RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD K. ALBERTS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Lieutenant Colonel Howard Kirkpatrick Alberts of the Class of 1943 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with …

Jared Kosch: Jared Kosch …

SI: Shaun Illingworth and …

David D'Onofrio: David D'Onofrio.

SI: Colonel Alberts, thank you very much for coming down today, and experiencing all this with us. To begin, I'd like to ask you a little bit about your parents, beginning with your father. Could you tell me a little bit about him, where he was from, what he did for a living?

HA: My father was born in France and came to this country when he was fourteen and went to work in the coal mines. … The mine he happened to be working in, I guess he was about eighteen or nineteen then, was flooded. He lost all his tools, and then he had to buy them from the company store. ... He happened to be on the night shift and going to work, he saw a Wabash train pass, and he saw the people in the dining car, and as you know, if you've seen the passenger trains, especially in a snowy atmosphere, how cozy things looked. So, he said he took his lunch bucket and threw it as far as far away as he could, and joined the army. This was about 1902 and he worked his way up through the ranks and was commissioned in World War I and subsequent to World War I, he was retired for disabilities. … He met my mother before he went to France and when he got back they were married. … When he was stationed at Fort Holabird, Maryland, I was born, actually in Washington, DC, one of the few people born in Washington, DC. Since my mother was from New Jersey, they bought a place outside of Franklin Park. … That's where I lived, starting school in a two room schoolhouse that was added to, to make it five rooms, all eight grades, which is still there, by the way. That's the only thing I recognized in Franklin Park, driving through it yesterday. It's not used as a school any more, it's something else. But, in any case, that part of the country was still farm country, and Rutgers since at one time, it was sponsored by the Dutch Reformed Church, there were still scholarships available from that part of Rutgers, and I believe I got the last one. It was a partial scholarship, but the administration didn't have anything to say, yes, no, or whatever. I just had to visit one of the individuals in control of the Dutch Reformed scholarship—a woman that owned a large farm, and was the descendant of one of the original donors, thus, she had control of the scholarships. So, that, among other things, was why I ended up in Rutgers. Now, after the eighth grade, we were bussed to New Brunswick for the ninth grade, in junior high, and then tenth, eleventh, and twelfth in senior high here. That's why John Archibald, Louie Lasagna, Art Van Dyke were my classmates in high school and in Rutgers. … A little bit about Rutgers and the military: right now, the ROTC at Rutgers is branch immaterial. When they graduate, they get told, "You go here, you go there," to any one of the arms or services. Before World War II, they were designated branches. Rutgers only had infantry and the first two years everyone, unless they were physically disqualified, was in the ROTC whether they wanted to or not. But, I wanted to because just listening to my father's stories of actions on the Mexican border and here and there and everywhere, that was one of the things I was looking forward to. … Rutgers, being a land grant college, every year gave, I believe, five scholarships in the regular Army or Marine Corps. … Since I was designated an honor military graduate, and my mentor, who had been a Marine in

World War I, said, "When they ask you what you want, say the Marine Corps," which I did. But also we were anxious to get into World War II and I went to summer school in '42 so I would get extra courses and have more than seven-eighths finished by the end of the first term in '43. So, when that took place, I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia to go through the infantry school, which I did, and I was on my way to the glider infantry in Camp Croft, South Carolina, when my parents received the Marine Corps commission in the mail. Fortunately, I had had a delay and so I was at home at the time, and on my way to Carolina, I got off the train in Washington, went to the Adjutant General's office and said that I wanted to resign my army commission. The first individual I talked to said, "He can't do that," and the one sitting next to him said, "Well maybe he can, let me see that." … Since it was a promise of a regular commission, this was a reserve commission, the same as my commission in the army, it was a grade higher and the Army was not giving regular commissions, so they said that I could do it. … I was sworn into the Marine Corps in an Army lieutenant's uniform, and they were nice as could be to me, up until I said, "I do." … Then, he said, "Get out of that damned thing." But they gave me enough leave to have uniforms made and all the rest of that. … So then, I reported to Quantico and they sent me through their school. Now, both at Fort Benning and Quantico I finished number two in my classes. But at Quantico, since I've been through the infantry school, they kept me to be an instructor in their school, in infantry tactics. Now, the hardest thing that I had was some of the classes had first lieutenants and captains in them, that had been given field commissions in Guadalcanal and here I am a twenty year old second lieutenant, telling these guys how to do it and I pulled it off, I guess. … A year later I received my regular Marine Corps commission, which does not look like the ones they hand out now. They were … almost a foot and a half wide and two feet deep with Neptune and his three pronged spear and all the rest of the fancy writing on it. So, that's the only one that I framed because it's different and even some of my Marine friends of later years they've not seen one like that.

SI: Could we just go back for a second? Do you remember where you were when you heard the news that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

HA: Where I was? I was playing, I guess you'd say, "Not for pay" football. It was a Sunday afternoon and, of course, I didn't hear about it until I got home that night.

SI: Where were you playing?

HA: The other side of Adams Station if, I think that still exists. It's on Highway 1 going towards, well, from here to Trenton. But World War II, without our participation, had been going on, and also, there was a mobilization with the song, *Goodbye Dear, I'll Be Back in a Year*. Of course, that was not like they do it now. Then, the person was in and they stayed in until it was all over. There wasn't the rotation, unless you got a Hollywood wound or something, then they rotated you. That's the hard way.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, how much did you know about the war in Europe? Your father being from France you must have been interested in that area, did you follow the news.

HA: Just what we read in the newspaper and radio commentators. But, it's primarily the newspapers and in the movies, news reels, there, and of course, right from the start, where the

French were showing the Maginot Line and everything else, how it was going to be impenetrable, couldn't be penetrated. … With the *blitzkrieg*, one would be hard-pressed, even today with super highways, to drive from Germany to Paris as fast as the German armies made it. By the way, there was also the Siegfried Line the Germans had, and one of the classes at Fort Benning was how to breach it. Russ Cloer, Class of '43, he happened to be in the unit doing it [breaking through the Siegfried Line with the Third Infantry Division] and he said it was done just like the Fort Benning problem. By the way, I was a physics major, Russ Cloer was a physics major, and there were two others. There were four in the senior class. But they gave the courses alternately, for graduates and undergraduates, so usually we'd end up with maybe six in the class. Things were different then. But back to the Marine Corps, traditionally, a Marine regular was supposed to put in a tour of sea duty and since I was at the transition point of the old corps and the new corps and whatever, I was sent from Quantico to a sea school in San Diego, which was a good thing, because there I learned about antiaircraft weapons, and how ships are run, and everything else. … I was assigned to new construction, which was a heavy cruiser, the USS *Fall River*. Traditionally the Marine detachment, which was two officers and forty-one men, handled part of the port side batteries. On some ships it might be the five inch guns, on other ships it would be the forty millimeter. Ours happened to be part of the port twenty millimeter guns. So, after the ship was commissioned, as we used to say, "Forty-one Marines to keep track of over a thousand sailors," since wartime complement of the heavy cruiser was about 1500 men. We were in the Atlantic Fleet for about six months, I believe, and then sent to the Pacific Fleet, and, theoretically, on the way for the invasion of Japan when the atomic bombs were dropped. So, we were sent into the shipyard in Pearl Harbor, to be converted to a flagship, which just meant making fancy quarters for the admiral that's going to come aboard and all his staff, and moving some of our people into less desirable quarters. … Then we were sent to Bikini Atoll as the flagship of the target fleet for the atom bomb tests. We were not a target, of course, but the admiral was in charge of all of the ships and their skeleton crews that had brought them there.

JK: This is the Crossroads Operation?

HA: It's called Operation Crossroads.

JK: Were you there for Able or Baker or both?

HA: Both, and there's never been another Baker. That was the only underwater test. Both tests, the airburst and underwater, our ship was the closest to the target, but that was essentially, shall we say, minor as far as the damage that was done. I'm not talking about radiation damage, which one cannot see, smell, feel or anything. An aside though, we were told to look the other way. We're on deck and there were no protective devices handed out, or anything like that. Now, prior to the Baker test, they had various scientists that were contemplating what might happen. [There were] some of them, that weren't off-the-wall-type scientists, which said that there might be a tidal wave that went all the way to Pearl Harbor or Hawaii. Now, the tidal wave that would make that, we would have been all drowned. There's no two ways about that. But, again, we were the closest ship, just, I suppose, hull-down on the horizon, which was about seventeen miles and there was no tidal wave, and then we were the first major ship back in the lagoon. Now, here again the sailors only had their dungarees to protect them. They didn't have any of the suits that you see people with now. … The carrier *Saratoga*, they were trying to save,

and they could have if they could have let the divers stay in the water long enough to plug in the holes that they had to, as a result, it sunk. Now, again with radiation, the entire lagoon, the water was radioactive, or the salt in the water, whatever, but since it couldn't be seen, or identified, it was run through the evaporators in the ship and, really, the entire ship became radioactive to some extent. So much so, that right after, I think about another year when they tried to decontaminate it with all different means, even sand blasting it with coffee grounds, it was decommissioned. Cut up for scrap and the armor belt, I think, is a target at one of the radiation laboratories at the University of Chicago, I believe. So, after Bikini, I was sent to MIT to take a course in electrical engineering, and so I graduated from MIT in '48, which would make next week my fifty-fifth reunion there, if I went to it, but those classes were pretty big. But, it's nice to go to college with your pay and allowances, as a military type. However, MIT would send my grades to my parents, not to the Navy. After MIT, I was ordered to Camp Lejune to a AAA battalion [antiaircraft artillery battalion], where we were deciding which radar sets from World War II should be scraped, sold for surplus, or kept. In actuality, I spent most of my time with the baseball team and the rifle team, probably missing out on some of the electronic features. … [I] went with the AAA battalion, in fact, I took the detachment from them on cold weather maneuvers; the first time to Newfoundland. The second time to Labrador, north of the Artic Circle, where we were to test a means of getting out of a landing craft into a, they used to call them alligators, amphibious tractors at sea. Well, after the first couple of disasters, they called that off, and we went in the regular way, down a landing mat into the boat and then the boat onto the shore. Coming back we ran into a hurricane, and the troop ship I was on started rolling, and it was rolling past the danger line. Everything that was lashed on the deck was washed away. I was sent with a working party to the number five hold, which was right in the depth of the ship, where heavy equipment had broken loose. When I got down there I saw that there was the Exec of the ship in charge, and I knew that was a pretty grim situation. That was one thing that seagoing taught me. If you find the Exec some where like that with a working party, you know the situation is in doubt. Part of the equipment was angle dozers, with the blade out at an angle and if one of them slid into the side of the ship, that would have been all she wrote, because that was five decks down with only a ladder and a small scuttle to get out. But, obviously it didn't happen because I wouldn't be here.

