reporting and reconnaissance of the enemy. We had, I think then, sixty-two or -three camps that ran from the DMZ in the North generally along the Laotian-Cambodian border, but inland, some of them were inland down to the South China Sea or Phu Quoc Island, which is off the tail end of Vietnam, was where our southernmost camp was. And really in most cases they were on reconnaissance and intelligence missions to find the enemy, keep track

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of the enemy, in some cases find them and hold them if you had these long-range patrols. We had a long-range patrol school and we'd send these people, and they'd go out in about company strength and be gone for thirty days, just disappear into the woods, and they would only contact us with this--we had those immediate-burst type messages. Then when we would for instance resupply those people with ammunition and medical supplies and some food--but mostly they ate off the land--they would usually call in an air strike in the vicinity. Not where they were, but near where they were. And they would bomb and then they would drop these napalm containers that were full of the supplies, so that it would appear that there was an air strike in this area. Then they would go out and pick up these containers. And they often would run into and follow VC and NVA movements, particularly in the Central Highlands and the northern part. As you got down in the South again, it gets wide open where it's hard to operate on a thirty-day patrol without being seen, where they could do that up through the jungles.

G: And these are the so-called Project Sigma?

L: No, those were SOG [Studies and Observation Group] projects and that was a separate thing run out of Saigon, and primarily their missions were cross-border missions of one kind and another. I'm not familiar with all of them; I was with some. Our camps, those sixty-some camps, some of them were bases of operations for the SOG missions, so you would have in that camp, often, say about two or three companies of the special forces mercenaries that belonged to me.

G: And these were Nungs primarily?

L: Well, it depends. Nungs and Jarai and Cham, depending on where the hell you were. Nungs were mostly down in the southernmost part, and Montag-

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nard. And they belonged to me, say in Camp A. They also have a detachment of fifty people who belonged to the SOG people who were in that same camp, but they would stage out of there on cross-border operations. If they had to go on a rescue mission, those fifty would stage out of there to go rescue people. And operationally we had nothing to do with them, but administratively and logistically we supported them while they were in the camp, and then we went about with our own reconnaissance missions. Of course, if the camp happened to be attacked, which some of them were, by the VC, NVA, at some point or other, they'd all fight together. And they'd have their section of the perimeter.

G: Right.

L: But basically they did not belong in the Daniel Boone, the Sigma--now, the Delta Project was mine. The Delta was a long-range reconnaissance program.

G: What part of Vietnam did that operate out of? All over?

L: All over Vietnam. Wherever we needed it, we sent it. And they had about six companies--some of them Cham, some of them were Montagnard--but we used them all over Vietnam wherever we needed really reinforcements or an interdiction force or something like that, where we already committed people and then we could call on Delta to go.

G: Did they go across the border, too?

L: No, no; not intentionally. We didn't go. I mean, occasionally I think we got them hung up over there fighting right on the edge, but that was not their mission. They weren't to cross the border.

G: That was SOG.

L: That was totally SOG, was the cross-border operations.

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G: Okay.

L: SOG of course had the big headquarters in Saigon, where Jack Singlaub and the commander of it was, and then they had a large place at Danang, a headquarters at Danang, again totally disassociated from mine. But out in the camps--as I say, they used our camps that were there as staging bases. But I had really nothing to do--and occasionally when I would go to Saigon Singlaub would brief me on what they were doing. But unless he did that, I had no way of knowing what the hell they were doing, even though they were operating out of the camp. And the lieutenants that worked for me would be transferred to SOG, or they'd go home and come back and do a tour of duty with SOG, or they'd been in the First. So if there was one camp, I could go up and say, "What are you doing?" and they'd tell me. I mean, it wasn't that they were keeping it a particular secret from me, but it really wasn't any of my business. My mission was not--other than to support them, mine was not to take part in the operations, and I didn't. I stayed as far away from it as I could.

G: What about this operation, this B-57 unit?

L: Well, B-57 was in the Fifth Special Forces, but it worked under G-2 of MACV.

G: It didn't work for CIA?

L: Well, I suppose they did some things through [Theodore] Shackley and the embassy, but they had a--I finally moved that whole gang up to Nha Trang, because I was going through Saigon one time shortly after I had arrived there--

G: Which was when?

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L: This was 1967 in, say, June or July of 1967, somewhere around there. I saw this scroungy-looking jeep, had the dirtiest-looking people in T shirts with special forces berets, and on the back of the jeep it had Fifth Special Forces markings and a number that I had never seen before, like B-57 or something. I hadn't gotten around that far in my briefings that I'd been briefed on what this outfit was, and so I stopped it and it was weaving in and out of traffic and I [said], "Who in the fuck are you and where did you steal this jeep?" They [said], "Oh, no, we're special [forces]." I said, "Well, you take me to your commander now if you're special forces. I want to see him." So they took me, they took me to this house in town there, and I went in and sure enough there was this major that he called. I went to his office and I said, "What in Christ's name is going on?" He was trying to explain to me, and I said, "Well, to hell with it." So I got his name. I only had my driver, this Montagnard driver, By, with me. So I went back to our headquarters in Saigon and asked them and, oh, yeah, they knew who they were, but they didn't know what they were doing. And I called up Bill [Charles] Simpson, who was still up there and got him.

G: In where?

L: In Nha Trang, where our headquarters were. He was my deputy then. And I said, "Who are these horse's asses running around here? They look like hell, they haven't shaved, they're dirty. I know they're catting out because they live in a house downtown and I could hear women giggling all over the place." He said, well, General [Phillip] Davidson, who was the G-2, ran them. So then I went to Westmoreland and he told me to go ahead and see Davidson. So I went up and asked him who the

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hell are these bastards. And so when I finally got back to Nha Trang, I got briefed. They were getting around to it, and they had just never gotten that far.

G: Did Davidson know who they were?

L: Oh, hell, yes, he knew who they were. I told Davidson--I sent down a lieutenant colonel who was in the command, just arrived new, but special forces. I said, "You go down there and you get that major and you shake that fucking place up. I don't want them running around town in their T shirts and dirty, and they're going to be shaved. And if there are any women, throw them out, because I'm coming down there in about a week." I found out they had three safe houses. Shit, they had all kind of stuff. So by then it was going on toward Christmas, and I told General Davidson, I said, "I want an order from you that those people--either I command them or you command them, but you give it to me in writing that they're yours and then you can transfer them to any MI [military intelligence] unit you want to." And I found out a lot of them weren't special forces, they were MI types, but they all wore the berets. That was their cover, supposed to be. So my point was, if you're going to be the cover, you're going to damn well act like special forces people and not like a bunch of renegades out--Davidson wouldn't give me this in [writing], so I told him, "I'm going to move the whole goddamn lot of them up to Nha Trang."

G: Why wouldn't he give it to you in writing?

