RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT M. SEES

FOR THE

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Robert M. Sees on November 5, 2005, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Tom O'Toole: … Tom O'Toole.

SI: Mr. Sees, thank you very much for being here today.

Robert Sees: My pleasure.

SI: To begin, where and when were you born?

RS: I was born [in] 1946 in Garfield, New Jersey, and I moved to Wallington in 1974. So, I've lived in New Jersey in the same two-mile radius all my life. I went to Rutgers. So, the only time I've ever left New Jersey was in the military.

SI: Could you tell us a little bit about your father, where he was from and what he did for a living?

RS: Yes, my father was born in Paterson, New Jersey. He was a member of the New Jersey National Guard, just prior to World War II. He had gotten, basically, [as] I understood the story, he got out [for] a short period of time, and then, he went back in. Then, World War II broke out. He was already thirty-six years old, so, he was not required to serve, but he decided he wanted to serve. He was with the 77th Division, which was, basically, composed of; it's considered the New York National Guard, which they brought the New Jersey units in, and he spent from 1942 up until about '44 training. What they did, at that time, was have intense military training for a whole unit, then, deployed the whole unit to the war. He was trained in desert warfare, not knowing where he was going go. He went through the whole gamut, and he wound up going into the Pacific.

He was an assault infantryman, landed on beachheads. He was in the Guam Campaign, when they took Guam. He was at the Philippines, Leyte. He was a member of that task force that attacked Leyte and that liberated the Philippines. From there, he went to Kerama Retto, which is below Okinawa, and they secured that island. Marine and Army units attacked Okinawa; his division attacked an island, Ie Shima, off the northwest coast of Okinawa, which was, basically, an airfield. At that battle, he was there when Ernie Pyle, the famous correspondent, was killed, and we have a picture home of the original monument to Ernie Pyle, which doesn't exist in any books anywhere, not to my knowledge.

At Okinawa, he was involved in the invasion of Okinawa, after they secured Ie Shima, and, at Okinawa, he fought until May 13th, around that time, he was wounded severely at Shuri Ridge, which was a very strong Japanese defensive line. The significance about Okinawa was [that] the 77th Division and the Marines worked very close together, and the Marine Corps commanders agreed that the 77th Division was one of the best Army units to work with. They were referred to as the 77th Marine Division.

So, he was crippled. He was highly decorated at the Battle of Okinawa, got a Bronze Star for Valor. He was wounded, got a mortar round, which severed most of his arm, left arm, and he continued. He wouldn't get evacuated, because he was a senior squad leader and he wanted to stay with his men. So, he was hit about four or five times on Okinawa, and then, finally, he had to go. He was hurt pretty bad. So, he recovered, left the military totally disabled. What it wound up, after he healed, was that [he] had just a tough time using his left arm. He just couldn't straighten it, but he recovered, and he had machine-gun bullets in the legs as well, at that time. So, he had a little trouble walking, but that all caught up with him later on in life.

Basically, when I came around, he thought that the war was over for everybody, after World War II, never anticipating that I would go. The interesting [thing] about my father was, he was very upset, I mean, he understood I was a chip off the old block, so, when I went, volunteered for the infantry, he knew exactly what I was going to get into with the jungle fighting, and so on, but he supported it a hundred percent. To me, he was a great influence. He worked for the railroad his entire life. Because of his injuries, later--it affected him--they forced him out on disability. So, he worked for the railroad probably around forty years.

SI: Was he an officer?

RS: No, he was a staff sergeant. Yes, he rose to the rank of staff sergeant.

SI: From the World War II interviews that I have done, it seems unusual that such an older soldier would be put into a forward unit.

RS: Right. I admire that, because, at thirty-seven, thirty-six, thirty-seven years old, yes, that's kind of tough. The 77th had many older National Guardsmen and were nicknamed "The Old Bastards."

SI: Yes, especially since he had already been married and had one child.

RS: Yes, my brother was born in 1942. He came home from Arizona. I've had a book; I've researched the 77th Division, so, I know their history. He was in Arizona, and they gave a two-week pass. He came home on it, and my brother was born nine months later after that, because we could figure, do the math. [laughter] He never saw my brother until my brother was two years old, because, after that, he went back to Arizona and they shipped out to Oakland, to California, and then, they moved to the Pacific, to Hawaii first. My brother had been born, and he didn't see him until he returned from the war. My brother was born in '42. My father returned from the war in '45, so, he missed three years of his life.

TO: After he was injured, did they send him right back out, or was he sent home after that?

RS: No, he was sent home. When he was injured the first time, he got hit with shrapnel, he stayed, because he said there weren't enough experienced soldiers. He was the type of guy, he's thirty-six years old, I mean, he insisted upon going with the unit, to go to war in the first place, didn't have to go. Then, when he got hit, he wouldn't leave the field, and then he got to the point

where he got totally incapacitated. He was still going after the Japanese in the caves at Shuri Ridge.