SI: A lot of Navy veterans that we talk to say that being in a hurricane or a typhoon can be even scarier than being in combat.

HA: That's true. In fact, the *Fall River*, one of its sister ships had its bow blown off in a typhoon. So, we were sent into a yard in Long Beach, California to have our bow strengthened and the stateroom that was my home-away-from-home, right where my bunk used to be, had a H beam about two feet by two feet come down through it, and so my bunk was canted to one side. …

SI: Please, continue. Tell us a little bit about your experience in Korea.

HA: Well, first returning from cold weather maneuvers, I was given a company in the Second Marine Division on the East Coast. Now, those were the days when the headlines were, for the military, "We're cutting away the fat and leaving the muscle." In doing that, they were taking a company out of every battalion, a platoon out of every company, a squad out of every platoon,

right on down the line. So when Korea broke out the First Division, on the West Coast, was called a division but they could muster a regiment, short three companies, which is the equivalent of a battalion. I was called in to my battalion commander's office on a Monday and he said, "Next Sunday, you and your company are going to be on trains for the West Coast," and every other company commander at Lejune was getting the same word. So, we made up the three missing companies that were needed to fill out the Fifth Regiment, which was in Korea. We had enough for the First Regiment, and our battalion that was in the Med[iteranian], went through the Suez Canal, and formed up with all the reserves west of the Mississippi to make up the Seventh Regiment. By the way, on this train ride across the country, our designation became, instead of the Eighth Marines of the Second Division, it became the First Marines of the First Division. Then, we stayed at Camp Pendleton about two weeks while they broke out equipment that were stored from World War II, loaded aboard ship as a commercial load, and off to Japan. We got to Kobe, where we worked around the clock, reloading ships, unloading and reloading ships in combat loads for the Inchon Landing. We used Japanese stevedores, and they, of course, had been veterans of World War II, on the other side, but they treated our weapons, like machine guns and so forth, like they were pieces of jewelry. We made the Inchon Landing and that's where the three missing companies joined up with their regiment. Fortunately, nearly all had been veterans of World War II, so it was no big deal. But, the landing was made in two parts because of the tides. A battalion of the Fifth Regiment landed on Womido Island and captured it. Then, we had to wait until about five PM, I think, for the main landing which was the First Regiment and Fifth Regiment. The Seventh Regiment was still in Japan. After capturing Inchon, [we] moved on to Kimpo Airfield, took that.

SI: Before we move on, was there any resistance on the beach at Inchon?

HA: Yes. In fact, the first casualty at Womido was one of the Signal people and the first KIA was an officer that came from Camp Lejune, who had been in the Second Division, and now he finished his life in the First. The most interesting thing between Inchon and Kimpo was three or four Russian tanks that, up until that time, had been called sort of invincible in their dash through Korea to the Pusan Peninsula. They had been hit with napalm. Their crews tried to escape through the escape hatch in the bottom, and they were lined up just like gingerbread men, cut out with a cookie cutter. Of all the weapons, to me, napalm is the most frightful. When we were at Kimpo, the Seventh Regiment arrived, and they were the lucky ones to cross the Han River into Seoul with the First and Fifth.

SI: Before we get into taking Seoul, this napalm, was it artillery launched?

HA: It's gasoline with a substance to make it jellied so it sticks, and it burns with such intense heat, it grabs all the oxygen if it's anywhere around, dropped by Marine Air.

SI: It was relatively new.

HA: Well, it was [in] World War II. In fact, back to Quantico; I worked with Jim Lee Howell who eventually became coach of the New York Giants. He'd been a player with them and I happen to have a car, and we would scrounge some of the gasoline that was supposed to be mixed up for napalm demonstrations so we could get to where we wanted to go. … Speaking of

scrounging, Marines are probably the best scroungers in the world. Whereas the Army has got all sorts of goodies and they don't really have to watch them. So when we're reloading ships at Kimpo, one of my more enterprising people went to an Army motor pool, drew out a jeep, had some stencils and yellow paint, stencil USMC on it, drove it onto an LST, and parked it way up at the end and behind a whole lot of artillery and stuff like that, so nobody could get the jeep till the whole ship was unloaded. That jeep will show up later. During the attack on Seoul, on the Inchon side of the Han River, [there] was a brewery and I had an enterprising mess sergeant who commandeered a six-by, went to the brewery as soon as the assault troops got through it, and paid the guy in charge the most money he'd ever gotten in his life with his life. They loaded the truck up with bottles of beer and brought it back, and so he had one for every man in the battalion. But our battalion commander was a hesitant type, in fact, his nickname was "Shaky Six," he told me to break all the bottles of beer. Now, we had been twenty-one days in crossing the Pacific without a drink, a couple of days in Kobe, where anybody that could get off had a drink or two, but that wasn't that much, and there was no beer ration then. So, do you think I broke those bottles? I just buried them in foxholes on the perimeter and we could draw them out. You have a question?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: I have a few questions about your father, going back. You mentioned that he came to the United States and became a coal miner. Was he from the coal-mining region of France?

HA: Not particularly.

SI: I was wondering if it was a family trait.

HA: Really, I think he was from a farming region, in the Alps. He knew a lot about growing grapes, I think.

SI: When he came to the United States, where did he settle, initially?

HA: Missouri. Because he had a sister here, and that's where he went first. But, then he was working in coal mines in Missouri and Illinois and maybe, somewhere else. He didn't really tell too many stories of coal mines. But, he must have had good times, too, because we have a stein that's about that high (twenty-four inches) and the bottom of it was a music box, and he won the thing by being able to drink all the beer before the music stopped playing.

DD: Now you had said he was in the Army in World War I. Was he drafted or did he enlist?

HA: Oh, he enlisted in 1902, stayed in the Army. … In fact, he first was in an infantry regiment, then he was in the cavalry regiment. But then when trucks started to replace horses he got into that, and that's where he stayed, was in motor transport. But he … had stories of the Galveston flood, I think that was 1902, or something like that, or maybe 1900, and the San Francisco fire and earthquake. He was there. No, they used the Army for martial law, to stop looting. … His most interesting stories were in Texas, in motor transport, where he darn near had to drive a truck like one navigates a ship. You know, there were really no roads, trails, but,

no road signs on the trails, so, you had to figure out where you were going, and he had some pictures of some of the Pancho Villa's bandits and Texas Rangers guarding them in the back of his truck going someplace with them.

SI: What were his duties when he was sent to France?

HA: He was in motor transport, I guess, in charge of a large motor pool, or something.

SI: Did he ever tell stories about World War I, being back in France?

HA: The Germans had an artillery piece, long range, that they used to shoot at Paris. Most of his stories were about that. I guess, he was more impressed by the various generals that he had to get vehicles for and that sort of stuff. But then, he also was in the coast artillery at Fort Hamilton. And when I was seven or eight, he used to take me to Fort Hamilton to show me the artillery that they've got there.

SI: When you were growing up you were moving around a lot?

HA: I tell you my greatest move was from Washington, DC to New Jersey.

SI: Was Franklin Park where you mother's family was from?

HA: My mother was from Jersey City. My grandfather was a blacksmith.

SI: You mentioned that Franklin Park was a rural community, could you just tell us what was it like for you to grow up in that kind of atmosphere?

HA: Well, some parts of it were really good, but we raised chickens and to this day I do not eat chicken, because I can just think about it, and I'm back in the chicken house in the middle of August when the humidity is about ninety-nine and a half percent, and I can recreate that. The only time I eat chicken is if I'm invited out somewhere, I've got to eat some of it. And this Marine friend of mine, also a colonel, who has since gone to his reward, he knew that, and if we were at dinner together, he'd keep harping on it, "Howard, why don't you have another piece of chicken? That's pretty good." But I could carry it off.

SI: In the years leading up to World War II there was obviously in Europe, Jews were being persecuted by the Nazis and there was an effort to bring Jewish refugees to New Jersey and settled them as chicken farmers in this area, and South Jersey. I was wondering if you knew of any of those families, or encountered them?

HA: Not really. We knew of the Germans and the Russians, too, having the camps where they'd send people off to, but it was never publicized that much. I was an avid reader and so was my family. It wasn't like we didn't have newspapers to read. When our troops freed the concentration camps …

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE----------

HA: In the first part of World War II, a friend in the Army Air Corps had been shot down in Germany and he was put in a *Luftwaffe* prison that happened to be a castle and the German Air officers lived there, too, and they all ate the same and he said as the rations got thinner, they all got thinner, you know. It wasn't like they were being treated poorly, but, I think, that was because the German Air was still thinking that they were "knights of the Middle Ages." That you were in combat but, then, you were friends afterwards, or not friends but at least polite to one another.

SI: Growing up in Franklin Park, how did the Great Depression affect your family?

HA: Quite a bit. You know, I think it affected nearly everyone, like for instance, at Rutgers, you know, to join the fraternity, that cost money and being chicken farmers, we say, when tuition was due, my mother would go and hock her diamond ring, then, when we sold chickens she'd get it back because the selling of chickens was not the same time the tuition came due. So, I have to say that chickens put me through Rutgers, plus the Dutch Reformed Scholarship, I'm not forgetting that. … We didn't have the wardrobe that we would have liked to have. You had to make do with, and they used to sell them, a suit with the coat that could double as a sport coat with different slacks. But there again, there were ways you could earn money, and, with a date, go to the Meadowbrook, if you went there with ten dollars, you could have dinner, dancing to a name band and come back with change. Again, I was lucky to have had an automobile, mobility is very important. Now, I sent my sons off to school with the complete wardrobe, everything I could think of that I would liked to have had, and didn't have, and the youngest son, I don't think he wore them more than once. He was in blue jeans and whatever.

DD: Having come from a rural town, what was the transition like coming to Rutgers?

HA: Well, of course, Rutgers Cow College was on the other side of, next to NJC, or Douglass, I should say. It wasn't that difficult because I'd gone to high school here. In other words, the biggest shock was when I went from what had been a two-room schoolhouse to a four-room schoolhouse, because they didn't use the fifth one, to junior high here. In fact, junior high, every lunch period, they had a dance band made up of students, and they played big band music and that was first class. Now, senior high, because of the crowded situation, had three shifts, so that there was not a single lunch period, but those of us that were bussed from the countryside, we got here for the first shift and left for the last shift, so we had extra time to goof around. I used to go to the metal shop just because I enjoyed doing some of that. The teachers were more liberal, as far as that went. You had more study time, too. So, it really wasn't a shock. Probably the biggest difference was your summer vacation was also involved with a lot of work, physical work, that is.

SI: A number of people who I've interviewed who went to a one room or two room schoolhouse say it was a great way to be educated because you'd be in the back of the room and the teacher would be teaching you and you learned it all at once. What that your experience?