L: I don't know. I don't know why. But I said, "I'm going to move them all to Nha Trang. They can stand reveille with my people and they can operate out of there, and if you want to have an office for them down

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here where--you don't need all of them down here." I had learned then about what they were doing and they didn't need that damn many people. If they wanted to call on them, they could call on them to come down and they could operate, but they weren't going to shack up around Saigon like they were doing. So I moved them; the day before Christmas, I moved the whole damn lot of them up to Nha Trang. We had had a couple of barracks built for them, and they began to stand reveille just like everybody else did up there. When they were in Nha Trang, they stood reveille, but on operations, of course not, but--

G: What were they doing?

L: I don't know what all they were doing. And really it wasn't any of my business, but they were a part of the Fifth Special Forces Group and I kept saying that--

G: Who gave them their operations orders?

L: Davidson gave them their ops. As far as I know, Davidson did.

G: You just furnished the people.

L: And I furnished the people and I furnished the logistical support and, as I say, a lot of them were not special forces. Well, this guy [Robert] Marasco and a lot of them were never special forces people; they were MI types. But I don't care who they were, as long as they were in the Fifth and were using Fifth jeeps and wearing the Fifth hat and the flashes and whatnot, they were going to damn well act like Fifth Special Forces soldiers and not like a bunch of bums. So we had that great old hassle. So a lot of them didn't like me at all, because it did cut into their catting around town.

G: Yes.

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L: And anyhow--now McCarthy was a part of that crowd.

G: John McCarthy?

L: John McCarthy. Now, they had a place out at Hao Na Tao [?], which was someplace between Saigon and Bien Hoa. You remember, it was off the highway there. That was one of their--they had that as an operational base, and that's where they had their indigenous types. I didn't move the indigenous types; I moved just the Yankees, moved them up. They kept that all out at Hao Na Tao, and he was operating out of Hao Na Tao when he shot the double agent.

G: You think he did shoot him?

L: I think so. I don't have any reason not to.

G: You did the Article Thirty-two investigation?

L: Yes, and preferred the charges and sent him down to Long Binh, to USARV [United States Army, Vietnam].

G: Did you follow the case after that?

L: I tried to follow it as much as I could, but they wouldn't let you in, so I couldn't get anybody in to see it. I would get what I could from General [Bruce] Palmer when I would go down there and he would tell me. It didn't last that long, I mean the case wasn't--the next thing I knew he was given life and sent to Leavenworth, and was gone before I ever saw him again. And I heard from him on several occasions. I'd say, in the couple of years he was in the clink, I may have heard from John six times.

And I answered his letters. One time he was writing to tell me that he was going nuts because they had him in a room and he had a radio and he could go to the library occasionally and he had plenty of writing



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materials, but he just was doing nothing; he was just sitting. And he even had his meals brought to him. So I wrote and said, "Why don't you petition the disciplinary barracks commander that you'd like to work, if you want to work, because I know at Leavenworth they have the farm there, they've got other kinds of things that you could do; and that you'd like to eat in the mess hall with the rest of the people, you want to talk to somebody from time to time." So apparently he did and he did then work.

For a while he worked on one of the farms and then he was made-- they had a stable at Fort Leavenworth, mostly for the children, and they had horses, several horses. He was made the guy who physically ran the stable, cleaned the stalls, took care of the horses, and he would leave the big barracks, Leavenworth lock-up, and walk to wherever the stable was and work all day, and then in the evenings he'd come back. But he always was in these quarters; he was never quartered in cells or--he was a captain in the army and they just--but under close supervision the whole time he was there.

G: Sounds like he was kind of under house arrest rather than--

L: House arrest more than anything else. So then, as I say, I heard from him two or three times. Then of course when [Robert] Rheault got into trouble, I heard from him and he wanted to know what I knew of that. Well, I didn't feel free to tell him what I knew of it, but I told him I certainly thought it was a reflection on his case. So then he got his lawyers, not at my instigation but when Rheault was finally let go, when they let that whole bunch go, his lawyers immediately showed up at the Pentagon and said, "All right, now what are you going to do about this

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one?" And so they let him out, too. They said, "We'll spill the beans. He's still a captain and he's there, and why is he?"

So then they let John out, but now John wasn't kicked out of the army. Actually what happened is he had been sending his money home to his wife and he called her--he got out and called her, said he was catching the bus down to go to wherever they lived, Dallas, or wherever, and he would get in on the bus at such and such a time. Well, he was met there by her lawyer, whom she later married, who gave him his divorce papers. She hadn't even told him that, that he had been divorced from her, and she was still collecting all his pay. So he called me and said he had to come to Washington; he had to 1) get that allotment stopped right away, without this stuff of two months to stop it. And he also had to determine what the hell was going to happen to him. So he did; he came to Washington and got his allotment stopped and he got orders to Huachuca, Arizona. He went to Huachuca and while he was there I heard from him a couple of times there. He had various jobs at Huachuca, and then I think he just decided that he wasn't going to go anywhere in the army, he was--he didn't want to become an old over-age-in-grade captain. So he finished his--whatever they do. Got out. He was a reserve officer, I would guess. He went off active duty, and then I didn't hear from John for a long time until maybe a year or so ago, and he called me about he was going to--it was after he had been with the police in Florida, and he had come up here and he was staying with Bill Simpson a year and a half ago or so. And he was planning to go to Venezuela in some sort of a mining thing. I guess I had lunch with him or something. Then again for about a year, and about four or five

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months ago I heard from him again and he was back again visiting Bill Simpson.

The first time he came I took him over to see General Palmer. That was where his first connection with Palmer--where General Palmer had suggested that he ought to take this story and get it really written up by somebody that could make either a damn good semi-factual novel out of it or just make a novel out of it. But he said, "I would keep it factual," because Bruce Palmer felt that a lot of these things should be exposed: Why wasn't he ever made a prisoner? And why is it that today he still can't get a job, even though he was reinstated in the army, served two years, honorably discharged, charges supposed to be dropped, but every time he gets a [background] check it comes back that he's an ex-con of Leavenworth, a murderer?

G: Who would know the answer to those questions?

L: Well, Bruce, I think that I can see his point as a four-star retired general; he's not about to get involved in digging into it himself, particularly. But I don't know who would know. And he said that John has apparently tried through all sorts of channels to find out why this is so, and he said the only way you're going to do it is like some of these other things, just expose it in the press and then let them worry about it. But make it, as he said, not a novel, only make enough truth in it that it's got a point; that here you've got this man now going on forty years old, who can't get a job, although the army did take him back in and he served. But the army won't do anything for him and he can't find out why every time he goes to get a job that his record has not been at least cleared to the point that he did get an honorable dis-

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charge. But he said, "I would just get somebody very good and write that up. And come up with a--" Well, a good one would be somebody like David Halberstam to delve into it, get all the facts and come up and then ask some very piercing questions.

G: Well, it seems to me they're waiting to be asked.

L: I would think so, too. But he called me about a month ago and he's off first to Arizona, I guess, and then eventually he hopes to go to Venezuela with this mining operation.

G: Did you have any dealings with the [Edward] Lansdale people in the sixties?

