INTERVIEW I

DATE: April 18, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: GUY S. MELOY

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General Meloy's office, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: General, could you begin by telling us when you were first assigned to South Vietnam?

M: My first tour in Vietnam was from early March of 1966 until January of 1967. My second tour in Vietnam was September of 1970 until September of 1971.

G: What was the nature of your first assignment?

M: The first tour I had two different jobs. The first job was, I was senior adviser to Task Force One of the Vietnamese Airborne Division, as a MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam] officer, and the second half of that same tour I commanded the First Battalion of the 27th Infantry of the 25th Division.

G: You said Task Force One. What did that entail exactly?

M: Task Force was a headquarters composed of about, oh, forty people, most of them communicators in a regular staff with a commander, a deputy commander--the one, two, three, four kind of people, and their associated sergeants and radio operators. It was set up as a command element to command from two to four different airborne battalions, depending on which battalions were available, how long it had been since the battalions had been committed, the casualties within the battalions, and so forth. Those actual battalions

assigned to the Task Force headquarters would vary, but it was a two- to four-battalion kind of a command element. And I was the--in fact, I was the only adviser. There was no other Americans in the Task Force headquarters itself except myself. Even my radio operator was Vietnamese.

G: So you had to be an adviser and a liaison officer and everything else?

M: All wrapped into one.

G: This was a kind of strategic reserve then?

M: Well, it was a strategic reserve in the sense that it was the country's fire brigade. But of the nine battalions--eight battalions at that time they had in the division, I suspect five of those eight battalions were in combat at all times. We were, I think, from early March until late July time frame--

(Interruption)

M: --was in Saigon, our BOQ [Bachelor Officers' Quarters] was in downtown Saigon for the advisory detachment. I think I figured up one time I spent a total of about three weeks altogether in my room at the BOQ sleeping at night, the rest of the time I was in the field.

G: What were you supposed to do exactly, in helping the task force accomplish?

M: Well, I had a--in my case I was quite fortunate. My counterpart, the Vietnamese colonel commanding the task force, was an absolutely brilliant officer, spoke fluent English, better English than many Americans. He'd stumble on a word occasionally, such as one day he mentioned the word "reciprokally" to me and it took me a while to figure out he meant reciprocally. But those were the few times he'd stumble. Spoke fluent French of course. He'd been a French paratrooper at Dien Bien Phu when the French [had] their Vietnamese

paratroopers with them. Had the equivalent of about a master's [degree]. You never wanted to argue war with him, you never wanted to argue tactics. He could discuss in awesome detail both the Napoleonic wars and the American Civil War. And at one time I thought I was a real Civil War historian and I found out I was out of my league. This is the kind of a fellow he was.

G: What was his name?

M: Ho Trung Hau. He had one time been the aide, military aide, of President [Ngo Dinh] Diem. In 1965, the year before I joined him, he was the most highly decorated officer in the Vietnamese army. A very courageous man and a brilliant tactician.

One of my jobs, of course--he was very impressed. I had just come from being an instructor at Leavenworth and that impressed him. As a consequence, I sort of had credibility. To him, Fort Leavenworth and the Army Command General Staff College had to be the epitome of everything, so if I said, as an instructor, I could get his attention. Very few other Americans could debate tactics with him or debate the plan for the day or what have you, because they didn't have that, but for right or wrong reasons he was very impressed with that. So he and I did almost all--jointly developed our plans for whatever we were going to do, defense, offense. So in that sense I was able to contribute. I was also sort of the fire support coordinator. If we needed air support--we were very seldom within artillery range, no artillery at all with the outfit. So we depended completely on the U.S. Air Force or Vietnamese Air Force, and consequently had our own assigned forward air controller, an American who would follow around with us as L-19. He'd just base himself out of the nearest airfield and then fly overhead all day. And I needed air support, I was of

course the communicator. We needed any kind of supplies, medevac. I sort of handled all those kind of things that only the Americans could provide, that the Vietnamese didn't have the assets for. The battalions assigned to the task force would normally have three additional American advisers, captain for the battalion commander and his adviser, a lieutenant senior, and one NCO [Noncommissioned Officer]. So we just wandered around most of the time in what they called the Bon Song area of II Corps. We did a lot of work up to the west of Hue and had one big operation in conjunction with the First Infantry Division down in War Zone C.

G: That would have been what operation?

M: That was Birmingham, in the spring of 1966. In fact, the first time I met General [William E.] DePuy was during that operation.

G: He had the Big Red One then?

M: Right.

G: A question occurs to me about the Vietnamese airborne and rangers and any of the Vietnamese special troops. They seem to have had two reputations, and I don't know if this is a false generalization or not. First, that they were the best fighters that the army of the Republic of Vietnam had; second, that they could also be counted on to misbehave among the civilian population if they got a chance. How far are these two things true?

M: (Laughter) Well, I would have to agree that they are probably as good a fighters as I've ever seen. I had a tremendous amount of respect for the Vietnamese trooper. In fact, they had a tradition within the Vietnamese airborne division that I thought was not all that sound, but they refused to retreat, they refused to withdraw from the battlefield. And they had one

battalion, the Seventh Battalion, that was virtually annihilated once up in the Michelin rubber plantation in the late fall of 1965, when any prudent decision would have said, "Hey, we are outnumbered four to one. This is the time to go and fight another day." They just stood and fought. And I think they lost all but about a hundred people out of that whole battalion. And they were very proud of that tradition.

And I don't know whether they had been--see, their legacy was the French. Their parachute wings, for example, were modeled exactly from the French wing. Their red beret was a French beret. Their colors for the first two battalions were French colors; they were authorized by the government of France to award French decorations. Not all, but selected decorations. The first two battalions were. That was their legacy. And I don't know how much of that was inherited from the French or how much was just their tradition, but they were sort of the makeup of the people. Most of the officers in the division at major level and above had all experienced days with the French and had been trained by the French as paratroopers originally. So there was some of that involved, I'm sure.

As far as their treatment of the civilian population, I would argue that, because I have seen too many instances where they would turn their back on a village that they knew VC [Vietcong] were in rather than take a gamble on hurting a civilian. We had one episode where they had reports the village was deserted. There had been a VC battalion in the area that had ambushed another different ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] army unit earlier that morning and left these guys laying all over the road, just really wiped out. The reports and the observation of the village indicated it was strictly a VC base camp. So we called an air strike on the village. The first pass over the village was iron bombs and the

first bomb had not hit the ground more than five seconds when suddenly through binoculars Colonel Hau saw a woman. We ceased fire immediately, even though there were in fact confirmed reports that the battalion of VC were in that village. She, to my knowledge, was the only civilian, or apparently civilian, that was ever seen in that village, but we refused to attack the village any further. And Colonel Hau later that night, literally with tears in his eyes said he would never forgive himself for not personally seeing that that village was empty before he took the reports.

So they were extremely sensitive to civilians; I never saw one civilian abused or harmed. They slept in civilian towns on many occasions. There was never any thievery' there was never any looting, never any anything. We would sleep in Vietnamese civilian homes. And one of the things they did traditionally was they never left that home without almost taking pains to make sure it was cleaner and more shipshape than it was when they got there. So I would argue with anybody that--whoever says that the airborne unit at least abused civilians in any way, shape or form knows [does not know] what they're talking about.

G: What about the rangers?

M: I really can't talk to the rangers, Ted. I operated with the rangers out in War Zone C, and they were quite good. But I never saw the rangers except in a combat role, and in War Zone C there [were] no civilians to begin with, so I never saw them around civilians. I couldn't really answer that.

G: Were you given any special training or briefing for this assignment?

M: As an adviser?

G: Yes.

M: No. I guess I'd been in the army about thirteen years at that point, which was sort of training for that role. About half of that time I'd been in the paratroopers, and I'd been an infantry officer the whole time. We had our normal three-day orientation when we first arrived in country at MACV headquarters where they told us don't eat the ice or ice cream, and watch out for the butter, and here's how to say a few basic words like please and thank you. Other than that, no special training. I didn't go through the normal MACV orientation course that they had at Fort Bragg, for example. In fact, I finished teaching my last subject on a Friday at Leavenworth and on that Monday I was *en route* to Vietnam.

G: Were you given that short notice?

M: No, no. As a matter of fact, I had six months' notice. I just had a boss that decided he needed my talents on a platform right up to the last minute. (Laughter)

G: No thirty-day leave before deployment?

M: No. No thirty-day leave before deployment at all.