HA: Yes, in fact, you could never get bored. Now, one of the big problems is a child who is really smart, he gets bored when the teacher has to concentrate on those that don't get the things

like they can, but where you're in four grades in one room, you can hear what's going in the other areas and you don't get that boredom. Like the other thing, I had never seen a basketball or a softball until I got to high school. We played hardball and football and obviously a hardball, not everybody had a glove and football, very few had helmets or any of that stuff. But that's what we played. In fact, here's something that couldn't be done today. I think I was about in the sixth grade; I went and asked the supervisor of Franklin Township, school supervisor, if we could play football against the school in Middlebush. Now could you imagine a sixth grader getting in to talk to a supervisor of one of these districts? No way. The other thing that was different then, was a big cut at the fourth grade. That's when certain children could get working papers. They weren't cut out for academic work. They knew how to add, subtract, read and write. They could go to be [an] apprentice for someone. That, of course, is no more, obviously. But it was an enjoyable time looking back on it, but you don't remember the bad times.

JK: When you went to New Brunswick High School was there a split between the townspeople and those of you from the rural communities?

HA: Not really. It was more because you were divided up, those who were going to go on to college would take an academic course, others were taking commercial courses, and then general courses. Like when I'd be going in the metal shop, I was in with the people in general courses., and so, you'd also be at recesses playing softball. You get to know those types. … Really now in New Brunswick is almost spread out to include Franklin Park. As I said, the only place I recognized was the school. I didn't even recognize where I used to live. I was by it before and I knew that I'd passed it.

SI: The whole area has changed so much.

JK: Was that the first time you'd come back?

HA: I was here three years ago, I guess it was, for a reunion, but I think that time I came straight in from Somerville to here, I didn't go by there, and ten years ago I was here for the fiftieth reunion. [Class of 1943]

DD: So from high school how did you decide to come to Rutgers?

HA: Mainly, it was the fact that I could get this scholarship and a confession: my thoughts at that time were to get an appointment to West Point, and they were competitive exams, which you had to take, and the top ones would get it and the first one I took I wasn't at the top. I figured, go a year to college and then I really found out about the ROTC thing, and looking back, I made out much better by doing that than going into one of the military academies.

SI: So it seems like the military was always …

HA: Well, I was always, but I majored in physics, in case I didn't have a military career. Well, I started off at Rutgers, I was going to be a lawyer but I'm probably the world's worst speller, and there weren't spell checks in the fountain pen, and so, you just can imagine the number of courses that you have to write essays and to get around the word that I couldn't spell, I have to

have some convoluted construction, and I said, "The hell with that." Now, if I had it all to do over, I would have gone to the School of Chemistry, because chemistry, which was one of the hard courses for many people, was one of the easy ones for me. … I didn't have to do much studying in chemistry so I could concentrate on the others. The worst course was French. Thinking, "Well, my father can speak French, it ought to be a snap," no way. … My summer job was at a sweat shop that is no longer there. Now … if any of you might have remembered it was "Louis (Lefkowitz?), Manufacturers of Leather and Leather Specialties," was a big sign across, that you could see from the train, as you crossed the Raritan River. The language spoken in that plant, except for management, was Magyar, Hungarian, and I worked on the top floor and there was a stairwell at each end and going in the morning, the people waiting to go to work would be sitting on the stairs. The first morning I said, "Good morning," no answer, second morning "Good morning," no answer. I found a guy, Hungarian, who was my age, I said, "How do you say good morning in Hungarian?" And he told me and I practiced it. The next morning I went in there and said good morning in Hungarian. I thought I was a cheerleader. Then they took it on themselves to teach me Magyar. Now obviously, it's the ribald side of Magyar but they gave me a phrase, "Go over and say it to that guy," he'd give me the answer back and forth and everything like that. Now, we go fast forward. I retired from the Marine Corps. I'm a laboratory director at Syracuse University Research Corporation and since I'm involved with intelligence type projects, part of my laboratory was physicists, the other part were psycho-linguists. The linguists were going out to the Army language school on some conference, or something, and I gave them one of the real choice Magyar expressions. They get out there, and when they come back, I said, "Did you get that translated?" They said, "Well, after the guy stopped blushing, he said, 'That accent comes from this part of Hungary.'" I've never been in Hungary in my life. Now, I go to Paris, this is after World War II, because the Marines were in the Pacific all the time. This was at a NATO thing, and the shortest street in Paris is "the street of the fishing cat," it's right across from *Notre Dame*, *Rue de la Chat ca peche*. Say that to a Parisian taxi driver, he doesn't know what the hell you're talking about. He knows, of course, but he wouldn't admit it. But had I been, say, in Budapest, they had a nice expression to ask. They would have figured, "Hell, he's a native of this place." So, they'd take me. Maybe I can get to Budapest one of these days. So much for sea stories.

SI: We heard a lot about the Hungarian population in New Brunswick and …

HA: Yes, that's why they used, when the uprisings happened in Hungary, that's why they used Camp Kilmer, because they had a lot of people that they could talk to them, and say Somerset Street, when that was all populated with Hungarians. That was every house was beautiful, little lawns around and now it's sort of like working and being in the slum. Oh, that's my other thing that Depression, you know way back. Money is short, and I got here and I started shaving when I think when I was about twelve, so not that they carded people, but you got a glass of beer about that high for ten cents and there were all sorts of pretzels on the bar. I figured man this is the way, to have a beer, eat all the pretzels I want, have only spent ten cents for lunch. That lasted about three days. But you had to keep figuring all the time, money was short.

SI: What did you and your family think about President Roosevelt and what he was doing for the country, the New Deal?

HA: Part of them thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread, the other part thought he was running things to rack and ruin, you know, all the jokes about the WPA and what not. It was just a matter of them standing around holding their shovels not doing any work, or anything. Personally, I thought he was doing a great job. But, I don't know whether my parents really thought it, because he also made some cuts in military pay and whatever. In fact my father was on the retired list, as an emergency officer, and so his monthly pay from the military was $127.50, which then was a nice amount of money. Roosevelt took the emergency officers off the retired list and turned them over to the VA for their disabilities, and his monthly pay dropped to fourteen dollars and something. So if it wasn't for the chickens …

SI: Did any of the agricultural acts affect your family at all?

HA: No. All that came in during Roosevelt's administration, not all of it, but a lot of it then. See, that's another good thing, was they didn't have any mortgage or anything like that. They owned, and they'd just gotten rid of a Cadillac car and bought a Ford just before the axe fell in 1929. However, the bank they had their money in did fail and didn't open so, that was another blow. That was happening to so many people that it wasn't like one is singled out here and over there they're doing really great.

HA: Right across the board.

SI: Were there things like people transients coming through?

HA: Hoboes.

SI: Yes, hoboes.

HA: However, they were just wanting food, something to eat. Now, like going to Jersey City, there were people living on the city dumps in cardboard houses. There, as a teenager and less, you'd see all that but you really didn't know what it was all about. It's just look at those people, and they're delving in garbage piles to look for subsistence, and I know if I saw it today, I'd have a lot different feeling about what it was.

SI: Let's talk a little bit about Rutgers. Can you tell us about your freshman year? Did still have freshman hazing when you came here? Freshman hazing, you had to wear the dinks?

HA: Yes. Fraternities had "Hell Week" for pledges, usually freshmen.

SI: Did you come to Rutgers College or the College of Agriculture?

HA: Rutgers College. And I ended up majoring in physics, but initially there was one option that was called "mathematics and natural science" and if you took that by your sophomore year you can switch off in different directions and my plan, as I said, was to switch into law and I soon found out that that wasn't the thing. Then, in my sophomore year, I thought I was a mathematical genius and later on I found out that applied math is my thing. It's not the mathematician's math, where they had their elegant proofs and all sorts of things like that, and so

then, by my junior year, was when I said, "Physics," but then my minor was chemistry, physical chemistry primarily, and analytical chemistry. Of course, my main concentration was military science. The big deal was only forty people in the Class of '43 got in the advanced course and there were a hell a lot more applicants than forty. … You got a big pay of twenty five cents a day, which meant something, but you also had to buy an officer's uniform, that cost something. But, that got you in bad habits of wanting tailor made suits. But I did get in the advance course, and then it was a matter of, in your junior year, what rank you had, and I got to be a first sergeant of one of the companies and was elected to Scabbard and Blade, which was only, I don't know six or eight people. It wasn't big, it wasn't large and then I was one of the company commanders in my senior year and I also was captain of the rifle team, that helped.

SI: Particularly after the war started, how did the mood in the ROTC training changed? Did it become more intense? Did it become more practical?

HA: To a degree, but we all, you know, wanted to get in. They were afraid the war was going to be over before we could get there. That's why I left, myself and Elmer Riley, we left before the June graduation, left in January, actually. We both went to the infantry school. Now, of the advanced ROTC, some that were in the School of Engineering, I guess it was then, they went into the Army Corps of Engineers, or Signal Corps, and some that were in the pre-med, some took commissions in Medical Administrative and others resigned their whatever to go to med schools, to be doctors who got a deferment. Dick Colfax, my long-time friend and fraternity brother, he did that. He ended up being a Navy doctor in Korea. So, it was an entirely different feeling, and probably, part of it was because communications weren't like they are now. Now, you look at TV and you get all sorts of views from different people and also you get a lot of the sob stories and there's no way of saying that war is nice but, on the other hand, the military is one of the very few honorable professions. That's old-fashioned thinking.

SI: You mentioned earlier that the reason why you joined the Marine Corps was because you had a mentor.

HA: Yes, it was, at that time he was Major Johnson, infantry, but, in World War I, he was a Marine private, corporal, whatever, but they branded him with that globe and anchor because I heard the story that, supposedly, he wanted to give up his Army commission and just join the Marine Corps as a private or sergeant, or something. But I guess, maybe somebody told him, "Take a cold shower and forget about that." … His son went to Rutgers. He was a Class of '42 and, if he's still alive he's now president of some college in New York State.

SI: I interviewed him.

HA: Oh, you did?

SI: Yes, Franklyn [Johnson RC '47].

HA: Now, he went in the First Division, Army Division, and ended up captain, maybe a major eventually, but I know him through most of World War II. He was a company commander in the First Division, and it was his father was the one that looked out for me, and the PMS& T

[Professor of Military Science and Training] son, who was in that class, he was killed in North Africa. … Major Johnson's wife, I think, was in the group of women flying bombers to England. That's the other thing. She had her uniforms made by Abercrombie and Fitch and he had his, we're still on Fifth Avenue but as Christianson, I believe. That's where he sent me to get mine. In fact, that's where I went to even get my first Marine Corps uniform.

SI: Just let me ask you a few more questions about Rutgers. You mentioned that you were with a fraternity.

HA: Alpha Chi Rho.

SI: How did you become involved with Alpha Chi Rho?