L: No. I knew Ed, but [I had] nothing to do with whatever he was doing.

G: How about ex-Colonel Vann, retired Colonel Vann, when he was back?

L: Back here, you mean?

G: No, when he went back as a civilian to Vietnam.

L: No, because when I ran into John Vann again was when I was in Cambodia. I was a civilian myself with the State Department, so I only saw John on a couple of occasions. One time I think it was lunch with General [Creighton] Abrams at his home, because he knew John and I had been friends. And I think one time with Fred Weyand, I mean General Weyand. He got us together for something. In fact, he worked for Weyand. I mean, he was--

G: He was a senior CORDS [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development] man.

L: He was a senior CORDS man, so he worked for Weyand when Weyand was MACV, I guess. So Fred got us together, but again, not on any business-type thing, it was just he knew that we had known each other.

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G: Let's switch to an operational topic of considerable notoriety. Where were you when the Tet offensive broke?

L: Actually, when the Tet offensive broke, I was just finishing my R&R in Hawaii; I was in Honolulu, and actually I was leaving and on my way back. It happened actually while I was en route back, and when I got back I went up to Nha Trang and they were still fighting around the edges of Nha Trang, but the basic--they'd been run out. They came into Nha Trang, and except for the outskirts, they'd been run out of Nha Trang by the time I got back.

But of course we had these damn camps all over Vietnam and of course the A camps were the outposts; they had maybe three to four hundred people. And then we had B detachments that controlled three or four A detachments, and then we had C detachments that were usually co-located in the headquarters where the corps commanders--now in III Corps that wasn't true. They were not there in Nha Trang where my headquarters was; they were out at--oh, Christ, I can't remember the name of the place. But Can Tho was one of them; one of them was in Can Tho. One of them, [a] C detachment, was in Danang. Then where was the other? Oh, the other was around Bien Hoa, Saigon, wherever that corps area headquarters was. And then there was the one where I was and that was not located at Nha Trang, where the corps headquarters was. It was located inland and almost directly west of Nha Trang. I can't think of the name of it.

But anyway, a lot of these were involved. For instance, when I got there they were looking for people to help with areas like down at Phu Tho Racetrack and down in Saigon where they were. So General West-

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moreland asked me if I could help there, I mean, if we could help. Well, we did. We sent him about six or seven companies of Montagnards, out of the hills, and they cleaned up the Phu Tho Racetrack and got them out of there.

Down in the Cham area south of Nha Trang, they used the special forces to go in and clean up. I don't remember all of them, but I mean they used them, because they weren't bothering us at all except in a place like Nha Trang, where you had a headquarters. But all these sixty-three A camps were sitting out--we had noticed before this Tet happened. Before I left to go to Hawaii, I had told General Abrams that there was something wrong, because our people on these long-range patrols and our intelligence network, we haven't seen any damn enemy out there for about three weeks. There just hasn't been anybody. We can't find them. They're either on the other side, Laos and Cambodia, or they've infiltrated and they're between us and the ocean. But we haven't seen a soul out at these camps. And so when they did attack these various places, we were--and after I got back, which was--they had their hands full right there in Nha Trang, the headquarters, because they busted through, and came up to--well, the big prison was just down from the special forces camp and they tried to free those prisoners, and they didn't. I mean, they got run off. And they came into town and they went to--there was a name of a restaurant there and I can't think of it, right in the center of town. They got about as far as that restaurant and then got run off.

But we had practiced with the air force. I had talked to the commander of the air base on several occasions, that our camp faced to the

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west; we had that defensive part of the Nha Trang perimeter. But if anything ever happened inside, I said, "The problem is you've got to go all the way around your damn airfield," which was a big airfield. It would take us some time--it's about a twenty-minute ride to get all the way around. "We ought to have some way that I can send my people into your air base and across the air base and protect that flank of your place. This flank is all right." So we had two or three dry runs of that at night. They would just stop all landings for an hour or so, except emergencies, and we would dry-run this thing of running three or four companies across the airfield. So when it happened, we had practiced it and they knew not to shoot our people. They knew who the hell they were; the air force guards knew who they were. So they were able to get them through and stop them in town before they ever actually got as far as either the airfield or our base or any of the real big military establishments.

Now, up north of town where the NCO academy was, we had to send people up there to help them out because they didn't get onto the grounds for that. But most of the work after the first initial onslaught was sending the special forces--I simply sent detachments or companies to wherever General Westmoreland needed them--

G: Kind of a reaction force?

L: --as reaction forces. We had a lot of them; I had close to, I guess, a total of forty thousand of them, and of that group probably a good thirty thousand of them were combat-trained in company formations with their own heavy mortars. So it was about the largest single command in Vietnam. There weren't any of them that had more than that.

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G: The size of two big American divisions.

L: Yes, as I say, it was the largest command. That's one of the things General Abrams said when I left, "You've got one of the biggest commands here."

G: Do I understand you to say that during the Tet offensive the enemy largely just avoided the A camps and--?

L: They avoided the A camps completely. As far as I know, I don't remember any A camp that had any--they were busy. Remember, they had infiltrated into the towns and villages, Can Tho, Bien Hoa, Saigon, Nha Trang, Danang, into the little town near Cam Ranh Bay. But they were in there when they started and what they had done was bypass us. So I don't remember that any of the A detachments were attacked, as such. They had left them and gone after the--where I think that logically they felt if they could win and get the people--well, there weren't any. The only people at the A camps were these mercenaries that we had and they would have fought them down to the last guy, so there wasn't much point in going after them.

But in Nha Trang, as you probably have heard from others, there were just--when I got there, we'd go through the streets, and they had these bundles lying in the streets of triangular pennants, blue with a peace dove on them. They had all these things, and found out later those were for the people to come out and wave in victory, that peace--

G: The general uprising is here.

L: Yes, the general uprising. And then they had potloads of those things, and Viet Cong flags, North Vietnamese flags. I'm like most of the military who were there; I think operationally the Tet offensive was a



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total disaster, but psychologically, again by the way sometimes our press handled it, it was a victory for them. Because they came out, everybody thought, smelling like a rose. But really they got the hell beaten out of them, and they didn't succeed in any single place to achieve their objective. They just got the hell kicked out of them in the end. But psychologically it was through our own fault, too, I think in reporting it falsely and the interpretation put on it by some of the media people. Some of the interpretation put on by some of the military intelligence people was, to me, faulty. They just didn't know what the hell was going on.

G: I think CIA reported that pacification had been set back.

L: Yes, God knows, ten years or five years or whatever it is. I felt in one way it was good; it did wake everybody up to the fact that this can happen here and you better shape up to it. Then subsequently while I was still there they lost Khe Sanh, and it began to show them that you aren't--and I used to think the same dumb thing about the old Dien Bien Phu. Every time I flew into Khe Sanh, I'd think about that because that place was to me a trap, to have all those marines in that goddamn place. And they had their own rules; they wouldn't let them out. You'd go in and they'd be mortaring you, and the marine commander wouldn't let even my people--I'd say, "Let me send my people out there. We'll go out there and stop it." At least you go up and interfere with it, but no, you couldn't leave the base. He didn't want you to go outside the base.