G: How would you describe the state of training and morale and equipment and so on of this task force when you first arrived?

M: By Vietnamese standards, they were quite good. They were fantastic navigators; they could move through War Zone C when I wasn't sure where I was, that's for sure. You're talking triple canopy jungle. And they could call--they knew exactly where they were. Their equipment was spotless. Now, again, that may have been because they were airborne and they had some French heritage, I don't know. But they really took care of their weapons. They had a lot of shortcomings. Ammunition was old; they never had as much as I would

have felt comfortable carrying. They always seemed to have like two clips on them when I wished they had four. But they were well clothed; their uniforms were good, clean. They all had helmets. They all wore their helmets. [Inaudible] I had a lot harder time keeping the helmets on American soldiers than I ever did Vietnamese soldiers. They were very quiet at night; their noise and light discipline at night was extraordinarily good. Again, a comment I wouldn't want to say was common among American units.

So there were a lot of pluses. But, for example, they had, just basing [?] it, like the two-quart canteen--most of the American soldiers carried a two-quart canteen as a collapsible kind of a thing. And when we were in War Zone C in April of 1966 it was the dry season, and I always thought jungles had running streams and waterfalls, and that's not the case; it was just as dry as a desert, although it was triple canopy. And water was a massive problem. I would go through four quarts of water in a day, and I thought I was practicing water discipline. But we couldn't find water. We used to drink B-52 water, we called it. We'd find this big B-52 craters out in the middle of War Zone C somewhere that looked like all they'd done was make matchsticks. As a matter of fact, I've got to confess to you I have yet to see--I did about twenty BDAs, or bomb damage assessments, of B-52 strikes. I've yet to see the first B-52 attack on the ground that did any damage at all except to trees. That's not to say they didn't, since I personally wasn't there. Although they were accurate. They gave you the four-corner coordinates of the box, and you can bet your life those bombs are all going to be within those four corners. But we'd find these B-52 craters full of stagnant water, and down into the crater these guys would go and fill their canteens up and we'd charge them up.

So we got resupplied at night with water, and because they didn't have enough canteens, they'd take ponchos and they'd tie the base of the poncho together and then they'd get a stick and all during the day you'd see two guys walking along with sticks on their shoulders with this huge bowl of water, maybe five gallons equivalent inside of a tied-up poncho. They'd carry it to the jungle all day just so they had their own water as the day went on. In that respect, they lacked a little bit, but they made up with some ingenuity.

G: Did you ever get sick?

M: No, but I got where I--I don't know how to say this delicately, but my urine was always solid brown because we used iodine tablets. Book says, "Put one iodine tablet in for a quart, shake it and let it sit twenty minutes." Normally when we got the water, we'd been out for hours; twenty minutes seemed like an eternity. What we'd do is throw two tablets in there, shake it and let it sit for ten minutes. (Laughter) But you'd be surprised over time what two iodine tablets every time you take a drink of water will do to your bladder and your kidneys.

G: I can imagine.

M: I got sick once on some pork which I knew I shouldn't have eaten, but it was about the only thing to eat. You ate what the Vietnamese ate or you didn't eat, with our unit, because we didn't have C rations. We had to eat the rice and the chicken and what have you. But I was surprisingly healthy, although I did shed about twenty-five pounds.

G: What was wrong with the pork?

M: Well, pork over there has got all sorts of--I guess they've got about every parasite known to man running around inside that pork, and they don't cook that pork like we do. It's boiled and you find it in soup and I suspect I got a piece of rancid pork.

G: Well, that's not a bad record.

M: No, I was lucky. We also took the gamma globulin shots.

G: Yes.

M: And that may have helped, I don't know. Anything they claimed would help, we took it.

G: What would you say were the most significant problems you had to deal with as an adviser?

M: Dealing with other U.S. advisers.

G: That's interesting.

M: Yes. And maybe it was the nature of the way the Vietnamese airborne--the way the unit was employed. The division headquarters was at Tan Son Nhut--it had one battalion at Bien Hoa; it had another battalion just south of Bien Hoa and the rest of the battalions were in the Tan Son Nhut area, with the exception of one battalion that was at Vung Tao.

Now the division headquarters as a division very seldom deployed. These task forces would deploy, and when they would deploy they would be assigned to operational control of one of the other ARVN divisions. It was a function, I guess, of the Oriental way of keeping statistics or what have you, but if the Vietnamese airborne, for example, was assigned to the 22nd ARVN Division, which was headquartered in Qui Nhon, the 22nd ARVN Division commander then gave us our missions and our orders and our areas of operation to work in and what have you. If we took casualties, the onus was on the airborne division commander back in Tan Son Nhut. He was the one that had to report so

many casualties. But if we had a victory, as they call it, and had killed more of them than they had of us, or had had a significant battle and had obviously come out ahead of it, the ARVN 22nd Division commander stepped forward and took all the great credit for what a brilliant tactician he was. It made a very awkward situation, because you can imagine the kinds of areas of operation he always put the airborne division in compared to their own units. We went to the hottest, and a lot of times because we were from Saigon and we were an operational control unit, I don't think there was as much sensitivity to our requirements as he may have shown for his own organic units.

I was frequently at odds with--I was a major at the time, and the senior adviser to all the ARVN divisions was an army full colonel. Some were excellent advisers, others I thought were--I wondered how they ever made full colonel. And I used to get into some pretty--as a major I'd get in some pretty wicked arguments with full colonels about, one, how to employ the airborne division; two, how to sustain the support and supply them, what I considered to be fair treatment as opposed to always being on the short end of it. I had one guy I'll remember as long as I live up in the Qui Nhon area that I finally made such an issue with him that we had to bring in the adviser to the II Corps to referee that, which incidentally I won.

But my biggest problem was with those kind of people. It was not the Vietnamese; the Vietnamese were always very pleasant, very courteous to deal with. That and finding food. (Laughter)

G: Where did you get your food?

M: Well, they served it at night, and you'd eat what they ate.

G: Where'd they get it?

M: Well, they carried five days worth of rice and they carried five days worth of chickens. The chickens were alive and they put them in these little wicker baskets with a top just big enough to get the chicken's head out and they'd carry them on their backs. Each night they'd stop and you could forget the chicken. They'd take a pan and they'd set it on a fire, fill it with water, and the first thing they'd do, they'd take the chicken live and drown this poor chicken in that boiling water. Well, it did two things. It was I guess a painless death; two, it also instantly gave them a defeathering if you will. So after they had done that, they would take the chicken out and they'd defeather the poor guy, they'd open him up and take everything from the inside out, and then they'd take a machete and they'd start literally at the beak and they'd chop that whole chicken up into bite-size elements, about one-inch cubes, bone, gristle, tissue, everything; feet, beak, head. And they'd dump this stuff back into that boiling water until they were satisfied it had boiled enough to eat. Then they'd pour that into an empty pot, and then they'd take a big handful of rice and dump it in the same pot of boiling water. This of course was unfinished rice, this was not--and then they picked wild leaves. They were very good at that. Sort of a turnip green looking thing. And they'd dump that in there, and then they'd serve it to you. And you'd sit there and they'd give you a little bowl and your chopsticks and you'd fill your bowl with this rice.

And because it was not refined rice and it was cooked the way it was, I liken it to eating a tennis ball, just like eating glue. And it was all I could do to choke some of it down, just because I couldn't chew it long enough to get it moist enough to swallow. And then you'd take a piece of this chicken with your chopsticks and you'd eat it the way it was

until you had all the meat and anything you chew off the gristle and the bone, then you very politely turn your head and put your hand up to your mouth and spit what remained in your mouth out into the jungle. And then you'd eat some of that greens, which was just unbelievable--you can't describe how sour tasting they were, but you would eat it just because it was nutritious. That was supper.

Then for breakfast, they take the same chicken cooked, the same rice they cooked the night before and they heat it up, and they put a bowl of rice with one piece of chicken in the middle of it. That was breakfast. And lunch, they take a hunk of rice and they stick a piece of chicken in the middle of it and they'd take their hands and they'd compress this thing into the size of about a tennis ball and then they wrap it in a banana leaf or something. Then you carry that in your rucksack, and sometime between eleven-thirty and twelve-thirty or one-thirty, whenever it was convenient for everybody to stop and open up and gnaw away at their lunch. And that was it, three times a day. You try that for about a month if you want a diet that will take off weight.

G: Especially if you're out humping through the jungle.

M: Yes.