HA: Through Dick Colfax. We met, I guess, the second day I was at Rutgers, or he was at Rutgers also, and we became friends over the years. In fact, when he passed away, one of his daughters sort of adopted me as a surrogate father and I still see Dick's wife, when she comes to visit this daughter, and she lives in northern Virginia. Her husband just retired from the Army, colonel, West Point-type, and Dick's grandson has been accepted to this year's class in West Point. Again, fraternities, one had to give a sales pitch at home to get the money to join, but they also were very formal things. You know, you had napkin rings at dinner, and everyone sat down and it wasn't the picture that people get of *Animal House*. We did have parties, and we had drinking parties, and that was the big thing, that one has to learn how to drink and you get some freshman pledge that his home was such that he never had touched a drop of liquor, but, he didn't want to show that, "Well, liquor doesn't affect me." The next thing you know, he's flat out on his rear end. But, they tended to, the older fraternity brothers, tended to watch out for these guys and it wasn't the, what they now call "binge drinking" as a way of showing off, I guess.

DD: Do you have to undergo any kind of hazing for the fraternity?

HA: Oh, you had, after you pledged then they had hell week, and that was harassment, no two ways about it, and the same thing was Scabbard and Blade. I know they took us out to somewhere, way out in the boondocks, blindfolded and then left us there. You know, you had to come back, and they had all sorts of things, and the pledges got paddled. Some of the people were heavy handed. I mean, everything that went on in these different societies, except maybe Phi Beta Kappa, I wouldn't know, now, you would be subject to a lawsuit, cruel and unusual punishment. But, we all survived because, I think, the people that were administering it, they weren't stupid. They might have been harsh, but they weren't stupid. Well, now, it burnt down, so you may not even know what it looked like unless you saw pictures of it. This was Kappa Sig, right on the corner of College Avenue and another street. But it was a Victorian house with a cupola type thing up on the front corner and they had, during hell week, pledges, they had to watch list for this every hour on the half hour they would have to make like a cuckoo in a cuckoo clock shouting. They had all sorts of weird things that were done but one knew that it was only one week and after you finish that week then you're sort of like at VMI, their rat week. That's another thing I didn't mention, in the Marine Corps bit, is that at Quantico, I ran into a lot of VMI types, who were commissioned in the Marine Corps, because they commissioned a large group, and they would tell me of their experiences during their rat week thing, and so forth.

SI: Going back to Rutgers; did you play any sports? Were you involved in any clubs or activities?

HA: My freshman year, 150 pounds football and, also, the fencing team. The only one I carried through the whole time was rifle team, which was under ROTC. However, we won the first trophy, and so my name is still inscribed on the thing in the ROTC, or at least it was three years ago, you know, the thing that they got with them. It's still there, I guess.

DD: This is just a personal curiosity. What weapon did you fence?

HA: Saber. That was more exciting than the others, and the fencing coach was from Seton Hall. I guess, he was topnotch fencing type. I forget his name, though.

SI: How did you get involved in professional football?

HA: At Quantico, when I got to be an instructor, one of the instructors that was, he was first lieutenant, I was second lieutenant, was Jim Lee Howell. He played for the New York Giants as an end, and we happened to be assigned to a lot of problems that were joint things and as enemy details, we would set out demolitions, and then by throwing a cherry bomb firecracker into a GI can, that would be the same sound as a mortar, when mortars dropped in the tube, and then we'd wait a couple of seconds and set off one of the charges with it. … He got me interested in Angus cattle and where I said, "We were saving up gas," we'd drive to Warrington, Virginia and do some cattle shows, because he played football in football season and had a rice and cattle farm in Arkansas and he was also in the Arkansas Legislature, so his nickname was "Senator." He had a very dry sense of humor and back then Arkansas used to have "land of opportunity" on their license plate. He'd say, "Well, there's nothing else there, so, there must be opportunity." … When he left Quantico we were going to meet at a Mardi Gras, in New Orleans, when the war was over. That never came to fruition, but his last year of playing football was when I was at MIT and so my wife and I went to have dinner with him that night and during the game they'd throw a pass to him and at dinner that night, he said, "When I got back in the huddle I told my quarterback, don't you ever throw that ball at me again." Which I'm sure wasn't his feeling. But then he became assistant coach of the Giants and then the head coach and whenever the Giants played the Redskins, he'd always let me know about it and have tickets for me. So, then we get to the locker room, I take my oldest son with me, and he got to meet Frank Gifford when he was a football player and all the rest of the Giant big names. Then when Paul Brown, who coached the Cleveland Browns, they came out with this speaker and helmet thing, calling the plays, and I think the Chicago Cardinals also had a wire buried around their football field that they can transmit signals to their quarterback and Jim Lee called me and said, "What could you do about that?" And I gave him a couple of ideas. One was to intercept it. The other was to jam it. When he picked the intercepting thing and he had a guy that had played for the Browns and when they got the signal, that this was the next play, this guy would say what it was going to be and they had a wig-wag system to get it to the Giant defense and after that game, I think, they called off this radio business until just lately. I guess the last few years they installed it now for everyone. But, when he left Quantico, he gave me a set of pictures of their 19, I guess, '38 Giants, or somewhere in there, and like Tuffey Lemans and Mel Hein, I guess, was the center

and a couple of times from Quantico we went up to see the Giants play, and then, like Sunday morning before the game, I can remember going to see Mel Hein in his apartment and, you know, open the door and here's this guy in his t-shirt with the Sunday papers, just like anybody. You didn't realize that in another hour he would be one of our gladiators, if you will, because according to Jim Lee, in his entire football career, that Mel Hein only had a timeout call once, or twice, and there he played both ways, center on the offense and linebacker on defense.

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO----------

SI: This continues an interview with Lieutenant Colonel Howard Kirkpatrick Alberts on May 16, 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. We were just talking a bit about your days at Rutgers and still have a few more questions before we moving on to the Marine Corps. The thing that impresses us from reading the old *Scarlet Letters* and the *Targum* is just how much of a social world was at Rutgers with all the dances and the house parties at the fraternities, and so forth. Could you tell us a little bit about your experiences with that?

HA: The dances, I guess, were four of them a year. They were formal and most of the time we would have one of the name big bands and then a band from a tier, just a little bit less, that would play when the big band was taking a break. So, there was music the whole time. The gym, here on College Avenue, would be decorated, you know, to the nines and the dates, a lot would stay at the fraternity houses, but we had house mothers, well-chaperoned, and it was, basically, a fun time. Now, the Scabbard and Blade, they sponsored one of the dances, the Military Ball. That let us off the hook, because we could wear our uniforms, which were Army officer's uniforms and one thing I never did go on was in the spring break they used to go to Pennsylvania, to Poconos or something, and the house parties, again, very formal type things, I mean they weren't in tuxes for house parties, not Alpha Chi Ro, but could have been at some of the other fraternities, for all I know. … The fraternities were a big thing in the social life. I think part of it is that the classes were not that large. I mean, all told, from freshman to seniors, slightly over a thousand, and, now, that's not even as many in one class. … When it was that small, you didn't know everyone personally, but you could recognize everyone, and there was a thing that we were told which, I guess, you'd say, that's freshman orientation, that you always said "hello" to everyone when you pass them and freshmen had to wear dinks and other classmen wore hats with their year number on it, which you could do when you are a sophomore, if you wanted to, and the freshman thing lasted the whole year, I think.

SI: Going back to fraternities, it seems like the fraternities really almost ran Rutgers. I mean, if you're on a certain sports team you had to belong to a certain fraternity. If you worked for, say the *Targum*, you belong to a different fraternity. Is that how it worked?

HA: I don't think so, because two things, that is vastly different now, then, the football players were distributed around everywhere. I mean, they'd be in your classes. They were in different fraternities. They all didn't belong to one fraternity and one could maybe say, if there was any classification, it was more by net worth than anything else, or how much somebody had to pony up to do it. Of course, the fraternity council had a lot to say about things but they didn't have everything to say. The rest was probably you could say disorganized. I mean, like Winants had a club, Ford had a club. But how much they got into the campus politics, I don't know.

SI: Do you remember any of the college administrators like President Clothier or Dean Metzger?

HA: I remember both of those. I mean, it's not that I had any dealings with them. I heard them speak and at these graduations, sitting there, you know, when a lot of times we'd have alumni attend, too, and you'd see these guys from classes twenty years past and you'd say, "Man, look at those old bastards," and now I'm sixty years past. So, the only saving grace is the fact that we still have the one from 1917 [Editor's Note: Walter Seward, RC '17]. He graduated from Rutgers before I was born.

DD: Is there a professor that stood out in your mind from your experience at Rutgers?

HA: I remember two of them. One was Professor Bracefield in calculus where everyday we would all go to the board to work out a problem and then he'd pick one out to explain it and he taught a heck of a lot of calculus, I mean, that way. Then, in the physics department, there was Professor Winchester who was sort of a free spirit, and since there were only four physics majors and, I guess, maybe four graduate students and I forget how many from the Class of '44, but every Friday we would have tea in the physics laboratory and we'd drink tea out of beakers, you know. In chemistry, Professor Reiman, who wrote the book on quantitative analysis. Because I was an oddball taking my minor as physical chemistry, at times I'd be the only person in the chemistry lab, doing my thing, because I had planned if I didn't get into the military, I was going to be, hopefully, a physical chemist, which I think I would have made out better than a physicist, but that's hard to say since I ended up as an electrical engineer.

[TAPE PAUSED]

HA: How far did we get?

SI: Well we got through Rutgers and we got sort of a basic review of your military

HA: I guess, we got to Inchon and through Inchon, to Kimpo and, I guess, we're getting into Seoul.

JK: Let us go back to your basic training during World War II, and talk a little about World War II, when you left Rutgers

HA: In January of '43.

SI: And you were sent to Fort Benning.

HA: Fort Benning for the infantry school; left there in May of '43 and then during that period of leave is when the Marine Corps commission arrived and, I guess, by the end of May I'd resigned from the Army infantry reserve and accepted this Marine Corps commission and went to Quantico in June of '43, end of June, actually. They were lenient to give me time to get uniforms and all that junk. Then I stayed at Quantico as an instructor in their reserve officers

class, which was, basically, all of the second lieutenants that had been commissioned at candidate school, plus first lieutenants and captains that had been given field commissions on Guadalcanal.

DD: Now you mentioned that you had been younger than the people you were instructing, was there any animosity amongst them towards you?