G: That was [David] Lowndes?

L: Yes, Fred Lowndes. I could never understand that mentality of trying to fight a war. Then I said, "It's just like Dien Bien Phu, you'll sit

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there till they're ready to kick the shit out of you," which is what happened.

G: What about Lang Vei?

L: Lang Vei was a pretty good camp. It was about six kilometers to the west and southwest, I guess, of Khe Sanh, right on the Lao border. And I'd been out there the day before and they kept telling me, "There are tanks. We can hear them operating over on the other side, at night particularly." And I went out there the day before Lang Vei was attacked. Of course, you didn't hear anything in daytime and there was nothing really going on, but they were in pretty good shape.

Now there was Lang Vei, the new camp, that was all built underground. It was one of the new ones we were testing, and we put in all the aeriels and the antennae underground. And then old Lang Vei was about a kilometer away where the camp had originally been, off toward Khe Sanh. So then the next morning when I heard Lang Vei had been attacked by both tanks and infantry and that there were three tanks in the damn thing, on top of it, they had broken through the wire and come in. Did you ever talk to Dan Schungle?

G: No.

L: Well, he was my C detachment commander from Danang who was there during the entire thing. I mean, he went out there with me the morning before and then he stayed. So he was there during the entire Lang Vei thing. You ought to get hold of him sometime if you can find him, because he--

G: Give me the name again.

L: Schungle, S-C-H-U-N-G-L-E, Daniel Schungle, lieutenant colonel, probably retired a full colonel. But he was the C detachment commander for that

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northern area, I Corps. And he was there the whole time and we could talk because the enemy, I think, was very confused because he had total radio communication, because all the antennae were underground and they didn't know that, for one thing. But the last time I talked to him on a voice set I was in an airplane, and he said, "They're crawling all over the place. We've got three of them." I said, "Yes, I can see," looking down. So then I had to call--well, we could either do three things. We could stay there and just hold out until everybody was gone, or the marines could execute the contingency plan which was a total plan [?], that they were supposed to send a battalion of marines over to help a camp if it got overrun. And the third one was to tell us to bug ass out and *di-di* out.

So what Dan wanted me to do was to tell him what to do. "Which one do you want me to do? We're now holding, but we'll hold as long as we can," but he and I both said, "Let's get the contingency plan." Well, then we went to Cushman's headquarters, who was the marine general, and working with his G-3 section got hold of Lowndes out at the thing and Lowndes refused to do it. He said it was suicide to go out there. Of course, they were all surprised there were tanks there, too. Tanks in that country, you can use them on the roads, but you can't use them much anyplace else. So they'd come across the river and they had heard them getting ready on the other side, was what they had heard, and then they came across the river. And two of them, one of them outside and two of them in the camp, and both of them were--the first time we'd used those LAWs, they called it, which is an antitank throw-away weapon. And they found a lot of things; that they were good in some ways, but a

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lot of places they were no good. The strings would break in a hurry. You'd jerk and somebody [would be] nervous and the strings would break, and Schungle said when he fired one, it hit him just head-on. He said it just showered like a Fourth of July thing, and it would not penetrate the front plate of the [tank]. On the side, it could break down the suspension system and the track system and go in the sub, but the front head-on, he said, it just sprayed like a big--

G: I thought these were the amphibious tanks, the real light-skinned ones.

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L: No, these were the T-something or other. One of them they eventually blew the turret off and it was lying there on the side. I don't know whether they are amphibious or not but they're some T designation, as I recall. But anyway, Lowndes wouldn't execute the contingency plan.

G: He was afraid of getting ambushed?

L: Well, I don't know; he just said it was suicide. Of course, they hadn't been out of that goddamn place in so long that--they wouldn't even go out to get the mortars that you could see where they were shooting them from. So anyway, General Westmoreland, I heard that morning was going to be in Danang, and I went to see General Westmoreland. Of course, he'd been briefed in Saigon about the camp being overrun with the tanks. So I got him off to one side and I said, "Look, I've got to get an answer. I've been out there this morning, flown out and flown over it and come back, and I've talked to Schungle and the marines won't do the contingency plan. So that really leaves two things: Either tell them to stay there or tell them evacuate, get out what they can. I can arrange with the marine air. At that time we were just beginning to use those CBUs.

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G: Cluster bombs?

L: Cluster bombs. I said, "We can get them to go over and just saturate the place and then they go out." I said, "All our people are underground." And he said, "Well, I'll talk to you after lunch." Well, shit, it's ten in the morning and he was going to a pacification briefing that the marines were putting on. I thought, "Oh, shit." So I'm sitting around waiting from ten till noon or after and I probably won't be able to see him at lunch. So I called General Abrams and said, "I can't get Westy to make up his mind, and I've got to know. My people are in there, and it's whatever you want them to do, but tell them. They want to know, and the commander out there wants to know, what do you want them to do?" And he said, "Tell them to get out. Work it out with General [Norman] Anderson," who was the marine air commander. I said, "He's right here beside me. We'll work it out." So he and I had already worked most of it out.

So then I flew out again and told Schungle what was going to happen and that they were going to come down and just use all these things on anybody that was up there. "Get them all down. If there are any up there, get them back in the holes." At that time he said, "Christ, they're putting hand grenades down our air vents. We're still getting air, but the place is just full of dust." So I asked him how many of the Americans were still alive, and at that time I guess all but one were alive; one of them had been killed. So within the next couple of hours the marines went in and laid this thing down, and our guys got out and they went to old Lang Vei camp first. And then I went with a helicopter and landed there and talked to them. They got to old Lang

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Vei camp; they were out, and the whole bunch of them that were alive, which I imagine was about three hundred and something, maybe more, walked from Lang Vei camp to Khe Sanh. And nobody bothered them; they weren't even there, nobody. But this was the suicide mission the marines wouldn't go on--not the marines, Lowndes. So when they got there it was just getting dark, the marines stripped them all and said they all looked like VC and told them to all go on back into the jungle where they belonged. Of course, my people didn't--except the Americans. I mean they let them in, but they wouldn't let any of the goddamn Montagnards in. They just took all their weapons away from them and took their uniforms away, and told them to go on back in the woods. They had their families with them. And that was the last straw as far as I was concerned, just fuck the whole lot of marines. But by that time I had gone on back to Nha Trang and I didn't know about that until the next morning, when Schungle got hold of me and told me what had happened up there.

G: Were you able to do anything about it?

L: No, they never were--they don't know what ever happened to them. They went back into the woods probably, went back to their villages and went home. But they were goddamn good soldiers. But this is why I say if you could get hold of Dan Schungle. My wife probably knows in her address book where they are. He's retired now, I think. Well, I got him a distinguished service cross. He did a tremendous job under the circumstances, a hell of a good soldier.

G: In the wake of Tet, did the Fifth Special Forces Group get any new missions or did missions change, modify or anything?