That was the time, May 11th, the Japanese started a major offensive in Okinawa. That's what he got caught in, and there was a lot of casualties and he was one of them. So, it got to the point where he was hurt so bad, they had to get him out of there. Then, he got on a hospital ship, sent him home. Then, he went to Deshon Hospital in [Butler], Pennsylvania, which was a military hospital, and he recovered there for a while, before they sent him home.

SI: Did he talk about his experiences when you were growing up, or did you find out later?

RS: No. I found out a lot later, but very rarely did he talk about it. You'll find with veterans, they'll talk about what they did and where they were, but none of the details. Nobody wants to get into it. I'm the same way. Until I got to Vietnam the second time, I was kind of hesitant about talking about certain things. Then, I found out it's better to do that. No, he didn't talk a lot about it.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother's background, where she was from?

RS: I will add, my father was a high school graduate, that was it, and he worked for the railroad as a clerk, most of his life, but my mother, she didn't finish high school. She was just this plain, ordinary housewife that existed at that time. She had gone with her sister to the Paterson Armory, and my father was marching there. She remembered him.

Oh, back up a little bit; when he was working for the railroad in Garfield, he would get on top of the freight cars as they'd go by, and my mother would be on the porch and she kind of liked this young guy going by all the time on the train. She was always waving to him. So, her sister took her to the Armory, and my father, because of his height, he was a little taller, was the right guide for the platoon, carries the flag. So, he saw her and she saw him and they gave, "Forward march," and he didn't go. Everybody bangs into each other. She saw him, and she saw him on the freight car the following week. She said, "Wasn't that you at the armory?" He said, "No, that was my twin brother."

Then, they started talking, and that's how they met and they got together. She was, actually, eleven years younger than him. So, that was one of the things. He didn't want to marry her because of that reason, because he figured she would outlive him a long time, which didn't happen. They only died a year apart, as it turned out. She worked, during the war, for Western Electric in a defense job soldering electronic equipment during the war. Then, after the war, she stopped.

SI: You grew up in the Garfield-Wallington area.

RS: Right.

SI: When you were growing up, what was your neighborhood like? Who were your neighbors?

RS: I'm sure you've heard this a million times, everybody knew everybody. When I was four years old, my mother would let me go out of the house, and I'd be running all around the neighborhood. She didn't know where I was half the time. Then, the neighbors would always take care of you. There was no crime of any kind. We'd ride bicycles. We were happy.

We went to school, learned everything the hard way, no calculators or any of that stuff. I didn't have TV when I started to grow up; didn't exist yet. So, most of your activities were outside. You'd come home from school and you'd go outside and you'd play with everybody, ride bikes. So, you got plenty of exercise. You had nothing to fear and there was total freedom. It was a great time to grow up.

I miss that, actually. With my children, you can't even let them out of the house without worrying where they are. We always had to know where they were. That time was much better, and no distractions or anything. Nobody was overweight. We did plenty of [sports]. We played baseball, stickball. There was always something to do, but none of it was sitting around watching TV, didn't do that.

When they got the first TV, one of our neighbors, it had the small screen, all of us sat around and watched it, and even the television shows were better in those days. [laughter] There [were] heroes and there were villains, and the heroes always won. You hear that on the Internet a lot, "The black-and-white days were happy days." So, it was a great time to grow up. The other thing, too, is, you're more prone to study and to do better in school and you have more incentive, and that was the thing. I mean, you tried to exceed [expectations].

Even today, I notice, with the kids, to get them interested in reading books and to do things is very difficult. If I can take somebody here and say, "I'll give you a degree and you don't have to take any classes," they'll be more than happy to take the degree and walk. I was telling my daughter that, "What are you going learn? The idea is to learn here." "Well, it's so hard. You've got to write papers." "Yes, but you're learning something."

They'd rather just go on the Internet, the University of Phoenix, "Give me my degree in three weeks," but, in our case, my studies were hard and we all did it. It was a good balance. Of course, you had people [who] didn't have the abilities or didn't care. The other thing, too, is, at that time, going to college was something that not everybody did either. Today, everybody sees you have to go to college. In those days, people had other alternatives.

SI: Was it expected that you would go to college? Was that a goal that they set up?

RS: No. It was not a goal, and that's up to me, "You make your own decision." Neither one of my parents went to college, but they left that, "[It is] your decision what you want to do in life. You want to work for the railroad, like your father? Do you want to go to college? Whatever you want to do. Do you want to join the military?"