HA: Not really, because I was giving them the straight dope and having gone through the infantry school, in their own school, I knew my stuff plus the fact, at Rutgers the ROTC, it was all taught during my time by infantry officers that had been in World War I. So, I was well grounded in things that, on a company level, what the infantry does. I mean, I wasn't about to be telling them how to run a battalion, or anything, but, I knew what how the battalion ran companies and the companies ran platoons. As an aside to show that they really did, I guess, respect what I was doing is, that our weekends started noon time on Saturdays. We'd rent a taxi, get to DC, get on the train and take off for New York or New Jersey, and this class had graduated that Saturday and they were all on the train and in those days, I guess, drinking was more popular than it is now and I happened to be on the train, too, and they all came up offered me a drink and told me how they enjoyed what the hell I was doing, which was basically the rifle platoon in attack, the rifle platoon in defense and attack of a fortified position. Now, that was where, on one week I would build a bunker, like the Japs had on Tarawa, and the following week I'd run the program to blow it up, and we fired machine guns at it and a flame-thrower, and finally, the demolition charge and I nominated myself to be the one to carry the demolition charge and I would cut the fuse shorter and shorter, because you're rather foolish at that age, and that was the grand finale. Because the toss of that demolition charge was, I don't know, a couple of pounds. Properly packaged, it was off the things that they supplied, and it would really blow the thing up and you had to get out of the way of the pieces of logs and stuff, too. I could move a lot faster than I do now, obviously. I forgot to mention that the Marine Corps sent me to Fort Belvoir to learn about demolitions, mines, and booby traps. Because at that time, more than now, in the Marine Corps you were expected to be competent in all of the arms and services. You couldn't be very parochial about just one. Then the other problems I would run would be enemy details. When the students were running a problem attacking, I'd have Marine enlisted men that I would have be the enemy and have them fall back and do the things that the students could expect the enemy to be doing. I enjoyed that work because I had a lot of freedom, probably more than a second lieutenant today would have, far more because of communications, if nothing else, because of the improvement in communications. Then when I left Quantico, I was ordered to sea school. That was in San Diego, and while waiting for orders, I spent a short time in the recruit depot, as being in charge of something, or other, I forget exactly what it was, … that was not something that appealed to me and then some time with the MPs where every night you had to count the prisoners. That's when they lined them up, locked step with their elbows crossed, and the individual in front, his neck was right there pushed together. That was on the watch list. You didn't do that every night, somebody else did it. When it came around to your turn, you do it. Then from there our detachment was formed. The other officer, myself and the forty-one Marines, we had a Pullman car, actually two Pullman cars all to ourselves with the stewards and everything that were on it normally to go across country to Philadelphia Navy Yard where the *Fall River* was going through the final work stages before it was commissioned. So we lived off the base, the other officer and myself, the captain, we lived off the base. The Marines were put

up in Marine barracks in Philadelphia and that lasted for about a month. Then the ship was commissioned, we took off for Cuba on a shakedown cruise, where they tested the ship to go at its flank speed, the fastest it would go. They learned how to fire the planes off the catapults, which was more of a no-brainer than recovering them. Because in the recovery of the plane, they had to throw a landing net over the fantail of the ship after the ship had made a circle to smooth the water out, then they'd throw this landing mat. The plane would land in this supposedly smooth water and the pilot would gun the engine to make it jump up onto the landing mat, then he'd hook up, the derrick was over top of it, hook it up to the top of the plane and lift him up. Then, at Viegas, [Puerto Rico], when they're having all the arguments about now, we would fire the eight inch guns at different ranges and they'd also tow sleeves for the five-inch 38s to fire at the forty-millimeter and the twenty-millimeter, so it would get the whole thing, because the ammunition comes up from the various holds where it's stored, and has to get up to where it's used, not too soon, but not too late. Then from the social side, now all the Marines at their clubs known as "slop chutes" had been drinking 3.5 [percent alcohol] beer. They get to Cuba where they have the Cuban beer, which is about ten percent alcohol, and so the liberty parties coming back to the ship sometimes were in pretty rough shape. Then they decided, the powers that be, probably the Exec of the ship, that they would have boat officers to ride the liberty boats into shore and back, which was fine since our exec was pretty strict in a foolish sort of way. Instead of four sections, two starboard and two port, he had two section liberty. So like, I would never go ashore with a Captain Wheat, who was the detachment commander at the same time. But now as a boat officer, my liberty night I'd meet some of the people from the small boat Navy, the ones that had seagoing tugs, net tenders, minesweepers, little ones, and they were a different breed of cat. On my way back from taking the liberty party in, I'd have the coxswain take the launch by one of these boats and I'd have a little social time and then get back to the *Fall River*. … When you went in with the empty boat to pick up all these guys loaded with Cuban beer, then it was a little bit different. You had to have a little more control over what was going on. But again, it was enjoyable and we spent a while after that shakedown bit, we spent sometime in the Atlantic Fleet and actually, I guess, it was Navy Day or something, we went to Fall River to, we couldn't get the cruiser all the way to Fall River but they sent part of the crew. The City of Fall River had donated the silver service for the ward room, which is quite a lot of silverware, because we're at least sixty or seventy officers so that means a lot of seats in the ward room, it wasn't two servings, or anything. When I went back to look at the remains of the *Fall River* with the cruiser sailors, it's just a little bit of the bow, not even as far back as the anchor chains, and I asked the people, "What happened to the wardroom silver service?" Nobody knew. But I'm sure that wasn't deep-sixed anywhere. Then we were ordered to the Pacific Fleet, went through the Panama Canal and our first stop was at Cologne, part of Panama, and we had liberty in the morning, say like from ten o'clock in the morning or 1000 hours to 1400 hours and we had to assign officers to augment the MPs that were there because it was a foreign country and you had to make sure your people weren't getting in trouble. Now, they also had one square block where sex was for sale at different prices in the different sides, you know and that was where one had to be very diplomatic when somebody couldn't do what he had to do in the period of time allotted. You know, these women were working piece work basis, if you will, and there'd be an argument and usually you could get involved in it, and the women would always settle for half because if the sailor got locked up by the local Panamanians, he might never get out of the jail. So that was diplomacy that is not talked about too often but it's for real. Then we finished the trip through the Canal and, which was very interesting by the way, and

took off for, first Long Beach, that's where they augmented the strength of the bow so it wouldn't get blown off in a typhoon, and then as we were headed for Japan, it was when the atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and then we were sent to Pearl Harbor to be made into a flagship, and a story that's a little bit off from what I was doing but it's interesting in a way: These target ships came from all over, like the German cruiser, *Prince Eigen,* which was a beautiful ship. It was one of the targets. But some of the landing craft, not the LSTs, but the, I think they used to be called LCUs, they would carry about four tanks, I guess, and the superstructure was off to the side. It wasn't a symmetrically built ship. They came from Ulithi, which was two thousand miles from Bikini. But the Navy had a program whereby sailors that got in trouble could go to a retraining bit, and some of them were fairly high enlisted and knowledgeable. This one particular case was a former first class quartermaster, which in the Navy is navigation, not supply, who had been busted to seaman second [class], but that beats working on a rock pile in a naval prison. So, he is part of the crew on this LCU. The ensign that was the captain of the LCU had enough points, when the ALNAV [All-Navy message] came out saying, "People with so many points could go home." So he wrote himself orders referring to that and said, "I'll see you." So now this seaman second [class] is the captain of this naval vessel, but he was a quartermaster, he knew what was required. They got orders to go to Bikini so he sails it with a crew of two other seaman second [class] from a couple of thousand miles across the Pacific. He gets there and does everything you're supposed to do, but because there were only three aboard, the Navy rules for beer rations were changed, that they had to keep the crew on the ship. So they'd bring the beer to them. A mine or net tender would go around and distribute the beer to all these little ships. Well, that was fine except, I guess, his crew of two were sort of flakey. The first thing they did was drop the ramp on the front of it and he was the only one that knew how to get it back up. There was a lot of work to do that. When they did it the second time he kicks them off the ship. Now they're on the island and he gets the full beer ration and, I guess, he makes the most of it. But just before the bomb, the first bomb was dropped, they had a sweep of the island to make sure there are no people left there and they find these two guys and what happened when the captain, skipper, I don't know what they called them, kicked them off the ship. Well, now, this is like a type of mutiny, or something, and we're the flagship of the fleet and so, we have to have a boarding party, and that's made up of Marines. So a couple of us go with the full captain and of the admiral staff and go over to this LCU, go aboard, and the guy was pretty well out of it. He's asleep in his bunk and a Marine pokes him with his bayonet and he gets up and at that time the Navy captain takes the thing you know in a formal way of reading it, "Seaman," whatever his name was, "you are hereby relieved of command of naval vessel LCU-11112 and you're under arrest," and he says, "Captain, you can take the LCU and put it where the sun don't shine." He used the proper words for that. "But remember to put one of these pills from the Atomic Energy people in the bilges and pump them every two days," and so then, the poor guy is brought back to the *Fall River* and put in the brig and they took him away, I guess, the next day. But I felt sorry for him because he, basically, was doing his job and he had some characters that are the ones that really should have been sent off. But that was one of the things that Marine detachments do.

DD: When the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, what were the reactions of the men, because I've heard that amongst draftees, most were relieved but occasionally I've heard from some Marines that some were actually disappointed?

HA: I don't know, those people should be sent to a good shrink, because, look at all the Marines that were killed on Okinawa, because you had Japanese that when it was fighting to the last man, they fought to the last man. In fact, years later, they were still finding some on Guam that were holding out, though I'm saying about twenty years later. Attacking Japan would have been a real bloodbath, even though the Japanese Emperor knew that their cause was lost and many of the Japanese commanders, high level ones, knew it was, but that didn't change their motivation and I would think that anybody that would say, "Oh, well, how we want to keep this fighting up," when those bombs solved the problem, had lost their cotton-picking mind. I mean, it's one thing to say, "Man, I want to get into it," but it's another, you don't want to get into it by being stupid.

SI: At what point did you say to yourself, "This is going to be my career, I'm going to stay in the Marine Corps?"