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L: No, not very much. They stayed about the same. They may have after I left. Let's see, Tet was what? February or something like that. Then late March, early April was [when] Khe Sanh fell and Lang Vei.

G: Well, I don't think Khe Sanh fell. They lifted the siege.

L: No, they lifted the siege, I guess. But the Lang Vei thing happened somewhere around there, April, and see, I went home in June. But in that couple of months' period of time that I was there, I don't think there was any basic change in missions. We got more people, more Americans to our long-range reconnaissance school. A lot of them came up and started to go to that, where we used to have classes, and if we had any we just mixed them in with the indigenous people. But we had all-Yankee classes there just before I left.

G: Who was the guy that wrote the book, the ex-Special Forces sergeant, a book called *The New Legions*? Duncanson?

L: Yes, Duncan--

G: Donald Duncan?

L: Donald Duncan and then Barry somebody wrote another one.

G: Barry Sadler.

L: Barry Sadler wrote some stuff about it. And I guess it was Duncan, but I didn't know him.

G: He has a rather realistic description of a long-range patrol in there, obviously intended to convey the message that he was the senior man.

L: Well, I doubt if he was.

G: Being a sergeant.

L: Yes, because they always had officers with them. I mean, unless somewhere the lieutenant or captain had gotten killed along the way, then he might have been.

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We had interesting things that happened there. When we first got the--the Australians sent their SAS [Special Air Service] people, a bunch of them. They came up and they wanted to have their people come and work with our special forces people. Well, when we first got them, which was a little bit before I got there, they had made up teams like the American teams and put them out like the twelve-man or fifteen, whatever a team would be in each camp. I think there were enough for two full teams. But they found it didn't work, because the Australians simply couldn't get over that "abo" complex of theirs, of aborigines, and that's is what these people were, a lot of them, and they treated them like dirt. Whereas the way we did it, they had their own officers and sergeants and whatnot. So it became apparent that that wasn't going to work. So I talked to the Australian; I can't think of his name right now, guy who was in Saigon.

G: Serong?

L: Not Serong, because he didn't have anything to do with that. He was sort of an adviser to the embassy or something. This guy was the Australian commander there. And then later General [Thomas J.] Daly of the Australians, who was their chief of staff, came up and stayed with me and I explained to him--what we did then, we'd put like two of them, so there'd be at least two with one of our teams of twelve or fourteen, so that our guy was always the commander, the U.S. Special Forces guy ran the thing. But during Tet some of their sergeants were just outstanding, where we'd send them down to these towns to reinforce or interdict. They were excellent, and they worked out great after that. But when they had them all together and there weren't any Yankees



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around, well, hell, the whole thing would desert, the whole camp would go away. I mean, they just weren't going to put up with that kind of horseshit.

But I used to enjoy them. They had a camp or station up in Danang, near Danang, where they'd bring their people in. They'd have indoctrination courses for them and then they'd farm them out to our area. Some of them worked with the SOG people, too. And I don't know what the hell happened to them. But I remember I went up, they invited me up for Anzac Day and I have never been so drunk in my life. I had no idea what Anzac Day was; I had some vague stories about it, but I didn't realize you started at sun-up and just kept going. It was a wild, wild day, but it was fun. I did have a good time.

G: Do you remember where you were when President Johnson made his March 31 announcement that he was not going to run again, and that he was cutting back the bombing?

L: No, I don't know. Well, I had to be in Nha Trang. That was March 31-- the funny thing is that diary thing you saw I kept when I was an adviser, I never did that when I was with the special forces. Well, really, I was too damn busy, for one thing, and I had an extremely competent staff around me. When I was down there as an adviser in the early days, I had someone like Raisig, but I had him out in the countryside and I had a few people around. But in Nha Trang, I was just too goddamn busy all the time. In Bac Lieu I'd come in and after five o'clock, everybody had quit. I mean, the Vietnamese had all quit and all our guys would have a volleyball game and I didn't mess around with that. But I'd be sitting around and that evening after dinner I

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wouldn't have a damn thing to do, so if I weren't at General Nhon's for dinner--once every couple of weeks--I was home. So I'd just write in this book of what had happened that day. Now, I never had that time in the special forces. My wife often said, "How strange that you kept this sort of detailed account and then on the other one"--I would have been able to get that book and tell you exactly what I was doing on March 31. But I don't have the slightest idea. I mean, I can remember when March 31 was.

G: I was just wondering what the impact was on you and people around you.

L: I don't think very much. We had less impact on--the bombings weren't really involved too much with us. Now, a couple of times when they did use the B-52s, we'd go in for the bomb damage assessment, which they'd--we'd go on a helicopter so we'd know where their block was, and then as soon as it was over, we'd go in. I've gone in on a couple of those. But we never found anything but a bunch of busted-down trees, things like that. We never found lots of enemy; in fact, I don't remember finding any enemy.

But again, we had our own artillery; we had our own mortars, we had our own air force--not air force, but we had our own air--and we didn't rely too much on the others, so it wouldn't have made that much difference to us. And of course, I wouldn't see how it would make that much difference to the U.S. infantry divisions out there, because that bombing wasn't directly related to what they were doing. I don't remember it having any particular impact on me at all, one way or another.

The first year I was there, somewhere in that book you'd find references, in Saigon they always wore the khaki and low-quarter shoes,

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and they always used to call them khaki swine, I mean, down in the Delta. (Laughter) They'd come in and say, "Colonel, those khaki swine are coming down here tomorrow to watch an operation." Well, like General Harkins, I never could get Harkins to come down with boots on. He always came with low-quarter shoes and you couldn't take him on an operation. Timmes would come in fatigues and combat boots; well, you saw pictures of him; you could take him out. But Harkins, every time he was dressed in his cap and his short-sleeve khaki suit and what-you-call-them shoes. You couldn't even get off the side of the goddamn airfield with what he had on.

Then one of the funniest things that ever happened down there; you talk about you wonder what happens to people. He was visiting somewhere in the area and he'd been dropped off and his plane was flying around, because he felt, wherever he was--he was at Can Tho. That was a big old goddamn town. But anyway he was flying around, because he didn't want his plane to be shot up on the runway. Well, shit, at Can Tho, to get shot up on the runway--but anyway, he had flown down and was looking around, and he knew where we were. And we had a lot of gas piled up by the side of our little airstrip that the engineers had built--Vietnamese engineers--and it just stuck out into the rice paddies, had water all around it. So I got this word down at my office that General Harkins' plane--it was only of those little two-engine Beechcraft, whatever it was--was flying around our airfield. So I got off my ass and I got General Nhon, or Colonel Nhon, and we rode out there. We thought, well, if Harkins was coming in unannounced, we'd like to be there. And his goddamn plane was going around and going around and going around, and so

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finally it comes back and it sort of dog-legs in and the flaps come down, but no fucking wheels come down. And he brought that thing--he forgot to put his wheels down. I guess he was thinking about the enemy or something, but anyway, he hit that strip we had and just skidded all the way up to the end and just flopped out into the water at the end and here's this fancy looking airplane out there. So anyway, he came in. He had to spend the night with us. Then we had to call back, radioed back, and told them that General Harkins' airplane was in the drink at Bac Lieu. (Laughter)

G: Did he fire that pilot?