My brother, in fact, did that. He joined the Navy, my older brother. He was seventeen, he joined the Navy. He was in the Cuban [Missile] Crisis, and so, that was the option. Then, he came out of the Navy, and he went to Rutgers for a semester [for] engineering. He was doing fine, but he

felt that it's not what he wanted. So, he went back to the railroad, which he was working [for in the] summers. I was working summers at the railroad, also.

Now, he liked the railroad and he made a career out of it and stayed with it. Without a college education, he rose to be the top guy in their pricing department. So, he did all the freight movements for the First Gulf War. He was responsible to get all the military equipment out of the country, over to Saudi Arabia, moved by rail from all the different bases. He did good, without a college degree. Nobody was pushing it. At that time, it wasn't really [necessary], unless, people say, "You go to college to be a doctor or a lawyer." That was the idea.

SI: Would you say your neighborhood was a working-class neighborhood?

RS: Yes, I had police officers, and everybody else worked in factories. My grandfather lived upstairs at the time. He worked in the tire factory, and then, he worked in a chemical factory right down the street. He walked to work in two minutes. That's the point, because we were all [recent immigrants], there were a lot of Eastern Europeans, because, in that area of New Jersey, Passaic, Paterson, that whole area, people were coming in from different countries and settling because the factories were [there]. There was a lot of manufacturing in the area, so, everybody could get a job.

There was a church, for example, which dealt with the Austrian-Slovakian people. My mother's side was Slovakian. Everybody came, and they were coming from Europe at the turn of the century, they all went to this church and that's how they all met and married each other, and so on. They met there. The neighborhood was, basically, I'd say people working in the manufacturing jobs, no doctors, lawyers. One of the guys across the street, my mother's lifelong friend, became a doctor, but most of the people that lived there were basically blue-collar workers.

SI: However, the town was not tied into a specific factory or one industry.

RS: No, everybody had different jobs, yes. That was the other thing, too. We got around; there are no cars. Everybody got around on busses, public transit. We didn't have a car until, like, in the mid-'50s or so. Everywhere we went was by bus.

SI: For most of your friends, were their fathers World War II veterans, too?

RS: Yes, because, at that time, with few exceptions, if you didn't go to war, people looked down on you. In fact, comments were always made, one of our neighbors, he was married, had children, so, he worked in a defense [plant], but he made a lot of money. So, everybody used to throw that at him all the time, "He stayed back when everybody else was fighting the war. He hid behind his family," but that was the thing at the time. World War II was different. Everybody went. If you were able-bodied, you didn't dare walk around the street. [laughter]

SI: What kind of effect did having all these fathers and mothers who had been in the war have on you and your generation growing up?

RS: I would say the thing they taught you was patriotism, you love your country. That's the thing. Everything was, "You obey the rules." Everything is by law here, so, everybody respected the police. People in uniform, you always had the highest regard for. If a teacher or anybody said anything, if I got into trouble with a teacher, I'd be the one that my parents jumped on. They wouldn't ever--today, it's always blame the teachers and so on, but, in those days, there was respect in authority and that's what they taught you.

SI: Even though they were not talking about their specific experiences, the World War II generation's values bled through.

RS: Right, right, and remember, too, most of the parents came out of the military, and a lot of the people in the industries were in the military. When I first started, I mean, in the '60s, working, you saw that still remnant. You had people that were running companies who had militaristic styles. You know, they're autocratic and they get things done, and, today, I mean, later, I'll get into it, but, when I was working, later on in life, it's all teamwork and everybody sits around, trying to discuss what we're going do.

In those days, people worked more on a military basis. The parents and everybody would treat the kids the same way, dress properly, be neat. I think that's because it was drummed in their heads, and it wasn't just that generation. A lot of [people], like, before my father, my mother's uncles all fought in World War I. It was the same thing. It was passed right on down, but it was also in your head, too, at that time, for all of my generation, that you had to give something back to your country anyway. So, the military was something everybody planned, "Someday, I'm going to do this." My brother, same thing, he said, "I'm going to work, but, when I get out of high school, I'm going to join the Navy and do my part." So, everybody had that also, "I'm going to join, do something." It was always in your mind.

SI: You mentioned that studying and academics were a big part of your life growing up. What were your favorite subjects and what were your interests?

RS: That's interesting. When I was in grade school, high school, science and math and all, I loved it. I was big in that. Then, I came here to Rutgers, and that all fell apart. [laughter] Things are a lot different in college. I'll get into Rutgers in a little bit, because it's a different story here, but, basically, to answer your question, all through grade school and high school, science was a big thing. I won science fairs in high school, against seniors even, when I was a freshman. I just loved it. I had microscopes and all the stuff. I'd play with that stuff. I read a lot of science books, go to ponds and pull things out. I really thought that was where I was going to head for a career.