HA: Before I got in. I mean, I was looking forward to a career in the military. Now, whether it was the Army or Marine Corps, I never gave that any thought, because I was willing to take an appointment to either West Point or Annapolis, if I could get it, and I didn't really know about the ROTC business, [and] the fact that the land grant colleges, every year, really supplied the majority of Marine Corps officers, not Annapolis. Now it's Annapolis that does it and there's Naval ROTCs, too. I mean, the next question you might have is, "If you love the Marine Corps so much, why did you only stay in for twenty some years?" Well, the answer to that is, after twenty years, at that time, I think they'd changed it now; you can retire at half pay. So that means the job they assign you after you got twenty in has to be something where you think it's going to enhance your career, or something you like to do. I'm not going to sound like sour grapes or anything, but in Vietnam, as I said, I was into Sig-Int and intelligence work and there was a billet open at NSA that called for a Marine Lieutenant Colonel. That one was being transferred and his replacement hadn't been picked. The J-2 of MACV wrote a letter saying that I should be selected for that job. The J-2 of FMF Pac sent a letter saying the same thing. The head of NSA wrote to the Commandant of the Marine Corps that he wanted me there. Well, the personnel people were going to send me to El Toro to a job that a stupid corporal could do and play golf twice a week and I don't play golf. So, it came to a head and the assistant commandant said, "Well, that's just Alberts working his bolt." So, I put in for retirement and then Syracuse made me an offer I couldn't refuse and I got to sit at the desk that I would have sat at NSA as a lieutenant colonel, as a civilian for twice the pay, although, I would have prepared sitting there in my uniform. But that's the way the ball bounces, because I'd had a run in with this general when he first made general, a brigadier general, and he'd made a trip around, he was G-4 of the Marine Corps at that time, made a trip to Okinawa, where we had a Marine division stationed there, and someone in the supply said they hadn't gotten certain radio sets that they were supposed to get, some new fangled ones that were just issued. So, my boss, he had a motto, "Stay out of offices with carpets." He sent me to the office with carpets. The general said, "Find out about this." So I went, and found that they had been shipped and then, I suppose foolishly, I went beyond that and found out where they had been loaded aboard a Marine transport plane at Travis Air Force Base in California and it was slated to end up in Okinawa. I said, "General, here's the bill of lading, loaded on the plane and we haven't lost any planes." That sort of, he didn't like that answer. So, he remembered it, and the Marine Corps is small, and when you mess up with the wrong person at the wrong time, it could come back to haunt you. But anyway, we got through Bikini, I guess, because I did talk about the underwater test. The fact that some reputable people

said there was going to be a tidal wave all the way to Hawaii and also the fact that every ship, I think, that was involved in that, not the targets, but the other ships, that spent anytime in that lagoon ended up as being radioactive to a greater or less extent. Then I came back to MIT, which I covered, Camp Lejune, and the business of going from being a member of the Second Division to being, by a stroke of a typewriter, I was now in the First Division and we landed at Inchon. The sergeant got the beer at Woimido, and then we're into Seoul where there was street fighting. That, I guess, was completely ignored in the news reports about how bad it might have to be in.

----------END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE----------

HA: As I said before, my group that I'd organized as an infantry unit, helped the communicators. They were into it, and one thing we observed was Chesty Puller, who was one of the legends of the Marine Corps with his five Navy Crosses. He was regimental commander of the First Marines and, if you think of a three block length of any city, he was the third block back, howling at his battalion commanders to move out. They were two blocks back with their platoon leaders at the end. That's how close that he stayed to where the fighting was. My gunnery sergeant, in that little deal, won a Silver Star, and also, we captured a North Korean flag that I still have framed. I wasn't going to frame it until my granddaughter told me I should do it and say where it was captured, and all that stuff. There's a thing that they used to have anyway of rifle discipline and it was brought about in many ways, because ammunition is heavy and to get it places when it's carried on somebody's back, you don't waste it. Now, with helicopters delivering the stuff that may have relaxed some. But the first night in Seoul, we'd taken over a school building, I think. All hell breaks loose, you know, rifle fire, and basically, it was just people thinking they saw things shooting, and that was quickly squashed, telling us, "If you don't have a target to really shoot at you don't shoot." Then, I guess, after Seoul, stayed there awhile and then we reloaded aboard ship to go around and beat Bob Hope to Wonsan. At that time, they didn't know that, but Wonsan harbor had been heavily mined and it was taking our minesweepers a long time to get it cleared and so, we went into Operation Yo-Yo, where the transports we were on went back and forth, back and forth, out at sea in, I guess, a twenty mile circle, or whatever. So, when we finally landed at Wonsan, the South Korean troops had already gone through there. Some other American units were there. Bob Hope had a USO show that he had there but, while I'm waiting to get told what to do, where to go, [I] happen to be right next to the First Marines and Chesty Puller walks over to my gunnery sergeant, whose name was Payne, and he looks at Payne because he knew him from World War II. He says, "Payne, haven't they killed you yet? You must not have been doing your job." Which Payne, of course, took that with a grain of salt, as I did. … After one aborted supposed attack, where we all manned our foxholes, or whatever, it never materialized, we were loaded on trucks and went to Hamhung or Hungnam, I get the two mixed up, the one that's farthest inland [Editor's Note: Hungnam] and that, of course, is where the business of the Chosin Reservoir started. Our Seventh Regiment started up this road and they had encounters with the Chinese. They told everyone about that and we were told, "That's just volunteers," and the Seventh Regiment, followed by the Fifth Regiment, and that was followed by the First Regiment. Now the … Fifth was to go up on the right side of the reservoir, then their orders were changed, that they would be relieved by an Army unit from the Seventh Infantry Division and they were to go west, back down around the bottom of the reservoir and west. The Seventh Regiment went west right behind the Fifth

Marines and now you got the two regiments there. The Seventh Regiment left a company at a pass between Hagaru, where the reservoir was and U-Dam-Ni where the Fifth and Seventh eventually ended up. The First Regiment had one battalion at Chinhungni. Another at Koto-ri and the third at Hagaru-ri. Now, General Smith, who commanded the First Marine Division, realized that a lot of these moves were not basically thought out, because the number of miles between units was considerable and so, he basically stalled as much as he could to build up a good base at Hagaru, which was at the foot of the Chosin Reservoir, and that's essentially where all these units were surrounded. The battalion of the First Marines, with Chesty Puller and some other people, they were surrounded at Koto-ri. Hagaru-ri was surrounded. That one company, Fox company of the Seventh Marines was surrounded, and between where the Fifth and Seventh Regiments were and Hagaru-ri, that was blocked off. So then, the first thing that was done while all this was going on after the surrounding, they were making an airstrip at Hagaru-ri to be able to get planes in. There you have frozen ground with temperatures way down in the minuses. But they were able to get the things straightened out and they used World War II torpedo bombers as ambulances because they could put people in the part where the torpedo went, or a person, or whatever. Also, we did have the little helicopters, not the fancy ones they have now, there outside two stretchers could go. … The Chinese attacked at night, why? Not because they're like cats that can see in the dark, but, because they don't have the training. You know, at night you can get up close to someone unlike if you're shooting at me from across the table or vice versa there's a good probability we're going to hit you, or you can hit me. But if you're a hundred yards away, you have to be able to handle whatever weapon you have. … So then it's sort of history, the two regiments of consolidated, and Fox Company, was attacked continually by, at least, Chinese in regimental size and on the radio you could hear the company commander, or a platoon leader say, "I'm being overrun." He'd say, "How many went by?" And whatever number the platoon leader gave, he would add to and say, "You're not overrun till that many come by, and we'll take care of the rest here." Aerial photographs of where they were holding out showed the dead Chinamen every place within the perimeter. But Ray Davis, who was a battalion commander of the Seventh Marines and, at that time, became the executive officer when the other, former, exec was wounded, I believe. Anyway, he led his battalion single file along ridge lines to come up behind the Chinese at night and to keep his directions, every so often his radioman, and whatnot, would cover him with a poncho, so he could use a flashlight, and get his compass bearings, and he was successful, and both he and the company commander of Fox Company got Medals of Honor for that. But, that let the Fifth and Seventh Regiments come back to Hagaru-ri and concentrate there, and then it was a matter of getting down to where the battalion, the First, was at Koto-ri, and in between there the Chinese had blown a bridge. Because the, General Smith, who commanded the Marine Division, was told he could abandon his equipment and he refused to do that. So, they get to this blown spot, and, fortunately, at Koto-ri, the Army, an Army bridging unit, had some Brockway Bridging trucks. They practiced dropping bridge sections in Japan from airplanes, and they dropped them at Koto-ri and, I guess, they dropped extra ones because some were damaged, but, they got enough to bridge that and in one place they were using Chinese dead bodies, that were frozen solid as, you know, as they stack up railroad ties for support. Anyway, they got to all the way down, and then it was a matter of just, I'm sure if we wanted to, we could have held a perimeter in that area forever, but, they decided that we would be loaded on ships and go back to Pusan and start over again, if you will. In a sense, the trip back to Pusan and out to bivouac in Masan, where everything was re-supplied, regrouped, and I may not have mentioned that the British 41st Commando was attached

to us. They were there, and my company commander, at this time I've been transferred from Headquarters company to Signal Company. The Signal Company commander was a major and I was his exec, and he was into, he's a frustrated actor, among other things, but also the British Commandos said, … Did we want them to come and put on a show for our people? This is right around Christmas time and he, of course, grabbed that and he set up speakers and everything for all that, and they came and the hit of the whole thing was a dirge that they had titled "Hardships." It was a story of a ship that was sunk in the Indian Ocean, or the China Sea, or something like that, and they were all trekking back to England. And it started off with "The ship was sunk in the straits of Badang. We all swam ashore except the bosom, that cunning F word, paddled ashore in a latrine bucket," and then they're met by, then the chorus comes in, "'Ard ships, 'ard ships you don't know what 'ard ships are." They go through all these adventures all the way back, all on a ribald side, obviously, but, you know, you have a whole bunch of men in a place like that, what else can you laugh at? Then we went from there, after we were re-supplied and everything, to Pohang, which is on the east coast, veer south, where they were going into a guerilla hunt, trying to find the oddball ones, and that's where my company commander played a big joke on me, that frightened the hell out of him afterwards. He said, since he'd been a China Marine and he knew all about these Orientals, that they're willing to fight for whoever pays them, he said, "They rounded up a whole of bunch of them, issued them all rifles, nothing more than rifles." Supposedly, they would move up and once they ran into the Chinamen, they'd run backwards. They had to have somebody that could communicate back saying, "This is what's happening," and that I was elected to do that. Okay, I had a radio team, a jeep, and during the attack in the other direction from the Chosin Reservoir, we'd gotten a sixty-millimeter mortar and we had .30 caliber machine guns of our own and I traded my field desk, which was a handy gadget, for the sixty-millimeter mortar. [I] made sure I had a machine gun with ammunition to take, and mortar ammunition, too, and then wrote a letter to my wife and hit the sack. Well, all the other guys in the tent, they all thought that I just had my death warrant signed and they were more worried about it than I was, and that was the wrong thing for his play. So, the phone would ring. I don't know who rigged that with but he played out like he was talking to the Division Com officer. You know, "Do you want him up there now? Oh, you want to wait a while? Okay." He'd wake me up and, you know, then tell me that it was delayed. So, about the second time that happened, I figured the whole thing was just a big farce, but, I played along with it and took along the sympathy from my fellow officers there that were, "Gee, you drew a lousy card on that one," you know. … So the next day, one of the other officers came to me and says, "How mad are you going to get?" I said, "I'm not going to get mad." Because the company commander was really worried that, you know, that I'd been put in harm's way, in a way, without being put in harm's way. But then, things came to a head, in a way. My jeep that I told you about that was loaded, the battalion exec took it upon himself to count jeeps. Well, they're coming and going and it's pretty hard to keep a good count, but, I figured I'd be caught sooner or later, so I told the guys to bring it to the Fifth Marines, which they did. Then, about a week later, I was transferred to the Fifth Marines so I got my jeep back. So you lose some, you win some, you know. … All my training and everything is infantry, although with the advent of computers and stuff and military occupational numbers and because I was an electrical engineer, I was a communicator, whether I wanted to be or not. … I had written a letter, endorsed by the general commanding the Second Division, saying that I should be in infantry, and whatnot. It came back from the commandant saying they figured that if I was in communications long enough I'd learn what the hell I should do. So anyhow, I'm now the Fifth Marine regimental