L: I haven't any idea. But like I said, it was so goddamn funny, and when we got him down later at the mess hall that night, we said, "What the hell was that? Why did you keep flying around?" And he said, "Well, we were checking out to make sure there was no enemy." And Raisig was there, and he said, "Well, shit, we were standing right there and you could see us standing there. If there had been any enemy, we wouldn't all been standing around waiting in jeeps." Well, that never occurred to him. That's why he left Can Tho, he didn't want the enemy to shoot his airplane.

That's how just--what is the word I want?--absurd some of those people were; obsessed with this thing. We lived down there with it all the time. As I say, once in awhile you'd get a shot around the towns, but not very often. I can always remember down there, though, that whenever we would go on local operations--not we; we'd send the Vietnamese out and make a sweep, just to make sure there weren't any people in the little scattered villages around. The minute they'd leave the

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area you'd hear two things--you'd hear a bugle, ta-ta, ta-ta, way off out in the woods, and then the other one was cymbals, bing-bang, the way they'd bang cymbals. And you could hear them going. And then another half mile down, ta-ta, ta-ta--shit, they knew whenever they moved, and yet you'd get to that village and there wasn't a bugle to be found in that goddamn place.

It's kind of fun, though, when I think about it. Those were great old days. Well, it was like the special forces, only this was even more so with the Twenty-first Division; it's one place when you're by yourself and nobody to bother you. When they do come, they don't know enough about what the hell's going on to even make many corrections, because they don't know what the hell's going on.

G: They've got to accept what you tell them.

L: Yes, and they don't know your relationship with all these strangers, little oriental people that are wandering around. You get along with them just fine, but they don't know them and they wouldn't do a thing this guy said that--

G: So you left Vietnam, when? In April?

L: June of 1968.

G: What did you do when you came back?

L: I came back to the Pentagon. I was then the director of the unconventional warfare division of DCSOPS [deputy chief of staff for operations].

G: SACSA [special assistant for counterinsurgency and special activities]?

L: No, SACSA belonged to the JCS. This was army DCSOPS. It was the opposite of SACSA but on the army staff.

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G: I see. And who was DCSOPS then?

L: I think Stilwell was.

G: Richard Stilwell.

L: Yes.

G: He had been Westmoreland's chief of staff at one time.

L: Yes, he had been his chief of staff at one time, but not while I was there. [William] Rosson was the chief of staff out there when I was there.

G: You came back about the same time Westmoreland came back, didn't you?

L: Yes. In fact I did, I came back almost exactly the same time he came back.

G: So how long were you in that job then?

L: Well, that was June of--what was that, did I say 1968? And I retired in January of 1970. So I was there a year and a half.

G: A year and a half. Did you have any responsibilities in connection with Vietnamization?

L: Oh, yes, with the army staff planning for Vietnamization and the use of the special forces over there, a lot of work with Fort Bragg at that time. And of course we were worldwide, too, and the Tenth Special Forces Group in Europe; they still had that over there. One of the things, when they were talking about bringing the Fifth back home and I kept--they were going to put it--retire the colors and everything like that. And just before I left, I made a very impassioned plea that they not do that, because of the four or five special forces groups they had--the First, Fifth, Tenth, whatever the others were, I've forgotten--it was the only one whose colors had been decorated in combat and it had

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presidential citations and both the blue and the red, the blue one for operations and the red one for whatever it was--there was a red one. And then it had the Vietnamese special presidential citation. So you get any man in the special forces in the Fifth Group and he immediately puts on three decorations, which I thought was good for morale. Why take that and pack that away? It also had all the Vietnam battle stars for the Vietnam ribbon with the battle stars. And I thought why, when none of the groups had ever been in combat, except that one? So I kept saying [it], and they finally did it; they finally changed their mind and kept the Fifth, which is still at Bragg. I just think it would be a shame to turn that one back to mothballs and keep the others who had nothing. I mean, not that they--and the same people in the Fifth, the Tenth, they all served in the Fifth at one time or another. But I'm talking about at that time, everybody had been in the Fifth at one time or another in the special forces. But those units now--when I first got in the special forces, they still had some of the Europeans who joined the army and got American citizenship by serving in the U.S. Army for whatever it was, three or four years. Some of those good, old tough sergeants and some of the officers were Czechs and Poles and Frenchmen and all kinds of people that were--

G: Emigrés?

L: Yes, but they goddamn well knew war in Europe. Most of them had been with the resistance, either French or other resistance forces. But almost everybody like that's gone now. There are a few people left--I suppose there are a few--who served in Korea, but not very many. Most of them are gone, too, because that thing was over in 1950--something, so that's thirty years.

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G: Thirty-one years this year.

L: Yes, so there aren't any left now. So the only ones they've got are the few that had a little bit of experience in Vietnam, and that was neither World War II nor was it Korea, nor was it, to me, any kind of counterinsurgency as such. It was not.

G: It was special operations.

L: It was just special operations. And then it got to be large scale special operations.

G: Now, how did you come to join the foreign service?

L: Well, I had retired from the army and been out about a year, and one day I got a telephone call and it was from Al Haig. And he had worked for me way back in Korea; he'd been a lieutenant. But I had known him all the way through. He had been a student of mine at the War College. And at that time he was working for [Henry] Kissinger in the White House. And he said, "Would you be interested in going back to the area where you are so familiar, [where] you've been all your life?" And I said, "No, not as an army officer. I don't want to come back on active duty as a colonel. To hell with it." And he said, "No, that's not it. Can you come over here tomorrow morning and meet the President at ten o'clock?" And I said, "Sure." I wasn't doing anything; I was in Arlington at that time. So I went over and that day I didn't see the President, but I talked to him [Haig] and to Kissinger, and they said that the President had come out with his Nixon Doctrine, and he was going to support Cambodia.

See, this was just before the incursions into the sanctuaries. And they didn't tell me about that. But he was going to help Cambodia



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and he wanted to do it according to the Nixon Doctrine, where we provide them with the wherewithal and they provide the men and the operational and the direction and do the fighting, but we give them the things they need. We don't go in and do it. And I said, "Well, that sounds all right to me. But I don't want anything to do with the Vietnam-type thing where they go in and then the Yankees take over and pretty soon they're running the whole damn country." They said, "No, you'll be the President's representative. There will be no U.S. military there. We want you to be a civilian. You'll have to be a foreign service officer, and we've already talked to Mr. William Rogers," who was then the secretary of state. "You're to be a foreign service officer, and you may select two or three people. And it's all right, because you can have a small staff, if you want active duty army officers, but you yourself, no, you cannot. You will have to be a civilian." So I said I'd think about it and I went home. No, I didn't. I was then sent over that same day to the State Department where I went in and I met Alexis Johnson, who was then under secretary of state, and some others, Marshall Green, and I've forgotten who the hell else was there--Tom Pickering, who's now down at San Salvador; he's the ambassador. But they explained to me that I would go over there as an FSO-4 and that I would work under the ambassador. Well, I didn't know what an FSO-4 was, it didn't mean a thing to me. So I got home that night and I called a friend of mine, who was a retired State Department officer that I had met at the War College. He'd been the adviser to the commandant there. And Ray had retired from the State Department.