G: How about peppers there, they--

M: Oh, yes, they like peppers, and they had about three varieties. I could eat the--the mildest they had made a super jalapeño look easy. They also didn't have any salt; they used a sauce called nuoc mam, which was fermented fish. And it was very salty, but you could smell the nuoc mam for about a quarter of a mile, and it tasted just like it smelled. So some

of us didn't use nuoc mam. We'd take salt tablets, the army issue, and we'd crush them up and use those trying to get our salt.

G: Some people grew to like it, though, didn't they?

M: Yes, some guys went native. They thought that kind of stuff--I could eat anything they gave me. I've eaten rat, cat, dog--dog's good, I found out. You take a boiled dog and particularly if you don't know the first time you did it that that's what he is, he's excellent. I've eaten brains of about five different kinds of animals; that was always considered a delicacy. Squid, dried-up squid--you chew on that like you're chewing on manila rope. I got to the point where there wasn't anything I didn't eat just because I always felt like I was starving to death. And if it was food and somebody else was eating it, I would try it, too. The only thing I balked on was the egg they--I forget the name of it.

G: Thousand-year eggs?

M: Yes, they bury them, you know. It takes a skill to do that, so it doesn't--you open up the top of the egg and there will be this little black dead embryo of a chicken staring at you, you know, and you're supposed to lop his head off and suck him on in and then smack your lips and say, "Boy, that was good!" But they never really forced me to try that either.

G: It was a delicacy, I guess. They weren't going to--

M: Oh, they thought it was a delicacy. But if they liked you, they'd offer it to you, and I'd always find a reason to decline that. I couldn't quite bring myself to that, but I guess I've eaten most of everything else.

G: Who was your superior officer? Who did you work for?

M: When I first arrived, the senior adviser to the airborne division was a full colonel by the name of Naughton. He left very shortly thereafter and was replaced by Colonel Bartholomees, Jim Bartholomees.

G: Will you spell that?

M: B-A-R-T-H-O-L-O-M-E-E-S. He is now retired at Fayetteville, North Carolina. I've seen him many times since those days, a prince of a guy. He is really first-rate, took care of his people, and I was very fond of him.

G: Did MACV and MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] take a special interest in the airborne?

M: MACV did. MAAG had folded into the MACV at that point, so by the time I arrived they weren't referring to it as a MAAG at all. And I think part of it was that the airborne division had probably worked with more American divisions by that time, at least when I arrived. They had done a massive operation in conjunction with the First Cavalry Division up in the Bon Song Plain called White Horse, in the fall of 1965, that was quite successful. And as I mentioned, the first operation I went on was in conjunction with the First Infantry Division. So Americans got to know them pretty well and I think respected them, because they always managed to do their job and they did it well. Also, because the officer corps of the Vietnamese airborne was a very competent officer corps, and most spoke English, not all but most, so their rapport with Americans was good. They were also visible. No question who they were. We were the only ones that wore a camouflaged uniform even back in those days. We American advisers referred to them as our bulletproofs, because it made us look like a Vietnamese airborne soldier and that made us, quote, "bulletproof."

And then General [William] Westmoreland was in charge of the shop in those days and he's been an old airborne troop all his life. So I think there was an affinity there. And he on several occasions I know--we got into an awfully big fight once just south of Bon Song, one night. A day or two later a helicopter came in and handed me a message that I was to pass on to my counterpart. And it was from Westmoreland personally to Lieutenant Colonel Ho Trung Hau, by name. Now, I'm sure Westmoreland didn't come in the office and do that. He had a smart captain or major back there alert to those kind of things, and I'm sure Westmoreland was aware of the message, but they actually sent--and you wouldn't believe what a boost that gave the morale of the airborne troops that had been in that fight. I'll bet you my counterpart carried that message in his pocket for weeks. So there was somewhat of a solid foundation, and we also were very selective of the officers that we assigned to the detachment. It was almost like a fraternity. You had to have so many years of airborne experience; you had to be a master parachutist; somebody had to know you; somebody had to vote on you. We could vote you out in a hurry. We were very careful--and it was not done by the book by any means. It was probably illegal as the dickens, in the personnel manager's point of view. But you had to volunteer for that detachment, and then the detachment passed judgment on you before they select you. And we were a small detachment, probably the smallest division advisory detachment in the country, and we were very close. So there was a lot of *esprit* among the advisers. An amazing number of us turned out to be general officers.

G: That's a startling parallel to the British regimental system of picking their new officers.

M: Perhaps.

G: Called vetting.

M: Yes.

G: When were you reassigned, then, to the 25th Division?

M: In late July of that year.

G: 1966?

M: Yes, 1966.

G: And the nature of your assignment was the battalion--you had the first [battalion] of the 26th--?

M: Yes, commander of the First Battalion of the 27th Infantry, the Wolfhounds, they called them.

G: Who was commanding the division?

M: Fred Weyand, General Fred Weyand.

G: And what, if you can recall them, this date, were some of the significant operations that you went on in the summer and fall of 1966?

M: Well, our initial mission, which I got the day I took command as a matter of fact, was to go into Hau Nghia Province, and specifically to Trang Bang district of Hau Nghia Province, which was reputed to be, and I can't vouch for this, but Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge personally told me--he came out to visit one day and so I've got no reason to doubt it--that Hau Nghia at that time was considered to be the most dangerous province in the populated regions, as far as VC presence or VC influence.

G: Lodge came out to see you?

M: Yes, he came out and spent a day with us, because we were doing some pretty tricky tactics that impressed him. But from the standpoint of just VC population, if you will, plus the control they had on the province, Hai Nghia allegedly was as a dangerous a province I guess as there was in the country, maybe the most dangerous, I don't know. I wouldn't say the most, but certainly it was no cup of tea. And in Trang Bang district within that province was considered to be the worst district. That was in the larger area of operations that belonged to the 25th Division. And General Weyand, who I thought very wisely--in fact, I'm still convinced if we had fought Weyand tactics, we would, one, have clearly defeated the Viet Cong much earlier than we did and, two, it would have been politically acceptable in doing so.

G: What kind of tactics did he--

M: Well, his notion was, yes, you need to operate out in the perimeters, out into the border areas in the War Zone Cs and Ds, and you need large-scale operations to keep the main force units off balance, to locate their supplies and caches, to break up the infiltration routes. That's very hard to argue as a tactical philosophy, tactical concept, because that's very essential. But Weyand said in addition to that you need to do something to control the population--not control it but to assist it. So he established a period of time there, most of the month of August and September.

The elections if you will recall were held in late 1966, I think late August, or something--I don't recall the month. There was a great deal of speculation from the intelligence community that the VC were going to do all sorts of dramatic things to try to jeopardize the elections and to break them up. So a lot of our mission was to make sure we

put some stability into a district or a province so that the people felt, one, free to vote without getting retribution in turn and, two, if the VC did get up to anything, we could sort of try to prevent that from disrupting the elections. My first mission was to go to Trang Bang District and, quote, "pacify it." And I asked my brigade commander, a colonel by the name of Tarpley, what specifically did that mean. He said my guess was as good as his guess and go out to Trang Bang and see what I can do about it. So I got in his helicopter and I flew out to the district headquarters, and I was met by a major who was the adviser to the district chief, whose name was Kneip, Di We Kneip, K-N-E-I-P.

Di We Kneip was a Cao Dai, and that particular religious sect believed fanatically that as long as they were doing good, they couldn't be killed doing it. And by definition killing VC was doing something good. So he lived by that philosophy, and unfortunately it caught up with him at Tet. Several years later he was killed. He was also absolutely honest, incorruptible, very genuinely concerned for the people of that district. And the people in the district town reflected it.

But he did not like Americans. And the reason he hadn't liked Americans [was that] apparently there had been other U.S. battalions that had operated in that district, and they [had] come into the district, one, without his permission. Even though they had the right to do that, as a courtesy they should have at least gone through the facade of obtaining his permission. But, two, once they got there they didn't work with him; they didn't trust him. One of the things I have learned with the Vietnamese airborne is I could trust as many of them as I could trust Americans. But Americans all thought because a guy was Vietnamese he was a VC even if he was in ARVN uniform; they were covered with spies and so they

wouldn't tell them anything, such as where are we going to go tomorrow, or what our mission is. So Kneip sensed that immediately and he didn't like Americans for that reason. He didn't like them coming into his district, just coming in uninvited; he didn't like the way they wouldn't tell him anything.