communication officer. General Ridgeway had taken command of the Eighth Army and he had his first big operation, called "Operation Killer." Well, from where we were at, to the line of departure was, I guess, a two day trip by jeep. The commo of the Fifth Marines that was leaving, who had been there with the brigade earlier, so they had more time, he was going to tell me what I had to do. So, with a bottle of whiskey and a box of Hershey Bars, which is quite a combination, we go driving up to … the line of departure, I forget where it was (Wonju). Anyway, when we get to where the line of departure was, he gets out of the jeep and says, "I will see you, you got it, goodbye." So now I was the regiment's commo, and the first thing was, some of the communication NCOs were going to teach me a lesson, I guess, and the regimental commander, who was Ray Murray, who was an individual, after seeing him operate, that I would follow down the barrel of a gun. Others I'd follow across the street but I'd check the traffic before I stepped off the curb. He used to have the command net remoted into his tent every night, so he could listen to all what was going on in the radio. He did very little wire stuff, most of it was radio. The next morning he called me in and he says, "There was all this chatter on the radio last night and I'm about to throw your ass out of here. But, you have a second chance." Well, fortunately the radio chief, the wire chief, and the message center chief were all due to be rotated and I made a point to have them rotated, like right now, and they were all tech sergeants. I replaced the message center chief with a private first class and the other two with corporals, and from then on out we made out like burglars. Because the other thing I did was go and see the battalion commos, and they had never been visited by my predecessor. He tended to avoid the frontlines. So, my time with the Fifth Marines is really good, and that, by the way, is the most decorated regiment in the Marine Corps. I have one incident, oh, first, Ray Murray; his favorite mode of attack was a battalion regimental H&S and the other two battalions all in column. So, that meant his regimental H&S was very austere. It was only those who were basically needed, and to set them up, he had the one and the four on one phone and the two and the three on another phone. He, with his exec, was on the third phone. So, the whole switchboard for the CP was a small one. He was the only regimental commander that traveled that way. … Everyday a supply truck would come from his rear, his CP rear, where all the supplies were, to deliver them, and there's a lot of ammunition, food and batteries for radios. It's amazing how many of those you ran through. So, while he was there and oh, the other thing, the longest we stayed in anyone place was two days and part of my job was to pick out the new CP and our, the exec of the regiment, he was an eternal optimist. He'd called me in and say, "I want you to leave at first light and this is where the CP is going to be." He'd give me an area. "Okay." I get there and sometimes I'd run into one of the battalion commanders, he'd say, "Alberts, you want to run this attack, or you want me to?" Because where I was supposed to go still belonged to the Chinaman, or North Koreans, whatever you want to call them. But then he was, Murray was, by the way, he was a lieutenant colonel for most of the time in Korea, then he was promoted to Colonel, and we had colonels all over the place, but General Smith trusted Murray more than anybody else, so they didn't touch him. But anyway, he was promoted and went back to the States, and he, eventually, became a major general. The next regimental commander, he traveled much differently. His CP had about forty-eight different phones hooked up to it. He had everybody and their brothers with him, because he had the only supply stuff there, and everything else. … As I said earlier, at lunch, I get the *Washington Post* because it has the best comics, but after I read the comics, the intellectual section, I, then, read the obituaries because at my age, reading obituaries is like one used to read the ball scores, and so, I saw the obituary of the next regimental commander and it said that the Army gave him the Distinguished Service Cross,

which is the second highest award, next to the Medal of Honor for saving his regimental trains when the Chinese broke through on our flank. Now, his "saving" was to say, "Alberts, tonight you're to lead the trains from here across this, shall we say no-man's land, or whatever it is, to where the First Marines have set up a line," and so, I did. In fact, I went, the First Marines with the First Battalion, and they called themselves, you know, the First of the First and it was the exec that met me, Bridges, that I knew at Quantico and I gave that no more thought. But it just surprised me that that was a pretty good order he gave me, but I didn't get a kind word out of it, but, I didn't want a kind word, either. Anyhow, there were several Chinese offensives during the spring and the summer, and I would get sent off on these crazy missions like that. Once was to find the French battalion that belonged to the Second Army Division, I believe, and that's when I captured a gook.

SI: Tell us about that.

HA: Well, he was there, I was there, pointing a rifle at him so, which by the way, I carried an M1, you know, my arm was theoretically a carbine. The first opportunity I had to shoot the thing in anger, it jammed, and fortunately, the one I was shooting at was going the other way. So right after that, I carried an M1 and in my jeep, the stolen jeep, I also had a BAR, because there's a difference, even though they both shoot the same ammunition, because of the longer barrel on the BAR, you can hear those bullets really zap by you. Whereas, from an M-1, the same bullet sounds more like when telephone wires are in the wind, they make a noise. That's incidental, my own thoughts. … Also, the other thing I did, being not a dyed-in-the-wool communicator, I was the first one to lay wire using a helicopter, where the wire chief would just tie a weight to one end of the spool of real light wire that we had, drop it out, and fly to where he was going and drop it and the chances of somebody being able to find it and break it were minimal, and the risk involved was reduced considerably. Now, since I did visit battalions, one of the radio chiefs at the battalion asked me could he modify an SCR 300, so it would turn on, essentially, with noise, you know, It wasn't a press to talk, and then place it out in what they thought was sure to be a path for attackers to advance in, and before he put it out there they could register artillery there. In fact, the canon cockers could do it so there was a time on target where every weapon, artillery type, when they reach that spot, all the incoming comes down at once. It's not one where somebody has a chance to duck, and I said, "Great, that's a great idea." Which we did and they caught a whole bunch of Chinese in an assembly area. I saw the photographs of that and there must have been at least fifty or more all chewed up, because it was not only the 105s, and the 155s, and, for all I know, they might have even got some of the Army's guns clued in on it. … I left just before they got to the Punchbowl, which was on the truce line. [I] came back to the States, and was ordered to Quantico, to the Marine Corps equipment board in the electronics section. … Again, back to MIT, in the days of radio, before transistors and printed circuits and what not, you turn the radio upside down and there's a mass of wires, and these kids, I was older obviously, they'd look at [it] all, "There's an amplifier, there's a oscillator, there's a this," and I'd looked at it, "there's a headache." One professor once said that most of the failures in electronics stuff are tube failures. I figured I could spot them that and I could touch tubes when you had to find the fault and I'd have a pretty good chance of getting the right answers. But, the one thing that I knew, unless somebody's parents owned a complete machine shop and everything else, they didn't build generators or motors in their basement; like they only built radios, I never had. Antennas are always sort of an afterthought, and I had concentrated on

generators and the antennas and at that time the Marine Corps used to give, I was a major then, because I got promoted right after I got back from Korea, and people like me had a lot more authority than they give a brigadier general now. But I had since ran the development of the Marine Corps engine generators, because you have to have power for radios, radars, and what not, and antennas, plus a little bit, [a] side thing with radars that would detect people. With those three things, it kept me busy in Quantico for almost two years, and then I was transferred to headquarters, Marine Corps. First, in the supply department as a technical adviser to supply procurement officers. Then, while I was there, [I] had a very smart first lieutenant that came to work for me, and, I suppose, I taught him all the things that he should not do if he wanted to become a general, and I had a bet with his wife that someday he'd be the Quartermaster General of the Marine Corps, a bottle of Jack Daniels. He paid the bet some twenty years later, I guess. After my tour there, I was transferred to, it was where I got into Sig-Int since, to me, that was the most interesting part of communications. … In theory, I was to take a job in London but before all the clearance papers were done, and everything else, they moved the billet from London to the second floor of the Marine Corps headquarters. So my transfer was from the top floor to the second floor, via London. That's where I got to work primarily with NSA people but sometimes with the CIA people, and after my stint with the, I was in the G-2 section.

SI: This was in the late 1950s.

HA: This was in '56 to '60, somewhere. See, that was the other thing, as far as personnel thought, this theoretic move to London and back, it was just like I'd figured out a way to never get transferred out of headquarters, that I'd found a home, and that's partially right. If there's guns shooting, that's where I want to be, but, if there isn't any, I don't go on these masochistic type assignments, like, at that time, the Marine Corps had a division in Okinawa.

----------END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO----------

DD: This begins tape three of an interview with Lieutenant Colonel Howard Kirkpatrick Alberts on May 16, 2003 in New Brunswick. You may continue where we left off.

HA: The Marine Corps had a division stationed in Okinawa and the division was stationed there without dependents, while the Army and the Air Force had their people there, with dependents. Now, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to tell you that that's a situation that is really set up for trouble, especially when the personnel people would send individuals there and they would become like second and third assistants to the various staff sections, when the individual holding down that staff section didn't have enough work to do. So, one would have all the temptations to get them into real problems, but, since I was in headquarters for so long, they all thought that I was just avoiding getting shipped to Okinawa. When Vietnam broke out, they said, "Oh, boy, now we've got him." By that time I've been promoted to lieutenant colonel, and I couldn't have asked for a better assignment, because, there I was going to go and do something that was really, if you'd say fighting with intercepts, you're really fighting. You're just intercepting as much as you can. So, I got orders to Vietnam and my wife wasn't too happy about them, but she also knew that was my business and she basically didn't mind it that much. So, I got to Vietnam and the plane landed at Tan Son Nhut Airfield and I was met by a J-6, who I was going to work for, and coming from a cooler climate to almost on the Equator, I guess it's seventeen degrees off the