G: What was his name?

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L: Leddy, L-E-D-D-Y. Ray Leddy. And I called him up. He lived at Carlisle. I said, "Ray, this has happened and, generally, I've been over at the White House and I am supposed to go in there and run the military program supporting the Cambodians. I would be a foreign service officer and be an FSO-4." And he said, "Wait a minute. An FSO-4 is like a major. If you don't go in with the same rank as the senior State Department person on duty there, you can't even use their radios without going and getting permission every time you want to turn around. So just tell them absolutely not, that unless you go as the same rank as the senior State Department person in the country, you aren't going to be able to do the job. If the President wants you to meet with the head of state, they wouldn't let you see Lon Nol if you were an FSO-4. It's hard enough to get in to the ambassador, to see *him*. But you couldn't do anything."

So I went back to the White House. I had an appointment the next morning and I went back and I told Kissinger, "No way." I said, "If I can't go as the same rank as their senior man, not that I'm interested in his job at all, but I've checked with my own sources and they say I couldn't [operate]." He said, "Of course, you can't. What are you talking about?" And I said, "Well, the guys at State told me I'd go as an FSO-4." He [said], "Hell," and immediately got on the phone and got Rogers, and "What's this crap about?" and hell, he was giving him the Henry Kissinger hock. "That was not the President's thought at all, and when he comes back over there, he will go as the same rank as the senior State Department [person]. Is that clear?" So he said, "All right, now what?" "Also, Mr. Leddy"--I didn't tell him his name, but I said, "My

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source tells me I should have every privilege there--that I can have my wife over there, I have my own automobile--as the number-two person in rank there, and my children can come visit me. I get all this business. It's not going to be just a 'slap this sucker over there.' All right, I'll go home and think about it." Al was there. I said, "You guys take care of this."

So Haig called me that evening and said, "Yes, they've agreed and you're to go there tomorrow, and they're going to start processing you." And I said, "When does the President want me to leave?" I guess I had seen the President that day just briefly. And he said, "He would like you to leave today, but tomorrow?" I said, "Christ, I can't leave tomorrow. My wife's going into the hospital and"--he said, "Well, as fast as you can." And my mother had died and I was the executor of her estate and I had to stop in California and oh, Christ, it was all messed up. But, anyway, he wanted me to go. Now, he wanted somebody over there. And this was right after the incursions into [Cambodia].

So I left two days later, and the State Department had sworn me in and I had signed all the papers, and my wife was going to come over after she got out of the hospital. And there were wives there at the embassy at the time.

Then I went to CINCPAC [commander in chief, Pacific] and met Admiral [John] McCain and became--oh, I remember one of the things, Tom Moorer, who was then the JCS chief, wanted to see me. Westy wanted to see me, too. These guys all, once it was out and through the mill--but I found out, to go back to your question, what happened was at a cabinet meeting, the President said, "I want to send a civilian over there in

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the State Department to run this military program, and he's to be a *civilian*. He's to have direct access to the information here."

So apparently Moorer and Westmoreland were riding back after the meeting at the White House and they said, "Well, who are we going to get as a civilian?" So they had someone call back and say, "Could we use a retired army person?" And the answer, according to Haig, that went back was, "Yes, but it has to be a legitimately already-retired, severed, not somebody-you-retire-tomorrow and send out to do the job. If you can find somebody that's severed their connections with the army"--so in the end I wound up being the Defense Department [nominee?] How that worked out, I don't know. But I'm sure that Westmoreland--because then Clark Baldwin [?], who's now dead, and a lot of those knew me well and I'm sure I got nominated that [way]. But I wound up being the Defense Department nominee and eventually the one that they called. Now how many, whether CIA or somebody else, had had people who turned it down or been turned down, I never found that out, how many others were in the thing. But that's how I happened to get over there.

G: As an FSO-what?

L: A two. Because at that time Mike [Lloyd M.] Rives, who was the chargé, was the senior man there and he was an FSO-2. And it wasn't till several months later that they sent the ambassador in. And it didn't make any difference, the ambassador, but then I was always the same rank as their highest level people, whoever they had there.

G: Well, what kind of job did you have to do?

L: Well, I was called the politico-military counselor, and when I got there, of course, I had made arrangements to have these two French-

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speaking officers and two enlisted men. General Abrams helped me get the enlisted men, but the officers were already assigned to me. And our job was, first, to make an assessment of what was the situation in Cambodia at the time. Well, I did that without them; they hadn't arrived there. I just went around and I was taken over and introduced to Lon Nol. He gave me a couple of English-speaking young guys that were damn good. And anywhere I wanted to go, I could go and their commanders were to respond to me. At that time, I got the most depressing briefings at CINCPAC and at Abrams' place, at MACV. I mean, they just thought the whole goddamn place was falling on its ass. When I got there, there were about eighty reporters who lived at the Phnom Hotel, and every night they would go out on the bridges to watch for the rape of Phnom Penh. When the enemy came streaming across, they wanted to interview them and have them on TV. There were French TV and Swedish TV and American; they'd load up in their trucks and go out at night. In the morning at breakfast you'd go into the hotel, and these guys would come in all mosquito-bitten and they'd been sitting around out there, Arnaud de Borchgrave and that whole crowd, waiting for the rape of Phnom Penh. Well, the longer I was there the more I begin to realize, just like I told you at noon, that because of the loss of COSVN [Central Office for South Vietnam], which I think was Phnom Penh, when Lon Nol took over, because of the incursion into the sanctuaries where they had all of their supplies and they were all hocked by the Americans, these units that had gone up toward Cambodia, the First NVA division and the Third NVA division, the batteries on their radios had worn out. They didn't have communication with anybody; they couldn't coordinate anything they

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were doing. The Cambodians were just a bunch of crazy jerks, but they were just as bad in their jerkiness as were these ill-supplied, ill-directed NVA types that were on one side of the river and the Cambodians were on the other. Well, eventually these guys simply left, and they went north to a place called--I'm sure--to Kratie is where they went, where they reorganized and re-established a COSVN or a directional headquarters at Kratie, and then a year and a half later did some of their offensives in Vietnam. In the meantime, it made the Cambodians look pretty good, because the enemy did disappear and they were able to cross the river and re-establish their posts and whatnot. They didn't fight anybody that amounted to a damn, and that's what I kept reporting, that one side's not any better than the other side. But a little bit of success and somebody like Al Haig can't stand a little bit of success; it had to be more. And Admiral McCain was the same way, bless his soul; he's now dead.