And he particularly didn't like the way they would not seek his advice. He had been at this thing now his whole adult life. He had been in that district five years. He knew every nook and cranny in it. It's probably twenty kilometers in one direction and fifteen in another. And they didn't cooperate with him. They came in with the attitude, "Okay, you screwed it up now all this time. Here we are, the big saviors, we're going to help you and bail you out and save your district for you, so just stand aside over there, Di We, and when we want you, we'll call you. If we don't hear from you or you don't hear from us, don't worry about it."

So you can imagine if you were in Di We Kneip's shoes how that went over with you. I think the main advantage I had is I had that tutoring for five months or so prior to that with the Vietnamese airborne and I understood a little better the Vietnamese mentality, how to kid them, because they are very courteous people and they are very sensitive and they can get their feelings bruised very quickly, although they would never let you know their feelings were bruised. So you've got to be careful how you kid them. They do have a wonderful sense of humor, but you have to know how to work it. Well, I met this American adviser and he told me right off front up, "Don't bother to even try to get in here. Kneip has literally ordered out the last two battalions. So here you are again. What's he

going to think," *et cetera*. And I said, "Well, I would like to at least meet the man." So he arranged that.

And I spoke I guess the first three or four sentences in what little Vietnamese I had, to include a couple of cuss words that were not on the profane side but were sort of a little bit slangy. Kneip sort of perked up. And I asked his permission formally, asked if he had any objections. And that just astounded him, knowing full well as he well knew that there's only one answer, "Well, sure." We weren't kidding each other, but at least I went through the courtesy of it. Then I really got him. I said, "Where would you want me to emplace the battalion? I'm going into a fire base. Where would you want me to put that fire base?" And that did it; that won him over a hundred per cent right then and there. Just that one question. Because he couldn't believe an American, one, was asking for his advice, but, two, would follow it. But I felt, "Who knew the district better than Kneip?" All the intelligence guys I had were just beginning to find out what the district looked like, and this was a fellow that knew it inside and out. Who better to ask where's the most effective, productive place to locate the fire base? Where can I do the most good? He was a logical guy to ask. He didn't look at it as if I were asking a logical guy from a military sense, though, which was what prompted the question. But I also had an ulterior purpose. I wanted him to know from the very beginning that I respected his judgment and we were going to work together.

And from then on out for the next six weeks, two months, we had a real fine relationship; we really did a lot of good. And that two months of working in a heavily populated area, seventy hamlets now in that district, not one civilian so much as scratched.

We killed more Viet Cong in that district than any other battalion in the entire country killed in the same period of time. You couldn't shoot in any direction without shooting toward a village, but we never so much as scratched a civilian. We never brought any kind of fire, be it direct fire or indirect fire or air strikes on a village. Now, we killed a lot of VC in villages, but we didn't do any of the things that you hear about or read about; very effective.

G: This is a disturbing problem. Time and again, you see after-action reports in which there are so many KIAs [killed in action]--VC KIAs--reported, let's say fifty, and four individual weapons. Of course, the question's obvious. Where did the other individual weapons go? The answer was always that the VC were very good as battlefield police, and they got them all up. Do you accept this as an explanation?

M: Partially. I'd have to caveat it, Ted. If you had any appreciable period of time between the battle itself and when you actually got back into the ground where you could see the casualties or the dead, and you did not have that area under observation the whole time, that's generally what did happen. The VC were extremely good about--and, you know, weapons were important. They would take the weapons that you'd very seldom find intelligence documents on these people. You very seldom found any identification, no ammunition, and no militarily unique equipment. You'd just generally find them in their shorts. Where I have trouble with that equation is if the fight happened at four and you are counting the dead and wounded at ten after, and you found that kind of a situation. I used to worry about it.

I didn't have to worry--I never did that. I reported weapons, basically. But in Trang Bang itself as opposed to War Zone C, when we got into a fight, we had everything right there; we were on top of it. We had the body if you will; we had the weapons and everything. There was no place or opportunity for them to come in and police up the battlefield. It was all done at very close quarters, and most of it done out in rice paddies and places like that, which, incidentally, a lot of people--somebody asked me one time, "Where would you rather get pinned down if you had to get pinned down? In a rubber plantation or a rice paddy?" And I told them, "Rubber plantation any day of the week." That rice paddy is naked, I mean you're laying out there--and you know what I'm talking about, I'm sure.

G: The dikes are not very high.

M: No, and you'd be surprised how you can find your way underneath one.

G: You learn how to breathe water.

M: One I never will forget--we got into one and it just happened to be one that was so full of leeches, big, huge--I thought they were snakes. Big, black rascals, bigger than your thumb. And they were shooting at us with a .50 caliber machine gun, so you didn't really have an option. You just had to live with the leeches. But it was just a very eerie kind of an afternoon, I'll tell you that.

G: I can imagine.

Let's talk about Operation Attleboro. That was a big one and you were in on it. In fact, you were in it right at the beginning, I believe. The controversy that ensued you were

some way connected with, but what was your perspective? From your point of view, how did that sequence of events get started?

M: Well, I got into it sort of almost by accident. I was down in this Trang Bang district, had just moved back into the Trang Bang district. We'd left the district subsequent to the elections and gone off to a place called Ho Bo Woods and we were doing some larger operations there. When we vacated the district, the VC filled the vacuum again, and they didn't come back in the same strength or influence they'd had earlier, but they came back in and made it a very miserable district to live in. So Di We Kneip asked us to come back and clean it out again. So we had just moved back in to do that.

One afternoon I got a call from the brigade commander to report immediately to a town called Dau Tieng, I think, up near the Michelin [Plantation], and to take the battalion with me and we were being placed under operational control of a separate brigade, the 196th, a separate brigade that was commanded by a brigadier general named [Edward H.] de Saussure. The intelligence they had picked up was rather grim and they needed some help, so in very short order I had helicopters *en route* and we picked up right from the rice paddies of Trang Bang district and flew to Dau Tieng. I got up there with the S-3 and the S-2 and a few of those kind of people, artillery liaison officer, sergeant major, about two hours before the battalion showed up, reported to General de Saussure, and I got a briefing from the staff of the 196th. They were inhabiting some abandoned French plantation house of some kind, and there was a little airstrip there that had been built by the French as part of their administrative [inaudible] of the rubber plantation. And this was right on the south west region of the so-called Michelin sector.

The intelligence said that the 9th North Vietnamese--regiment, division, something--was moving south towards Saigon, and it was coming down toward the Dau Tieng area out of Cambodia. Because of the buildup of activity, they needed reinforcement and General de Saussure and the 196th had been in that area, war zone--this was really sort of a [inaudible] officially War Zone C, but it was just to the east of Tay Ninh. And he had his battalions, four of them--three of them were in the jungle and one was back at Tay Ninh guarding the regimental base camp. The three battalions he had had had a field day out there in this area, which was about ten kilometers I guess to the north, fighting rice caches and ammunition caches. They were very heavily involved in evacuating those caches. He wanted to get them back together again, if you will, for their own protection against this North Vietnamese crowd that the intelligence guys said were coming down. But he also didn't want to abandon the base camp he had at Dau Tieng. He needed security there. And he also wasn't sure that he had a handle on where the additional VC might be in the jungle.

So my mission was to, one, secure his base camp and the airstrip and, two, run what I was calling phantom eagles, which was a tactic I developed down in Trang Bang where I'd go in very quickly with a helicopter load of guys and they didn't even know where they were. They just knew whatever's out the right door, go find it and scout it and cloverleaf it and get back in. We had some real close code words that we worked up with the same helicopter units. So it was a real gang-bang, frankly, but it was very effective, because you could gain surprise completely. I wouldn't mark the LZ [landing zone] until about three seconds before you hit it, and I come in with the first bird and throw a smoke bomb and that's when the guy landed, wherever they saw the smoke hit, and all the troops knew to go

out the right door and come back in five minutes. Well, as often as not, you got into a fight and the surprise would be on your side. That's how we were getting so many of them and they weren't getting many of us.

Tape 1, Side 2.

So I was going to do some of these phantom eagles along the edge of the jungle to the northwest of Dau Tieng the next day. So the battalion got in that night and we drew our plans up for the next day's work and coordinated with the aviation guys of course, [inaudible] went into a permanent kind of a complex around the airstrip. And the next day we did a lot of these so-called sneaky eagles. I had two eagles, one sneaky, I called it, and the other one phantom. And I did those with two of the three companies I had that next day, and we uncovered a lot of evidence that there was VC movement in the area and we uncovered a lot of evidence that, yes, there was definitely something afoot out here, but we couldn't really pin it down.