See, that's the thing I tell the kids, too, just as an aside, in 1950s, growing up, I had no idea that in the year 2000, I'd be selling Internet and IT (information technology) products. You worry about, "What am I going to do in the future?" It's going to change, because you didn't even have that kind of technology, nor even dreamed of it. I wandered into an area that didn't even exist when I was growing up. Well, anyway, that's an aside. Science was my favorite. I didn't like, didn't care for history and all that, had to take it like everybody else. It was boring to me. Now, I read history almost every night.

SI: Was religion a central part of your life growing up, church activities and social activities?

RS: Yes, I came from a Catholic family, so, I went to all Catholic schools all the way through high school. So, it was a very important thing, because the Church, you had your neighborhood and all that and you always had your parish. Everybody knew each other in the church, and everybody worked together, volunteered to do things together. I went to the schools. All the parents knew each other, and it's just different. I mean, my daughters went to a Catholic high school, and if they knew ten, fifteen of the people, they were lucky. With us, we knew the whole school for the most part. So, that was very important. That's part of what I was saying earlier, I think the parents were brought up with the religion, God, country, and all that, it was very important.

SI: Was it a largely Slovak Roman Catholic Church, or was it another church?

RS: Actually, we started that way, my mother and her generation, but, then, as the next generation came, they started pushing us off to other parishes, so, we went to it at that time, like [when] I started. My brother actually got kicked out of the Slovak school. They built a school in Garfield, which we both went to. I was in the first, actually, kindergarten class to attend that school. What they wanted to do was, they wanted to be an ethnic church, but, once you started intermarrying and all that changed.

SI: You lose the character.

RS: You lost that identity. They kind of pushed you, "Go to your own town." See, religion was so big then, the churches had a problem of too many people. So, they would tell you, "Go to your own church in your own town." [laughter] They just couldn't handle the crowd sometimes. It's amazing.

SI: Was the Slovak culture present when you were growing up, learning the language or food?

RS: Well, my grandmother, see, that's our, I think, second generation, you lose that, my grandmother spoke the language obviously, and her husband and her were both ethnic with the food and everything. So, we started that way, but, then, my mother and father started, my father came from an Irish and an English and Italian background, so, he kind of wasn't hot on that stuff anyway. [laughter] So, that's what happens; it changes. Then, when we come along, the second generation after that, we didn't learn the language, we knew nothing. That's typical.

I'm seeing that with my own kids. My wife is Puerto Rican, and my own kids don't know Spanish. I mean, they know they're from Puerto Rico, my wife's [from] there, but they have none of the culture really. That's typical second generation. It's called assimilation.

SI: Yes. Were the Catholic schools that you attended coed?

RS: Yes, coed, right, but, in high school, they tended to have the classes, even though it's coed, they tended to have boys go to sessions and girls [others], even though in some classes you

mixed. My lab partner in chemistry was a female, but in most classes all males. They tried to keep it separate sometimes, but the school was coed, grade school for sure.

TO: How did you meet your wife?

RS: Oh, you don't want to know that. [laughter] No, that's a fascinating story in itself. I'll have to tell you, after grade school, I went to the seminary to study to be a priest. I thought that's what I wanted to do. I spent two-and-a-half years doing that. I decided that's not really what I wanted, so, I dropped out and I went back to regular high school.

I came back from Vietnam, and this is when I met her. It was after the college, after the war, and I was kind of having trouble getting a job. At that time, it was a recession, and nobody wanted to hire Vietnam veterans. Every time I went for a job interview and they were close to it, they'd give me a blood test.

Now, I didn't realize this until I was in the room and I had the bandage on, and I see other people that didn't have it on. I went up, I asked the people who did, and we all had one thing in common, we were Vietnam veterans. I asked the interviewer, at first, I got a little bit rambunctious, I asked the interviewer, "Why did you give us [blood tests]? It seems like you're giving Vietnam veterans blood [tests]." He says, "Yes, because this is a bank, you handle a lot of money, and, [as] Vietnam veterans, there's a good chance you're on narcotics of some type, druggers." I walked out, and I said, "Ridiculous." I never took [drugs], smoked marijuana, never took anything in my life. I walked out, but then I really had to play the game. I went, I got one job, and I didn't get along with the boss, got fired. I was kind of hurting to get a job.

One of the savings and loans [was] looking for a management trainee, so, I said, "Fine, I'll do it." It was cheap, low wages, but I said, "What the hell? I need a job." I went to work there. They were breaking me in on all the jobs. I was at the teller position. In walks this young girl, and she's staring at me. I fell in love her, I've got to tell you, instantly, the first time I saw her. She was just everything. I said, "This is great. What a nice girl." She's smiling at me, smiling at me and looking at [me]. She's talking to the other teller in Spanish, and she keeps looking at me. I thought, "Hey, something's going [on]." [laughter] I asked, "Who was that girl?" [The other teller] says, "You'll see her. She comes in here a lot." I said, "Okay." This was June of 1971.