Equator, something like that, and sitting in a plane on the tarmac, I got off, you know, like a drowned rat. So I told them, I said, "If he was looking for a Marine to pose for recruiting posters, he had the wrong person. If he's looking for one that didn't mind going out on the boondocks and looking for bad guys, he had the right one." So, I guess he got a kick out of that, maybe, I don't know whether he did or not, but it, was what we call a "purple suited command." The Army was the head guy. His deputy was an Air Force one. I had what they called the plans branch. I had an Army major that worked for me, an Air Force captain, and a Navy lieutenant, and an Army first sergeant, and all the sections were that way, and my main office was in Saigon, but my job took me everywhere, from one end of the country to the other. You might say KheSon in the north to Phu Quock Island off the southern coast. Dealing with the Vietnamese, [they were] to me, were very nice people and also very practical. Like in the early days, there was only one beggar in all of Saigon that I ever saw, because they had a, you could say, a welfare system that was unique. My maid, had a maid, who had a maid. Now, the last one in the row, just maybe had a place to sleep and some rice to eat and that was it, but, each one was taken care of. If you drove south of Saigon, where there are rice fields after rice fields and you didn't see anything written in the Vietnamese language, by the way, they used our alphabet. They don't use, like in Thailand, it's a different script, you would think that you were in Arkansas or East Texas because they're plowing with John Deere tractors, Farm-All tractors. The only thing that would be different is at harvest time, then they cut the rice by hand, and throw it on the dikes and then drive trucks back and forth over it to knock the grain out of the heads, and then the women winnowed it. But again, that employs a lot of people, and since rice is one of their main staples, that even at that time, during and later on during the war, they still were growing enough rice in the Delta to export it. Now, the pictures that I have seen, that have been shown to people in the States, is from the northern part of the country where, maybe, some guy has a lot planted with rice as big as this room using a water buffalo to do his plowing for him. But, the real picture was a totally different picture. Again, I feel that if they had just left it alone with the 20,000 regular US military types who were there, we could have muddled through. Because, again, that book that was written by a professor at Georgetown said that when the coup took place against him at that particular time in India, representatives of Ho Chi Min and the South Vietnamese were trying to get together for a truce type of thing. But, politically, things were being controlled from Washington and it was like, "My mind's made up, don't confuse me with facts." Since the head of the CIA station, he said the coup was a bad idea, and he was called back to the States and replaced. The Ambassador, of course, Nolting, was called back and replaced by Cabot Lodge, who wouldn't even go to see Diem. The day that the coup took place, I went to the Vietnamese Army headquarters looking for their head of intelligence, my guess, is they were dragging him out the back door to shoot him. The other thing is that the plotters had to get Madame Nu out of the country, because she had more intestinal fortitude than anyone else, plus the fact she was a very beautiful woman. But, really French was her main language and she would write things in French and then they'd have to be translated into Vietnamese or English. Though she talked Vietnamese, too, but she did not, as far as a I know, write in Vietnamese and since languages don't translate into a one-to-one basis, it was easy to take what she'd written in French and use the worst translation you could for English. You know, not it's the wrong word but it's just one of the many words that could be used to mean a certain thing. But they did get her out of the country, and, of course, I got the J-6 mad at me. I was left to see that all the traffic was sent back to the States, to Pearl Harbor, and at that time, before we have satellite transmissions and what not, depending on sun spots, Saigon was halfway

around the world from here. So, sometimes the transmissions would go across the Pacific to Washington, other times they go around the other way, through Asmira, Turkey to Washington. So, I was left to see that all traffic was got out, which I did. He called me up, asked if it was all gone, I said, "Yes." I said, "Now, I'm going to go out and find Madame Nu's people and fight with them." Then the general that they put in, he was called Big Minh, Big Stupe would have been better, and he didn't last very long, because one of the division commanders, along with his American advisor, figured out how to throw him out of office. That was Nguyen Khan. In fact, they stayed in the same BOQ that I lived in. It was really a large French mansion you could say, a lot of rooms in it, maybe twenty rooms. About a week or so before the coup took place, for some reason, I went to the island that was off the east coast they used as a prison island, where they had some people in tiger cages. But, the American adviser there, who was from a police type organization, he said, "Yes, there were some political prisoners, but the majority were VCs and then regular felons, or murderers, or whatever." The day after Diem was assassinated, somebody gave the order; they loaded up every prisoner that was there on an LST, brought them to Saigon and open the doors and said, "Go." Talking about agents getting implanted in your organization, that was something. Now, a little bit of that I was involved in, when I read all sorts of versions of it, is that supposedly, the Ho Chi Min Trail went down the border between South Vietnam and Laos. Off the northern, northwestern tip of South Vietnam, there's a mountain, the French name for it was Tiger Tooth Mountain, and it's above the clouds, and I made a, using contour maps, from the top of that mountain to the city of Tchepone in Laos was line of sight, and I also figured that they probably were using the latest Russian deal, it was code named, "Mercury Grass," which was a digital type of affair, and that if we put a listening post up there, with, probably, a company of Marines and South Vietnamese types also, that, since it was accessible by helicopter, at least in good days, it wasn't that big a risk. The head of NSA out there, he had a code name, they never called it NSA, he was something else, just like the CIA people were Cass, he thought it was a great idea. So, he went to [the] General that was the J-3, his name was Stillwell, not Vinegar Joe, had no relation, I don't believe. He thought it was great so got to see General Harkins, and General Harkins said, "Well, I think there are too many VCs up there." I said "Well, our reports show there's only this many." He said, "Okay, you go up there and reconnoiter that spot and come back and if it's okay, we'll do it." So, I did along with the NSA type and we got another lieutenant colonel from the advisers in Danang. He went with us, and after I persuaded the helicopter pilot to fly us up there, he had strenuous objections, but he did. His crew chief was so nervous that he, the smoke grenade that they used, the colored smoke, it went off inside the cabin. But anyway, then, that said, we could do it. Now, I had to come back to NSA to get their permission, which I did. I went to a company that made exotic, radio type gadgetry, if you will, since the president of the company was their head gadget maker, to make something that would intercept this four channel deal. Then went to headquarters, Marine Corps, and saw Al Gray, who I always say "worked with me" when I was in the J-2. He says he "worked for me." But, he was another one I showed what one shouldn't do if they wanted to become a general. He became the Twenty-Ninth Commandant of the Marine Corps. But, I told him what it was, and was he up to doing it? I knew he would. I could have made a lot of money because there were a lot of people that thought he wouldn't. But, I didn't make any bets, unfortunately, because I didn't want to get the word out. But, to show you how things were now, up to this point, the only people that knew what was going to happen were NSA, myself, and we didn't even tell any of the CIA types what we were going to do, or anything else. But then when the wheel started rolling, and Al Gray knew it, of course, there were delays. They

might as well imprinted it in the Hanoi newspaper, because, you can be sure there was nothing to be heard, but, anyway, he was up there and, I guess, he stayed for a month, and by that time I was back in the States and almost out of the Marine Corps then. So, there were no results. In different books, now, I find write-ups of this, and most of them saying what a harebrained idea it was, and none of them realized that it was listening for a specific deal. Another thing that I passed over in a hurry, when I was in J-2 or G-2 on the Marine Corps, that was when Castro took over, and the phone system for Cuba sort of runs down the backbone, but it zigs and zags, and I proposed that one place off one of these zigs or zags out to, at sea you could pick up what was on the phone lines. You know, it would take a lot of doing after you've picked up the garble to sort it out, but that could be done. I guess, I sold that idea because I got a destroyer and people from the Second Radio Company at Camp Lejune to man a shelter with, we'd put in the instrumentation in, and see what they could get. I don't think they got much of anything, but it was worth a try. … The head of the Second Radio Company, I guess he went, and he was a Marine character of sorts, he refused promotion to lieutenant colonel because he wanted to get out. He got out while he was there in the radio company. He got a master's degree in mathematics from East Carolina and his favorite thing was, I guess, one of his advanced math type at Eastern Carolina had an accent just like the dog with the southern accent in cartoons. Anyway, he would spout off something in calculus of variations in this deep, not a southern accent, but it's the one that the dog has. But, he went on to Iowa State and got his PhD, and he taught calculus of variations and he said that one class during a term he would always hold in the scroungiest bar in the city, just to let the people in the class know that there is another half to the world. But, he was a character that he would ride a motorcycle from there (Ames, Iowa) to Washington to see some of his acquaintances, and he would send his bag on a Greyhound bus. I had first met him; he went to MIT, also, the same time I was there. After the coup against Diem, things were pretty much downhill until everything got sorted out. But, now we had, the press and some of the military, kept deriding everything South Vietnamese did. I'd say to some of them, "Supposing the same things were being said at the start of the Civil War after the First Battle of Manassas, where the Union forces hightailed it out of there? It could have been made into a losing situation right from the beginning." There are some things we did in South Vietnam that I think were real good, like one of my acquaintances was the adviser to the junk fleet. A friend of his was a naval doctor, so on weekends, since the early part they sort of fought the war the way the British did in India; it's just five days, and you have your weekend. You don't do any fighting then. He would get a junk with a Vietnamese crew, of course, and go up some of these tributary rivers to remote villages and you'd see the headman and tell him what you, because the doctor would take some of his corpsmen with him, that we're there to treat his people. He couldn't do surgery, or anything, but he could certainly do a lot for them, and they appreciated it, and I was along for, supposedly, security. Playing "Terry and the Pirates" was really what it was. Because the people of the village appreciated what you did, you would have to have a meal with them, and this was, talk about playing roulette, because those meals could be just about anything. Of course, they lived on them, and since I was on the economy a lot, I got to like some of their food, and you hear about this fish sauce, *nuoc cham*. When they fix it up right with hot peppers and lemon juice and so forth, it is pretty tasty. Fortunately, I never had to have roasted field mice or anything like that. But, I also got initiated into one of the Montagnard tribes and there you had to drink some of their alcoholic spirits, I guess, is the only word that you could give it, and they give you a copper bracelet, or whatnot. The sad thing of it all is that we got a lot of the Vietnamese to trust us, and then we pulled out without any rhyme or reason of

saving them. Another area, this was, initially, it was MACV for the whole South-East Asia (SEATO). It was MACTHAI in the Southeast Asia overall version of NATO. So, one time I got to travel first class, to the areas, guess, it took a couple of planes. We landed at the airport outside of Bangkok, I got my cities mixed up, that's Thailand, isn't it? We were met by cars right there. We get off the plane; the car will take you to a hotel, traveling really first class. But, that was also where I got to go to Singapore a few times, to meet with the British counterparts down there, and there again, that was a very nice city. Now, I can't say the same for traveling into Cambodia or Laos. They have places that were really grand, but it must have been thousands of years ago. I guess that, as I said before, I overstayed my tour in Vietnam. It was supposed to be twelve months and, I guess, I stayed there about almost sixteen. That made my wife really unhappy, and I can't blame her much there, but I thought I was doing an important job and I wanted to stay at it, except after the build up, where forces would take a hill and then give it up. This supposed war of attrition against an oriental country is ridiculous. That was the way it was being run from Washington, and so I think I've almost told you everything that I've ever done.

SI: Well it's about time for us to leave.

HA: Thank God.

SI: We can sit here all day and would love every minute of it but the Old Guard Dinner is coming up, we're going to give you a chance to get changed and get to the campus.

HA: Supposedly there's going to be something to take me there, right?

SI: Yes, a shuttle.

HA: Right down in the lobby. About what time is it now?

SI: It's almost quarter after four. This concludes our interview with Colonel Howard Alberts on May 16, 2003 in New Brunswick, New Jersey. And thank you very much for spending time with us.

HA: You're welcome.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Kevin Bing 5/3/04
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 5/9/04
Reviewed by Howard K. Alberts 7/05