That night de Saussure gave me a mission to move out with two companies much further to the north and do a sort of a search pattern which was going to be astride and sort of come in from two directions flanking the main route the North Vietnamese were coming down on that the intelligence guys predicted. I argued with him on that mission for several reasons: one, I thought given the number of LZs out there, there weren't many LZs in that part of the jungle; secondly, the sector he gave me was about the equivalent of what at least six battalions needed. I only had two companies, because I had to leave one company by his direction back at Dau Tieng just to continue to secure the airstrip. Third, he was putting me out at the very limit of artillery range.

G: What kind of artillery was that you--?

M: 105.

G: 105.

M: Yes. And I just thought you had to be pretty stupid to maneuver U.S. troops beyond artillery range because that's how you got a lot of people killed and you couldn't do a damned thing about it. That was one of the few advantages we had, is a field artillery.

So there were a variety of reasons I opposed this mission, and I thought on good, logical ground. I wasn't trying to be insubordinate; I was just trying to protect my soldiers. He got very mad at me and asked if I had any additional arguments to offer and I had probably offered most of those same arguments by this time in the discussion for the third time around. And I told him no. He said, well, he had heard me out. I'd had my day in court, and he'd made his mind up and I was going to do it anyhow. So I saluted. I put my B Company in up near the Saigon River and I watched them work for about an hour before I put my C Company in, and when B Company reported things looked fairly quiet and stable, I put my C Company in over to the west of them about ten kilometers.

Now, this whole period of two weeks before I'd ever gotten there, or ten days or however long De Saussure had had his 196th in that area, that's really technically, I guess, the official start date for what is called later Attleboro. I think Attleboro is thought of however as that battle that we did for two days and three nights that I was involved with. My C Company went in on the ground, and I was out of fuel by this time. I had to go over to Tay Ninh City to get fuel. The C Company commander told me--a guy named Fred Henderson--everything looked calm. What we had [was] what we called a green LZ. And

they were moving off the LZ, no action, *et cetera*, and I was down to less than two hundred pounds of fuel. So we went over to Tay Ninh and refueled, landed, came back, got in the air and were headed back toward the LZ I guess a distance total of ten kilometers. [I] was talking to Henderson again on the radio; everything was still calm. Before I ever got back over there, which is only a ten-minute flight, all hell broke loose on that LZ. And that began what you might think of as Attleboro.

G: Now, the troops had not moved off the LZ.

M: No, they had moved. They had moved into the flanks of it. Not all of them. One platoon was still moving off the LZ.

G: And you were in command--

M: What we happened to hit at the north side of that LZ was a major Viet Cong base camp. And when we went into it later--I have never seen anything as elaborate. They literally had teak latrines. They had a desk set up under a thatched roof--this is all in triple canopy--well, classrooms, if you will, where you could sit forty, fifty people down and teach. They had hospitals. They had an ammunition factory. We found a pile of reinforcement rods, for example, concrete reinforcement rod, where you could see they were taking snips and they were cutting off about an inch at the time to make claymore mines out of it. You couldn't believe what we accounted for in that base camp. But that's what we had landed on, unknowing, and that's what started this fight.

Henderson was hit very quickly, as was his first sergeant, as was one platoon leader, as [were] two platoon sergeants. And in a period of fifteen minutes everything on the ground was in shambles. The man in charge left was a brand new second lieutenant, never

forget him, first operation he'd ever been on, right out of Officer Candidate School, and the poor kid was just petrified.

The pilot, fortunately, was an old friend of mine--in fact, we had served in Korea years before--and a gutty guy named Jim Patterson, also retired now as a major general, he was then a major. I said, "Jim, you're going to have to put me on that LZ." He said, "Hell, ain't no way I can put you on that LZ." Because there were machine guns going off. I said, "Well, you've just got to do it." He said, "Well, I ain't going to stop." And I said, "Fair enough." Then I had no radio contact back to the A Company on the airstrip, so I said to Jim, "You go back and tell Dick Cole"--command of my A Company--"to get that company off that airstrip and into your helicopters and you bring their ass out here," and I pointed to another LZ that was about a half a mile away, and I said, "Bring them in there, Jim, and tell Dick Cole when he hits that drop zone, or that landing zone, to move"--and I showed him; we were looking at the ground and the map at the same time--"to that point and I'm going to try to meet them there. But you've got to put us on the ground," because the company was just sitting on the ground by this time and nobody doing anything except try to defend themselves, but really nobody in charge. So Jim said, "All right."

We crossed the south end of that landing zone probably going twenty-five knots, which was still slow--but not if you're jumping out of the helicopter, it didn't seem so damn slow. If he'd stopped, he wouldn't have gotten this transition again. You know, this transitional lift, you've got to--as it was, he got hit four times just doing what he did then. And he came across for about three feet. And on my command, we all bailed out. By sheer coincidence, the artillery-liaison officer, a guy named McElroy, was a paratrooper and the

sergeant major was a paratrooper. We all did instinctively parachute landing falls. The sergeant major got hit in the leg, broke his leg, while he was still in the air, literally coming out of the helicopter. He took a round right in the leg. He was the only one hurt, though, on the jump out, if you will. All the radio operators made it out all right. And we headed for this little strip of woods and that's when I found the first--remember, I had a platoon sergeant named Chou--Chou or Ching, a big Chinaman, a huge man--and he had gotten these two fingers shot off, and he was sitting there trying to put a bandage on it when I went by him.

Henderson had been hit in the stomach was still out in the LZ. I went out in the LZ to get Henderson. It was obvious he was going in a hurry. The first sergeant was also going. The first sergeant was a very devout Mormon named Solomon, Sam Solomon. I still get emotional talking about Sam Solomon. I just think he was one of the greatest human beings I'd ever met. And they had both been hit trying to go after wounded soldiers. I called Patterson and said, "You got a guy who'll volunteer to try to get this guy?" And I could say that--I'm getting off on the side stories now, but--

G: That's all right.

M: --two warrant officers had volunteered to try to medevac him and got shot up and the bird exploded about thirty feet off the ground. And they knew what they were getting into. We weren't asking them to do anything they weren't aware of. But Henderson died on the drop zone, on the landing zone, and so did Solomon. Patterson went back, and we didn't say anything to the 196th or to de Saussure or anything else. Couldn't find him, couldn't raise him on the radio. They didn't even know this was going on.

Patterson's co-pilot ran across the 196th CP [Command Post] to report what had happened and where it had happened. And Patterson ran over to the company CP and found this guy, Dick Cole, who is another story--great soldier, now a full colonel in Washington. He policed up Cole. Now Cole ordinarily would have laughed at him, because he took his orders from me, not some helicopter pilot. But he knew Patterson; we'd worked together very often. And all Patterson said was, "The CO said 'Get your butt moving.'" And they had that company in helicopters within ten minutes. Cole came in as directed, and I moved him on the whole left flank of this thing and did a wheel movement, if you will. We had air strikes going in real fast and furious by this time as well.

Henderson had gotten hit around I'm going to say eleven o'clock that morning. By dark we had the area secure. We had located the base camp, cleaned it out, I don't know how many Viet Cong we killed. We had all the wounded evacuated and we had all the dead evacuated. I still--you know over a period of time you build a sensing, what I used to call a nose, and something didn't strike me right about that area. It wasn't one of these hit and run kind of things. There was just something that worried me. So I kept A Company out there, and I got hold of B Company through our radio relay and told Bob Garrett, who commanded that company--he's retired, incidentally, up here outside of Fort Worth--to increase his rate of movement, because I was supposed to link the A and the B and the C Company up at a point about eight kilometers north of us. And about that time de Saussure sent a company from the battalion securing his Tay Ninh base camp commanded by a young fellow named [Captain Russell] Devries, sent that company out as additional reinforcements. And that company came in, and I assigned them a sector. He had a

battalion minus out on a rice gathering, rice cache evacuation mission about five kilometers from where all this had happened. And he sent that battalion minus over. I don't know where the battalion commander of that battalion was. I never saw any of the battalion commanders of the 196th the entire time we were in that jungle.

G: Wait a minute now. This is how many companies that he sent you so far--three?