The following week, they had me opening the door in the morning. [I had to] get there at eight-thirty and let employees in. So, she's there, all dressed up nice. She knocks on the door, and I said, "You can't come in. We don't open until nine." She says, "Let me in." I says [tapping his watch], "Nine o'clock." She says, "I work here." [laughter] She came in. Now, because of her being Puerto Rican and me being American.

TO: Did you experience any problems because of that?

RS: Absolutely. It was terrible. Her family, I mean, I didn't start taking her out. She refused for a long time. I knew she liked me, but she just wouldn't. Finally, she broke down, said, "We'll go." So, we started going to lunch and things like that.

Then, I found another job, so, I had to leave. It was better money and opportunity with the Bell System. I left, and I didn't want to not see her anymore and she's still refusing to let me take her out. I couldn't call her house in case somebody answered, "Who's this guy?"

TO: There were no cell phones back then either. [laughter]

RS: I went, and I got a flower. I was in training for Bell Telephone. I knew the way she would walk home from the bank, so, I drove [up] and I just stopped the car, gave her the flower and kept going, but we started going together.

I wanted to get married. That was '74, but I wanted to marry her. She had this thing all along to be a nun. She was a very religious lady. She went to the convent. No matter who I met or anything, I just could not see anybody other than this girl. I just was totally in love with her. In 1974, she went to the convent.

I was talking to some lady at work. She knew the nuns, the Salesian Order. I said, "Maybe I could find out where my girlfriend went." She went and took me to the convent. I asked. "Oh, yes, she's in" and told me she's in Newton, New Jersey. I went up there one day, and I drove around for two hours, afraid to go in. I go and I ring the doorbell, and it's a big clanking sound all over the place. I feel like that tall, [gesturing a short height], and the Mother Superior comes down, opens the door, "Can I help you?" I said, "Is Sister Maria Morales here?" She says, "Yes, but who are you?" I said, "I'm an old friend. We used to work together." [laughter]

She brought me in a room. They had this big, huge table and those big, high-backed chairs, and it was like the Middle Ages. She comes in in her habit, and she sits down. She said she had like twenty minutes until she had to go to prayer, and I was just petrified, scared. [laughter] They knew that there was something between us previously. She had to confess that. She was punished.

Anyway, so, time goes on. I think it was about 1977 or '78, something like that, probably even later, maybe '79, I don't know, I'm having a meeting with my staff in my office and the secretary called, says, "I've got an important call for you. She says it's urgent." She says, "You will take this call," and I thought, "All right." So, I said, "Excuse me." I get on the phone, and it was the lady that knew me from the bank, says, "Guess who's back working here." I said "Who?" and she told me. I hung up the phone. I said, "Excuse me, meeting's over." I got in my car to go see her. It took another two or three years before she'd go out with me again. I would go to her office every Friday to buy savings bonds to be able to see her. Year later, we paid our daughters' tuition with the bonds. Then, finally, she [and I] went out, and then [in] 1984, we got married. I knew her from 1971. We didn't get married until 1984, and the happiness is amazing. Every time I'm with her, it's just like I just met her. It's a great relationship.

TO: Wow, that is great.

RS: She's wonderful. If you met her, she's wonderful, but my mother, you've got to also add, [in] that timeframe, with people in the '50s, there was a lot of prejudice.

TO: Yes, it is not like it is today.

RS: Yes. My mother hated Puerto Ricans; I'm not even ashamed to say it. She hated Japanese, because of the war. Black people all lived in certain streets.

TO: Segregated communities.

RS: You didn't talk to them. Then, the other thing is, if you're a Catholic, there was bigotry in that. You didn't talk to Protestants. It was bad. Finally, I said, "Look, my future wife here, the girl I'm in love with, is a Catholic. She's a religious Catholic, so, we don't have that problem. She's Puerto Rican."

Now, my wife was born on a farm. They didn't have toilet paper. They have no pictures of her when she was a little kid, they didn't have cameras, and she was poorer than anybody you could imagine. They used to take corn, the cobs, after you eat the corn, they would use that for toilet paper. That was their toilet paper. She lived in a little shack, a wooden shack, no electricity. It was all candles and all that. That's how she grew up.

She came to this country when was nine, learned English and all that. She has an attitude about people coming here and putting out and becoming Americans and getting into society, okay, she believes that. When we got married, my mother then met her family, and they all liked each other. [laughter] I went down to Puerto Rico a couple times. [Editor's Note: The phone rings.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RS: [I went to] Puerto Rico, and I got to meet the family, and I did fine. The brothers all, they were not prejudiced in any way, but the concern, at that time, that minorities, let's say minorities for lack of a better word, they had against us was, "What are you doing with my sister?" or my daughter, "What's your intentions?"