The first time they got over there and they had McCain and Haig and this crowd come over and talk to Lon Nol, he wants tanks. Lon Nol would have taken the whole U.S. Army if you had given it to him, but he asked specifically for tanks. So through McCain and Haig they got him a squadron of those APCs, which they needed like a hole in the head. And then every time you'd turn around, they were giving him something else. And this was the kind of thing I couldn't stand. I'll give you an example. They began to keep track of--I had forty million dollars when I went over, which was a presidential determination, and he took that out of other MAAG programs and gave it to me, because this wasn't a MAAG program. And in the first year I spent most of the forty thousand

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[million], mostly on communications equipment and on hospital supplies and on ammunition and weapons. When I got there, they were all armed with AK-47s.

G: Where did they get them?

L: Well, they got them from the Russians when the Russians were in there. The Russians and the Chinese were there, and when our mission left about five years earlier, our MAAG got thrown out, they accepted the Chinese and the Russians and they gave them those. Their artillery pieces were Russian artillery pieces. They had a couple of Russian tanks. They had MIGs in the air force, about eight MIG aircraft out there. That was *their* air force.

You asked me what my problems were. First, to make an assessment. The assessment was the situation is really not as bad as it seems. It's bad on both sides, but they aren't going to go down the drain, because the other side isn't going to attack them and they're not capable of attacking them. So then they began to pour it in. But then next came things like, "Where do you get [weapons]?" Well, I went down and talked to General Abrams. Well, of course they had gone into the sanctuaries and they had tons of AK-47s there, so I had it all shipped up to Phnom Penh and we shoot it to the Cambodian Army. In the meantime, I was putting in for carbines and M-16s, but they cost--I had to watch my dough, because I had forty thousand bucks to last me--

G: Forty million, wasn't it?

L: Forty million that fiscal year, which included the gasoline and everything else that they were using. For instance, ammunition for the damn MIGs so that they could fire their machine guns, which weren't our

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machine guns. Anyway, we looked around and I could see that the AK-47 ammunition from the sanctuaries wasn't going to last forever. In the meantime, the Cambodians were building their army up. I was trying to get them to hold it down, but Lon Nol, no, he had to have a big army. So we were trying to make a deal through the CIA to buy this stuff from people like the Czechs and the Yugoslavs and whatnot when I got a letter from a guy in Arlington, Virginia, who says, "I can make AK-47 ammunition for you and it'll cost you this much a round," which was like a nickel a round, which was a hell of a lot cheaper than we were getting it from stealing it from the communists. So I sent all that information back in and, sure enough, so he started to make it. Tons of it were made over here in Arlington, Virginia, after we had gone all over the world trying to get it from the surreptitious sources and clandestine sources, and this guy just got some--and he made ammunition here, but he just retooled and he made AK-47 ammunition. As far as I know, he still makes it.

G: What's the name of this outfit?

L: I forgot what the hell the name of it is.

G: He couldn't make ammo for the MIGs though, could he?

L: No, he couldn't make that ammo for the MIGs. And then I got the air force to come up and look around. I didn't know anything about the goddamn airplanes. So they decided they could mount .50 caliber; the MIGs had a bigger gun than the .50 caliber. They put these .50 calibers in. They put them in, but then went to fly it and the plane was nose-light. So they figured out what they're going to do, so they finally got a big hunk of lead and just put it in the front of the goddamn plane to weight



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down the nose, so you could get it where it would fly right again. That's the kind of thing I--it's kind of fun. I got involved in it and then they had them and they were so proud of them. And the pilots, the American pilots, would fly in and the first thing they would do is jump out of their planes and go over there and crawl in those MIGS and look at them. They'd never seen a MIG up close before.

So they kept them in a hangar. On the nineteenth of January of 1971, they had a big raid on Phnom Penh. Damn if they didn't hit that hangar and burn up every fucking MIG they had, every goddamn one of them was destroyed. So then they needed a whole air force. Then we began to get them these T--the ones like they used in Vietnam.

G: T-28s?

L: T-28s, they got them.

G: That's a far cry from a MIG.

L: Oh, it sure is. Well, the MIG wasn't so hot anyway, because you would fly it out and you'd only stay out there a few minutes, because you'd use up--you never got up high like you were supposed to. It would be down low and they'd burn up all their fuel and they'd have to come back again. And if they didn't carry any ammunition [to compensate for the weight], then they couldn't shoot anybody. So it was six of one--I was just as glad to get rid of those fuckers, except they were kind of nice to have around as souvenirs. So then we went into that thing.

Right after they got the thing where the army took over and they brought the general and the other guys in, and logistically, I had planned what they needed for the next year. They didn't agree with this at all. What they were doing was--this was [General] Mataxis and his

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crowd--they'd get the Defense Department to punch the button in the computer for a battalion. And it would come out like thirty-two two and a half ton trucks, four jeeps, two pairs of boots for every guy, a poncho-- and I looked at it and I said, "For Christ's sake, you've only got"-- whatever it was then--"fifty million dollars the next year. You can't have all this shit. You can't even buy the trucks with it. Cut all this crap." "Oh, but we'll get the money, don't worry. We'll get the Congress to get the money. We'll get the President and"--and I said, "But it's ridiculous. They don't need trucks." The Australians had just given them two hundred very nice four-wheel-drive trucks, as a part of their--

Tape 2a

"They don't need any fucking trucks." Pardon me.

So then they had a meeting in Washington and somebody made a mistake and invited me to it, and the guy that was the assistant secretary of defense for something or other, the name began with an N, I think. But anyway, I went to this meeting and they asked me to speak and I said, "Well, I think it's crazy. You know what my list was, but these trucks"--and I went through how, "with the divisions they've now got in Cambodia, if every battalion has thirty-two trucks, there's going to be no road room on the highways. There's not that much highway in Cambodia. Besides, they don't have that many people that know how to drive a truck, and they don't have the gasoline, and they don't need it anyway. Nothing happens more than twenty miles away from Phnom Penh. They don't need all that stuff. They've got plenty of trucks." "Well, they're not our trucks. They're Australian." I said, "What difference

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does it make? What do you care if they cannibalize one to make the other one work?" "Well, we can't have that." Then I said, "But now the worst thing of all. Look here, they've got a hundred and twenty thousand ponchos, and the Cambodians have been standing in the rain without a poncho for two thousand years, and they don't need a poncho now. When I'm over there it rains and it's hot and you just get wet, and they're not going to put on a heavy poncho to get out of the rain." I said, "They'll take them down and sell them in the black market." But I said, "They don't need them. But look at the money on that. With that dough, I could turn around and buy so many M-16s, and that's the kind of thing they need."

Well, anyway, this guy who was the assistant secretary said, "Well, I agree with everything you're saying." Well, in the end they did cut out the ponchos and they reduced the number of trucks, but in the beginning they were just going to punch that thing, and [since] this is what a U.S. battalion uses, give it to the Cambodians." That's insane.

End of Tape 2a of 2 and Interview I

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