M: Well, this was the first day. I had my C Company--I had what was left of my C Company, maybe sixty-five or seventy guys. C Company wasn't annihilated or anything like that. It's just that most of the leadership got banged up. I had my A Company. I had this one company from Tay Ninh. That's three. And then for that night he sent these two companies from another battalion of his over to the same area, and those two companies were commanded by the battalion "S three." A super guy incidentally. I don't know where their battalion commander was.

G: Now, you were all tied in--?

M: Well, they all reported--they were part of my old task force at this point.

So we went into this perimeter for the night and stayed there all that night, and there was some scattered shooting during the night, probing kind of stuff, nothing all that serious. The mission the next day was for me to continue on to this rendezvous point eight kilometers on up through the jungle where I would marry up with my B Company, which was coming from the east. So the next day the battalion minus commanded by the three, S-3, that had come in from the rice mission and had joined me--they were given another mission where they were going to move through the jungle parallel to my route but about five kilometers further east. And I was talking to that battalion S-3.

Oh, I'll tell you a curious story. Around eight o'clock that morning here comes a helicopter--this is the next day--and three journalists get off, photo journalists. And they had been briefed back at MACV about this beautiful base camp. So they had asked to go out and take photographs of it. So typically nobody said anything to us, and these three innocents get off the bird and want to know where the base camp was. I told them, well, I didn't guarantee their safety; there were still people shooting around the side of that base camp--"That's all right," he says, "I'd like to go see it." So we put them in the base camp and I said, "What time is your helicopter coming back?" He says, "Ten thirty." I said, "Fine." Our mission, though, was to continue north.

Now, the only reason I hesitated--I told this guy, this battalion S-3, "I tell you what. I'm going to give you an hour's start, because you know how close it is in the jungle. And coordinating fires can be a real tricky proposition. I want you to have an hour distance on me, so that if I get in a fight or you get in a fight, we're fighting VC, not each other. So you go first." So he said, "Good. Glad to have seen you, glad to know you. Enjoyed last night," kind of thing, and he took off straight east. He was going to move about five kilometers in and then he was going to turn north. I waited for him an hour, and the only reason I stayed in this base camp area was to give this guy that hour head start.

The second smartest decision I made that morning was I also called back to--our base camp was all the way back at Cu Chi, and I had the medical platoon come out to include the battalion surgeon, who was a little Brooklyn Chinaman. And when you met him, he looked like he was right off the boat from Singapore, until he opened his mouth and he had the most classic Grade B movie Brooklyn accent you can ever imagine. Feisty little

guy. His name was Chou--Ching, Dr. Ching. I got them out there. He said, "What am I doing in the jungle?" I said, "You're going to walk in the jungle today, Doc." He said, "Uh, huh, I don't want to walk in the jungle." I said, "Yes, you bring all your stretchers and walk in the jungle. He said, "Why?" I said, "I don't know. I've just got a funny feeling. I want you around." He wasn't very happy with the idea, but thank God we did it, because he saved a lot of lives. He got a Silver Star later, too. Very highly warranted.

This guy takes off for an hour. Now it's an hour passed. My turn to leave, and I turn around and there's these journalists. And I said to the guy, "You still here?" "Yes." And this is about eleven o'clock. I said, "What time's the helicopter?" He said, "It was supposed to have been here at ten-thirty." I said, "I hate to tell you this. I can't hang around here and wait for you. I've got a long way to go today and I want to make it before dark. You've got two options, friend. You can either go along with us or you can stay here and hope that helicopter comes back and gets you. Since you are in the middle of the 9th NVA Division I'm not sure I would stand out here by myself hoping the helicopter comes." So he said, "I guess you're right. I'll go with you." And I tell you that story because he later made a tape recording of--not consecutive but for about the first eight hours of Attleboro that he later gave us. And he held the microphone [of] the tape recorder up against the--we used to carry these speakers on the back of the radios so we didn't have to hold the handset up to listen. And he just hung the tape recorder while he went and hid underneath a tree. So you get all the communications that were going on over the battalion net, you hear all the artillery, you hear all the shooting, and it just scares the death out of you. To this day it scares me to death.

G: Have you still got the tape?

M: Yes.

G: I'd love to hear it sometime.

M: It just scares me to death. But the guy was gutty.

But we took off. We hadn't been gone twenty minutes when all hell broke loose, and that's when we ended up with--when we left I had at that time--my A Company was point company. I had C Company in the rear, and I had this other company commanded by Captain Devries from the 196th. That's three companies, plus my own B Company which was way off to the northeast. So we started this thing with three companies. To make a long story short, we apparently had found this regiment, and God was looking after us. Maximum range of a 105 artillery tube is 11,200 meters. We found these guys at 11,000 meters. They fired over 16,000 rounds of artillery in our support, one battery. Tubes melted. We were bringing rounds in at literally twenty-five yards. You know, "Drop two five, right five zero five." You know, adjustments like that you never hear in school. It was all done by sound, and we killed some of our own people, not many, but thank God we had it. That's in addition to the air strike support.

But by the time that whole mess was--that started on a--let's see, Henderson was killed on a Thursday, and we finally got out of the jungle late Saturday night or late Saturday afternoon. The 1st Division relieved us, a whole brigade of the 1st Division. It was the second time I had seen DePuy. And by that time we had eleven companies assigned to that task force, and every company--it started out with my A Company, C Company and this company from the 196th.

When the thing started and [when] after about the first thirty minutes we realized what we had, I on my own initiative called that battalion S-3 from the 196th I'd sent off an hour earlier to get his ass back. And without asking anybody's permission in the 196th, he did. He turned them around and brought them back to me and just assigned himself to me. I never was so happy to see one guy in all my life, but it took him about four hours to get back, because they got in a couple of scraps getting back in their own right. Those are two more companies, so what am I up to--five? Then by about mid-afternoon, it was apparent that we really had something bigger than a breadbox, so they sent in the 2nd Battalion 27th from the 25th Division back at Cu Chi. I was happy to see those guys come in. That battalion was commanded by Bill Barott, and of course they were a sister battalion. Bill only had one company, though, when he arrived, and I told him where to land. Bill was killed within twenty minutes of hitting the ground. See, I had been wounded, too, so they were coming in--one of reasons Bill came in with that lead battalion was he was going to replace me and they were going to medevac me, although we didn't start our medevac till dark. We couldn't get a chopper in there. But, of course, when he was killed I had to assume command of that company he had. Then a second one of his companies came in, so now what am I up to? Seven? There were three additional companies from the 196th represented. By the time we finished we had at least one company from each of the four battalions--three battalions? I guess three battalions of the 196th.

And I never asked for--I suddenly got a call on the radio from a guy I never heard of. He was on the ground at such and such a coordinate, what did I want him to do? And de Saussure just kept adding companies. I was happy as heck to see everybody up through

the first five. Beyond that, it was always a surprise, surprise time. Because I was a major commanding eleven companies, is what it boiled down to. And I finally got my B Company into the thing--that was on Saturday, Saturday afternoon. But I never talked to de Saussure on the radio that entire period that I can recall. If I did, I have no recollection at all of it. I do know that I had to--we had a FAC [Forward Air Controller] and he was a guy from the 196th. He was normally in support of the 196th, this young air force captain. I found out later he was an Annapolis graduate. And that poor guy stayed in the air about sixteen consecutive hours, only to land and refuel. He was a gutty guy. If it hadn't been for that guy, I would have had no radio relay even back to the base camp or back to Dau Tieng, where the 196th was. I finally asked him--my S-3, incidentally, was on leave. He was in Hawaii and my assistant S-3, a guy named Jerry Mayone, who now works for Hallmark Cards up in Kansas City, Jerry was minding the store, if you will, back at Dau Tieng.

G: How do you spell his last name?

M: Mayone? M-A-Y-O-N-E. Lowell [J.] Mayone, comes from some funny town in New York. I said, "See if you can't get it relayed back to him to get a helicopter and get your butt in the air. I want to talk to somebody that I know." And Mayone finally got a helicopter out of the 196th and he got up in the air, and he was my only contact--he and the FAC [forward air controller] were the only contact. And all we were doing was relaying information to the 196th, and that's how I guess General de Saussure was finding out what was going on up there, because I never did see him, ever.

G: Who was coordinating artillery fire?