TO: "Are you genuinely in love?"

RS: Right, because she was a very beautiful, bright girl. "Are you here because you really like her or are you here because you have other motives?" That's the fear they had. They didn't trust us either. They thought you're always out to abuse them and whatever. Our kids go down there in the summer. We had great times. That's a whole new world, another culture. We enjoy ourselves there. Some of the best beaches in the world, her family lives close to them. Her mother and father also passed away. She's got three brothers. One of them just moved to North Carolina to be by his son. She's got a sister there, so, that there's other stepchildren as well.

SI: That is great. We are glad you hung in there.

RS: Yes, I am, too. [laughter] I learned this late in life, that things happen for a reason. Even though you go through them and things don't work out and you're depressed, things always go in your favor eventually. There's got to be a reason for things happening, yes, and I'll get into that too with Vietnam as well.

SI: I thought it was fascinating that you mentioned that you were in the seminary for two years. I thought that perhaps it was just a school run by the seminary.

RS: No.

SI: You were in the seminary.

RS: Yes, a Franciscan priest I was going to be, yes.

SI: You mentioned that you were just interested. Could you elaborate on that? What were your motivations?

RS: I was in high school, and I thought that's what I wanted to do. I mean, I wanted to serve and do things. I love people, basically. I was a softie. I liked to help people, and I just felt this was something I wanted to do. I admired a lot of the priests that are Franciscan; I admired [them]. It was a thing I just thought that it was something I want to do. What happened was the seminary was a lot different than I thought it was going to [be]. It was kind of tough, the discipline and so on, but I got used to it.

Things were going fine, but then I started to evaluate it, because what they were doing, the Franciscans, my cousin was a case in point. He was a Franciscan. He wanted to be a parish priest, but they make the rules. He was very good, an intelligent guy and all. They got him his advanced degrees in English and all that, so, he became, which I thought was a fantastic job, but he didn't like it, he was a public relations guy to Hollywood. He met with celebrities to try and solicit money for the order and all that. [laughter] He met all these people, but he was a teacher. They made him a teacher. [He] never was in a parish. That's what he really wanted to do.

I was in the same boat. They were saying that I was good in science, as I told you, and I was winning all these science fairs, even there. They would look towards you, "Well, you're going to go to get your advanced degrees in biology, whatever, and teach at one of our universities." I wasn't quite into where I wanted to do what they were going to be telling me to do all the time, and then I started to see some of the hypocrisy. I just said, "I can do something else." It wasn't women or other reasons. I just felt lost, and I said, "I just changed my mind. It's not what I want to spend my life doing. I want to have a little more control over what I do."

SI: I may have the year off, but that was around the time of Vatican II [1964].

RS: Yes.

SI: Did that have any effect on your decision?

RS: No, no. I had left in 1962. Vatican II I believe was implemented in 1965.

SI: I know a lot of Catholics say that really affected their faith.

RS: No, it didn't affect me at all, no. I left before the Vatican II took effect.

SI: All right.

RS: I didn't like especially when they went [away] from the Latin mass. I was in the choir, actually. Actually, they made a record of us, because that was a good choir, but we used to sing all the Latin masses. Even those Masses they had in Africa, in the African language, we used to sing. It was almost jazz beats to it. I enjoyed that. Vatican [II], the only thing that a lot of people didn't like was they switched from the Latin in the liturgy and went the other way, but, as far as the rules and everything, that didn't really affect us. In fact, I kind of agreed and we all did is it's better to start not looking at people who weren't Catholics as all condemned for some reason, because the nuns were always trying to, at that time, telling you that if they're not a Catholic, then there's something wrong with these people. I believe that they did foster some bigotry. I'm not knocking religion; it was just individuals in it.

SI: Also, at that same time, in 1960, that was the time of John F. Kennedy becoming president and his campaign. Do you remember that at all? It was pretty significant for Catholics.

RS: Oh, yes, we watched, in fact, we were allowed, it's the seminary, I was in the seminary in '60, they allowed us to watch the inauguration and everything on TV, because it was a big thing. It was the first Catholic president. That was big. We normally were not permitted to watch TV or use the telephone.

My father actually met Kennedy, because I remember he shook hands with him when he was in Teaneck. My father was working for the Democrats, at the time, and he came by. He was so excited that he met Kennedy. I remember that, shook his hand. At that time, everybody were Democrats. It switched with Nixon; their whole thing turned around. At that time, if you were a Catholic, you were a Democrat.

Kennedy comes in now, a Catholic guy, and all the nuns were just going crazy, because you've got a Catholic president and they were talking about his wife and how religious she was. They kind of put that in your head. Then, I was in the senior year of high school, because I'd dropped out of seminary in my junior year, so, I had a year-and-a-half in another high school, the same year when he was assassinated. I mean, that hit us all, everybody, hard. I was in a math class; the nuns all started crying. I remember that era.

Then, I changed my mind about it later, [laughter] after I got involved in the Vietnam War. I'll tell you later, but I read an awful lot after I got back, all about the history of Vietnam and all about all the politics, just to try to get a feel for what we were actually doing.

SI: At that time, in late 1950s and the early 1960s, Communism in general was viewed as the big threat of the day.

RS: Right.

SI: Do you remember discussions about that?

RS: Well, yes, because we had in school, we had air raid drills. A couple times a week, you had to go out in the hall, put your coat over your head and bend over, and then they'd pray. They would say the "Our Father," or you'd sing a song or something. They all [thought] Communism was bad, and it was evil. We had the [Joseph] McCarthy hearings that I don't remember. I remember seeing part of that. Everybody viewed Communism as a dirty word, especially in our community, in which you have hardworking people who were Catholics. They convinced us. That's part of the reason I went to Vietnam. We had the Cuban Missile Crisis.

My brother was in the Navy at that time, because he'd joined in 1960, so, all this happened, Kennedy's election. He was on the *Enterprise*, which was an aircraft carrier. It was brand new at the time. Kennedy came out to visit the *Enterprise*. My brother was telling the story, everybody working on the ship had to put their blue uniforms on. Kennedy had been in the Navy, obviously. He came on the carrier, and he said to the captain, "Why are these guys all in their dress blue uniforms? Isn't that ridiculous?" [laughter] He said, "Shouldn't they be in their dungarees?" Half an hour later, they're all in dungarees.

In fact, there was a funny story. I was with the 82nd Airborne later, but they tell me Kennedy visited Fort Bragg. They knew he was coming, so, that the general, post commander, had the whole 82nd Airborne go out and pick up all the pinecones laying around. They policed the whole area, everything that was laying on the ground, so, they picked up all the pinecones. Kennedy drove in in his limousine, and he had the post commander with him. He looked, he said, "This is odd, General." He says, "What?" He says, "You've got all these pine trees and there's no pinecones." [laughter] So, he said, "I never saw this before. What's going on?" When he finished his meetings and his tour, he was on his way out, they were all back. They threw them all back. [laughter] At that time, it was ridiculous. Anyway, the Communism [threat] was definitely something they drilled in your head. Bishop [Fulton J.] Sheen was on TV. At the time, during the '40s, [Franklin D.] Roosevelt tried to get him off the air even because of his criticism of FDR and support of Stalin.

SI: Do you mean Father Charles Coughlin?

RS: No, this was Bishop [Fulton J.] Sheen.

SI: Oh.

RS: Yes. He's on TV sometimes.

SI: Okay.

RS: Famous orator. You listen to him, he's timely, even today, but many a time, it's not relevant because he talked about Communism and he blasted it. You listened to this, and so Communism was something that was a dirty word to all of us. It was something that was anti-religion, no God, everything we stood for, it was absolutely no good, and, remember, too, during the '50s, we were very prosperous in this country. Everybody had jobs. The economy was booming. So,

you didn't want to hear about people trying to take over the world and make you give everything you had to somebody else. I hope that answers your question.

SI: I know just from studying the New Brunswick area, we had a lot of Hungarian refugees that came over and they were virulently anti-Communist.

RS: Right, that's true.

SI: Was there anything like that in your area?

RS: Yes, Ukrainians, same thing, yes, the whole Passaic area. My high school, in fact, was full of refugees. We had Czechoslovakians after '68, they moved in. I met them in the bank, later. A lot of them worked with my wife there. A lady working with my wife was throwing Molotov cocktails at Russian T-54s. They despised the Russians, and, in fact, the neighborhood, we had Russians that left Russia. Years ago, people, all the Ukrainians, everybody hated them. So, they had their own little community where everybody was down on them as well. Yes, the Ukrainians [were] big in my area.

SI: Let us talk a little bit about getting into Rutgers. Why did you choose Rutgers?

RS: Okay.

SI: Before that, when did it become obvious that you were going to go to a college?

RS: I wanted to do that all along, in my mind.

SI: Okay.

RS: Yes, I wanted to get a [degree]. The first thing, after the priesthood, I was looking around, I thought, "I want to be something," like I said, "to help," so I was looking at being a medical doctor. I guess that all my time was always anticipating I was going to go to college. I was always in the top of my class, had all A's in most subjects. It was a foregone conclusion that I was going to go to college.

SI: How did you choose Rutgers? What was the process?