M: A guy named Bart McElroy, who was my captain, battalion field artillery liaison officer, coordinated all eleven FOs [forward observer?]. The battery that normally supported me was A Battery of the 8th Artillery, and they had come with us, of course. I didn't go anywhere without my artillery, and I considered them my artillery. The captain that ran that battery, Jack McDonald, a big old football player type from West Point, didn't ask any questions. He just started driving trucks around, finding ammunition. Before they were through, they were flying ammunition up directly from the Saigon docks by CH-47s, direct to that battery. He policed another--one battery of artillery was just sort of going down the road going somewhere and he went out and stopped them and put them in position and said, "You now belong to me." He ended up as a battery running what was the equivalent of Battalion FDC [Fire Direction Center]. And he ended up with another battalion from some other outfit. He had three batteries from three different outfits so he just put them all together. What got tricky was this Bart McElroy, who was my liaison officer trying to coordinate eleven FOs on the ground, like me he only knew three of them. A real tribute to the army training system when you think about it. Because here we all were--there were guys that I put into a night attack the second night there that I never to this day have seen in the daytime. Company commanders I have never met were in that fight, working for me. But we all spoke the same language, we used the same terminology, we had the same communications procedures. It's a real tribute I think to the U.S. Army system that we were able to do that, when you think about it. Complete strangers out there fighting together.

But pulling those eleven FOs together was something else, and he did that and he did it well. He got wounded, too, real bad, got wounded twice. I told him if I wasn't going to go, he wasn't going to go. (Laughter) Anyway, we're still close friends.

But, anyhow, then General DePuy was called--General Weyand, my division commander at the time, was back as acting commander of the Second Field Force, First Field Force, whatever--

G: First Field Force.

M: Whatever. Anyway, when he heard about this thing, he decided that he would ask General DePuy to go assess the situation and see what the heck was going on. Because all that Weyand knew was that the Wolfhounds, which were his, were really in the thick of it. DePuy came up with sort of an advanced tactical group on Saturday morning early and landed at Dao Ting. His assistant division commander was a guy named Jack Dean, a very youthful-looking guy, later retired as a four star. He told Dean--we'd finally gotten our landing zones secure late Friday night and we were getting the wounded out all night long. We had a hundred and sixty wounded and sixty killed, I guess, in that crowd there in the two days or so. And the only supplies we were bringing in were water and ammunition and medicine, nothing else. No food, no zip, just water, ammunition and medicine.

He told Dean, though, "Go up there and see if you can find Meloy and find what's going on." So Dean saluted and got in a helicopter, and he landed at this landing zone which is about three hundred yards I guess from where I was, and I was about fifty yards from where the Viet Cong were, the North Vietnamese. We didn't have very much breathing room in there. By this time--the stretcher-bearers carrying wounded had made a

trail, because there was none there to start with. But by this time the trail looked like it had been there a hundred years, it was so beaten down, you know. Dean followed this trail, and he could hear the shooting and he wasn't wearing any kind of pistol and he wasn't wearing rank. Now, don't ask me--now, I was laying on the ground and I had been on the ground for quite a while at that point, and I had a couple of bandages here and there on me. I was tired; I hadn't slept in two nights. I hadn't slept since Thursday morning. Wednesday night is the last night I slept, and this is Saturday morning. So you can imagine I was pretty [tired] and I was in no mood to talk to straphangers and I had too many things going.

I was up to eight companies at this point, and all of a sudden I'd look over and there's this guy and he's in a nice, clean uniform. He says, "I'm looking for the battalion commander." I was talking to somebody on the radio and I just went like that to him. He just stood there. About that time they started shooting like hell, and he jumped down on the ground with the rest of us, where it's smart to be. And I'm looking at this guy, I've never seen this guy before, and he didn't say General to me. In fact, he didn't look old enough to be a general, I didn't think. He says, "I'm looking for the battalion commander." I said, "What for, Buddy?" He said, "I came to find out what's going on." I said, "What the hell business"--I said this in a much more profane way, though. I said, "What business is this of yours?" He said, "Well, I'm from the First Division." I said, "Big deal." And this is the way the conversation went, Ted, for at least five minutes. Finally he said, "I'm Jack Dean," and I actually said, "Well, kiss my ass."

(Laughter)

I'd never heard of Jack Dean. I guess he thought that was going to make it all right, you know. And he looked at me a minute, and--great guy, obviously. You know, he didn't get mad. He finally said, "Let me say it slower. I'm Jack Dean, General Jack Dean." "Oh!" (Laughter)

"What can I do you for, sir?" (Laughter) So I got my map out--still got that map, too, I might add, sort of a nice memento, got my blood all over it. It makes a nice thing to hang in your den. And I started showing him where all these companies were. He said, "Well, what company--?" I said, "I don't know the name of the company." I can still tell you to this day all the call signs, to this day I'll tell you every call sign out there. They were Fighters, Sluggers, Boxers, Mustangs, I forget the fifth one, but I'll think of it. Oh, Trojan. So I was telling him where all these companies were and he said, "My God, I don't believe it." "Well, there they are." "Gee, you really got your hands full." "Yes, sir." He said, "Okay. I was up here to assess the situation for General DePuy. I think we better bring in a lot of people to help you." I said, "Yes, [inaudible] could help me out here, but I don't want to let loose of them," because we had them pretty well--if I said I had them cornered, that's the wrong word. I'm not sure who had who cornered, but I wasn't about to let go of them. So I said, "If you can bring somebody in here to relieve us in place, I've got a lot of wounded and my guys haven't slept since Wednesday"--we were getting pretty beat-up by that time, just physically exhausted--"it'd be handy." "Why don't I go back and talk to General DePuy." "Okay."

It wasn't three hours later here comes DePuy himself right up the trail. He hadn't been there two minutes when they opened up with everything they had again, and he was

on the ground with the rest of us once more; it never fazed him. He looked like General DePuy, though. I knew General DePuy. I had met him, oddly enough, less than ten kilometers from there the first time, in March of 1966 during Operation Birmingham, when we were attached to the First Division, task force airborne. So I had met him, and he didn't remember me, but I guess he remembered the name or something. He says, "Sandy, General Dean came back and reported that you had eight companies out here," and this and that. "God, it just sounds unbelievable." He said, "It was such a confusing report, though, I thought I better get up here and see it for myself."

Now, General DePuy is a real stickler with his battalion commanders. You better know where every company is. And he's right. That's fundamental to a--and he was amazed I knew where these eight were. I said, "Well, sir, I hate to tell you this. I'm up to eleven now." And he coughed about three [times], he said, "Eleven?" "Yes, sir, I've got eleven. Here they are." I showed him what I was doing with them, what I had planned to do with them. He just said, "God Almighty!" He and I made arrangements where he said, "I'll have the--Sid Berry"--was a brigade commander. General Al Haig was one of his battalion commanders. General Paul Gorman, now a commanding general SOUTHCOM [U.S. Southern Command], CINCSOUTH [Commander in Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe], was another battalion commander. So that was a pretty impressive brigade of guys at the time. And Al Haig reminded me of this. I didn't remember meeting him at all, but he remembered very distinctly meeting me. He said, "I'm going to come up here. It will be another two or three hours. And then we'll work up a plan to relieve you in place." So I said, "Fine." So he left.

I'm told that he later got in a helicopter and he flew to Tay Ninh and found General de Saussure back at his own BOQ taking a shower. I will not vouch for that story. I was told, however, by a very reliable source. I believe the story, but I don't know whether it's true or not, nor do I think General DePuy would discuss it. And I'm told General DePuy relieved de Saussure on the spot. He did; he just dumped the whole damn battle on me and I got no--you know, for whatever. And for a brigadier general to turn a thing like that over to a young major, not all that courageous in my opinion.

G: That was Attleboro.

M: That was the Attleboro that when I talk about Attleboro I talk about. The First Division came in; we did break contact. Another story how I did that, I was very proud of the way we did that. I managed to get my battalion--my battalion went directly back to the 196th base camp, the closest base camp. Hell, by the time our guys got out they were almost naked, clothes had been ripped off, and they were--I got on a helicopter with my artillery guy. Our RTOs had also been hit, I might add. And when they took us back to the 25th Field Hospital, just before I got on the helicopter, though, I stayed long enough to make sure the battalion had gotten out all right. First Division helicopters took them out, and then I briefed the brigade commander, Berry, Sid Berry--later ended up as superintendent of the military academy--and briefed his three battalion commanders on the situation, so at least they were up to speed. And they went in that night, they went in off the LZ and then the next day they came back into the area where we had had our fight, and by that time--God, they counted seven hundred bodies in there. It was a good-sized fight.

G: Yes. Seven hundred bodies. If you wounded two for one, that's--

M: I don't know.

G: --two thousand casualties.

M: The little things that happen. When I finally got B Company up into that thing, I actually had them infiltrate through the NVA [North Vietnamese Army]. They came right through without a scratch. Couldn't believe it. But about a day before I'd had them--you know, I was telling you about this rendezvous point, eight kilometers we're supposed to meet. Well, when Garrett finally got there and he arrived there as this fighting was taking place eight kilometers to the south. I said, "Get into a good ambush posture." He said, "Is there a trail?" There was a trail there that didn't show on the map. I said, "Get into an ambush posture." And I kept figuring--you know, as often as not, in fact most of the time when you get in a fight with one of those Viet Cong or NVA units and you had the firepower, they wouldn't stand and fight much more than an hour or two, and then they would bug out and withdraw. To show you how much of a mindset you get, I just anticipated that's what's going to happen. My first clue that it wasn't going to happen is when the mortar size went from 82-millimeter to--what's that?

G: A hundred and twenty?

M: One hundred and twenty, which is what got me.

G: That's a divisional size weapon.

M: Yes. And that was my first clue that these bastards weren't withdrawing. They're supposed to be withdrawing. How come they're not? Whew! Well, that's when you realize they're serious and they don't intend to withdraw. Garrett's up there at this rendezvous saying, "Boy, I see them. They're hard-core, all right." You could hear all this on the tape, too.

He's pointing out their pith helmets, pointing out they've got hard-core equipment. I came on the radio. He described them to me, and you could hear me on the radio saying, "They're really hard-core, aren't they?" He said, "Definitely." I said, "Well, take care of as many as you can." He says, "They are really moving in a hurry." I was thinking [they were] withdrawing! I said to myself, "Hot dog, we've got these guys on the run," and I passed the word to some of the company commanders, "Be prepared to pursue." I wasn't going to let go of those guys. I was all set to charge on into the jungle and take care of them while I had them. Well, when he said they're moving, it never occurred to him and it never occurred to me--to show you the little tiny things that can make a difference--which direction. Now, in hindsight, that's the most obvious question in the world, isn't it? In the middle of that battle, it wasn't that obvious. He never thought to say they were moving toward me, reinforcing the thing, and he was watching this. He ambushed about--I don't know how many, about four times he sprung ambushes up there. The guy led a charmed life, didn't have a single man in the company except his first sergeant hurt. The first sergeant took a round through the shoulder. Not a man in the company scratched. Great soldiers. But that was Attleboro as I knew it. And de Saussure I do know was relieved and then he went north up to II Corps, II Field Force I guess they call it. I don't know what happened to him after that. I've seen him one time.

There were two Medal of Honors that came out of that fight. President Johnson, as a matter of fact, presented them. A guy named [Robert F.] Foley, a West Pointer who stands about six feet six. He commanded one of the companies of the 2/27 [2nd Batallion, 27th Infantry] that I took over after Bill Barott[?], his battalion commander, was killed.

There was a little PFC who was then a--I don't know whether he's in an acting leadership position or not. His name was [John F.] Baker. Same company. Baker is five feet two. And the two were awarded Medal of Honors during that period. And of course I was invited to the ceremony at the White House since they worked for me at the time. And as I sat down--I had a front row kind of a seat there, when the President came in. As I sat down, I happened to turn and I glanced over my shoulder and sitting in the second row was General de Saussure. And that's the only time I've seen de Saussure. In fact, that's the first time I'd seen him since the night he and I argued in his command post. That's the only time I've seen him since. I think I said, "How are you, General?" or words to that effect. I certainly didn't say, "Good to see you," because I'm still a little bit upset with him. And I think he said something equally courteous but nothing warm on it.

G: How could General DePuy relieve him?

M: Because I think Weyand had given him that authority, to go up to Dao Ting and, quote, "straighten that thing up."

G: Well, that's a pretty broad commission.

M: And I would think--General DePuy is a very courageous guy. He's also a very fair man. He's also extremely concerned about his soldiers, and I think all that in combination if in fact he found General de Saussure back from his BOQ room--I'm sure he was tempted to shoot him, if that's a true story. Now, Ted, I don't vouch for that story. I think that would have to be confirmed and General DePuy would be the only one--and I would be surprised if General DePuy talked about it anyway, because I think that's sort of a private general officer business that he wouldn't want to--I'm guessing. He might.

G: We will see.

M: It may have happened in the CP. In any event, de Saussure sure stayed away as far away from the shooting as he could.

(Interruption)

G: Did you participate in Operation Sam Houston or Cedar Falls?

M: No.

G: You left?

M: I left in January of 1967, early January.

G: And where did you go?

M: From there I went to the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, six months.

G: What influence was the war in Vietnam having on what was going on at the Staff College? Was this the topic of conversation all the time? Was counterinsurgency at the center of the curriculum, or--?

M: No. As a matter of fact, among the army guys attending the course, I was one of the very few that had been to Vietnam and back. I will say this: I think 98 per cent of the army having the course went from there to Vietnam. Everybody was getting their Vietnam orders. Yes, Vietnam was obviously a topic of conversation, because all of us there were professional military of one service or another and we all had friends in Vietnam. But the curriculum was designed more on a larger generic sense, joint staff actions and joint planning and joint orders. To be honest with you, that was right after the French pulled out of NATO, you'll recall. That seemed to be more of a lively topic than the Vietnam War.

G: When did you go to DCSOPS [Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans] then? Was that right after you left?

M: After I left the Armed Forces Staff College, yes.

G: What was the nature of your job there?

M: I was the Vietnam desk officer in the International Affairs Directorate of DCSOPS, what they call the Political-Military Division. Most of the work I did was in the joint arena; I was the army action officer on many--I guess 99 per cent of what I did do was in joint actions.

G: Could you go into some detail about that? Give us any--?

M: Well, we did a lot of work on bombing campaigns, recommendations the Joint Chiefs would make on bombing campaign and pursuit across borders and that sort of thing. Mostly the recommendations the Joint Chiefs were giving the president. Then when the--of course, I did a lot of fact sheets for the Chief of Staff of the army and a lot of talking papers for the Chief of Staff of the army on Vietnam affairs. The notion being where I was, I wasn't in the part of DCSOPS that sent troops to Vietnam or followed the war on a day-to-day basis. I was in the side that--we worked very close [with] the State Department. If there was a State Department position on anything dealing with Vietnam, State would send that position over for analysis to the Joint Chiefs and sort of find out, "Okay, what is the impact of a political decision or recommendation or policy or what have you? What impact if any will that have on the military pursuit of the war?" We in the military, on the other hand, reciprocated that, and if we were coming up with a policy or a recommendation to the president as far as how to pursue the war, we would coordinate that paper with State,

so we would have an idea of the political ramifications that that military judgment might have.

My job was to be the guy--if the paper came from State I analyzed the State paper and if the paper went from us to State I handled--and a lot of times in the press of time I just gave an independent assessment. If you do this militarily, this is the political ramifications. Or if somebody does this politically, here are the military ramifications. Because the two are too closely bound.

Now, having said all that, I want to tell you that I still think the United States government as a nation has a big-time problem that the Viet Cong didn't have. The Viet Cong used the word "politico hyphen military" as an entity always. They never made a military decision without thinking of the political objective, and the political objective was really what they did militarily. They didn't attack from point A to point B to capture hill 2 for military reasons. They only did it for political reasons, and they're brilliant at it. And they also knew what they were doing, which is why Tet was for them a military disaster, but a political brilliant victory. And our own press did it to us. And they knew the press. They knew the American press better than we know the American press. And they milked the American press and I think they played the American press beautifully, plus the Jane Fondas and the rest of that crowd.

But they understood the influence and how to work the press better than anybody in the U.S. government ever did on their best day. So even though I was a political-military shop and Vietnam-oriented, we--at least I haven't seen any evidence that it's changed since I was there in 1968--have never understood that they are one word. We still treat him as if

they are two separate things that don't have any relationship to one another, and it's one reason I think we do so many dumb things.

But, anyhow, that's what I spent a year doing, and most of it was in the joint arena. In the last six months I was almost exclusively devoted to the negotiating question when negotiations first became a possibility--from the time that they became a possibility up until the time they actually began.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

GUY S. MELOY

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Guy S. Meloy, of Georgetown, Texas, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted with me on April 18, 1984, in Austin, Texas, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Guy S. Meloy — 02 August 2006
Donor — Date

Sharon Fawcett — 12-19-2006
~~Archivist of the United States~~ Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries — Date