RS: Well, you applied to four or five schools. I picked Columbia as the tough one to try. My family didn't have money; my family was poor. My father had to work two jobs most of his life. I picked Rutgers because the in-state tuition was low, and so I applied there. Seton Hall, I applied there, I got into Seton Hall as well. [I] did not get into Columbia. I think, if I remember right, it was just Rutgers and Seton Hall, because they were the only ones that were close by, and I decided I had enough Catholic education. I was starting to look [at things] different, because I said, "It's been just a biased, bigoted [experience]. Let's change." So, I said, "I'm going to go to Rutgers." I got a rude awakening when I got here. [laughter] I said, "Let me try Rutgers," and it was also that the tuition was probably a big factor in my family. It wasn't that bad, and it was close by.

SI: Before we get into Rutgers, I had one question that came to mind. You mentioned your father worked for the Democrats. What did he do? Was he an organizer?

RS: No, nothing big. He was, basically, a worker, hand out stuff and things like that. He would try to be active in helping the local candidates mainly, but because he was involved with them, they'd invited him over to Teaneck to meet Kennedy that time when he came in. My father was the type of guy who would sweep floors when everybody's working. He was a very humble guy. He would hand out brochures, whatever it takes, that type of thing. The irony is my daughter, she's going to Livingston now, she works for the Republicans in Bergen County. She's working next weekend, tomorrow, to hand out election literature.

SI: With the election.

RS: Yes, she's big on that.

SI: Tell us about this rude awakening in coming to Rutgers. What were your first days like at Rutgers?

RS: When I first came here, it was [not] the first time I [had been] away from home, so, I didn't have that problem because I'd been in the seminary, but when I came down here, everything goes. There was some wild stuff, the drinking and everything, marijuana. At that time, we had LSD; that was coming on.

SI: In 1964, they had it.

RS: They started, yes. It was in sugar cubes.

SI: It was pretty wild that early.

RS: Yes, oh, yes. I don't know when it came exactly, but LSD became a thing during my tenure. When I first got here, you look at the yearbook, the Class of '64 still had decent haircuts and all that. I think what hit me was that the teachers didn't care if you went to class. I was hit by the fact, and it's still the same. You go to a lecture, and you have this high-valued professor who has wonderful credentials, talks for one period. Then, you get a graduate student who gives you the tests, talks to you and helps you, and the professor's never available. I said, "This is for birds." I was used to having teachers that cared about the students in the class. I didn't like that whole arrangement. I said, "What am I really learning? I'm learning from the graduate student." That was all something that shocked me.

Then, the other thing is, and my daughter's facing it and you guys face this, I was excellent in biology, had all A's. I mean, this was my thing. So, I go to "Biology 101." I have the hourly, the mid-term; I thought I was in the wrong room. I looked at the test, and I get up to walk out. The proctor says, "Where are you going?" I said, "I am supposed to be in "Biology 101." He said, "Sit down. This is it." It was fifty questions, multiple choice, and more than half were photosynthesis, all the formulas. Why is this worth half the test, just one little aspect of it? So, I

couldn't understand the emphasis. You'd take and study the book and nothing matched when you took a test. I had "Comparative Anatomy." You'd memorize all this stuff and you'd study all this material, and the test had nothing to do with it. Then, you'd find out, talking to students, if you don't study, you get the same grade. It's multiple choice. You just go down, do your best. So, you had a culture, everybody waited until the last minute.

Now, the other thing, when you did papers, you had to do three sheets of paper with a typewriter, carbon paper, make a mistake, you've got to erase it on three pages, [laughter] a terrible time to do it. So, I was kind of frustrated. I didn't think I was learning anything there. I felt that, because of everything I was telling you, the TAs were teaching, and then I also had this thing that nobody really cared whether you learned or not. You're paying the tuition. I felt, "I'm a customer here. You owe me an education. You owe me the best you can do," and it just seemed like, "Take it or leave it. We're going to do what we do, whether you like it or not."

I later switched. I got out of bio-sci. That's because we had a chemistry exam, and the highest grade was a fifteen. I said, "What the hell is this?" Then, they said, "Well, they curve it." I said, "So, if they curve it, zero's a passing score?"

TO: Exactly, nobody is learning anything.

RS: You go up to see the teachers, the professor, you want to see the professor, and they didn't have time or didn't care. So, I go to the finance course and I wrote two bluebooks and he gave me a D. I studied for that. I knew that, on the essay type questions, I was fine. It's the multiple choice killed me. So, I said, "What did I do wrong?" I demanded to see the guy. I said, "No, I have to see you, because I want to know why I didn't get a higher grade than a D." He shows me the bluebook, and I said, "Wait a minute. Where's the other one?" He had misplaced the other bluebook. He didn't know I did two, but he refused to change my grade. So, I went to the head of the department, and they said the guy, "He wrote so many books. He's an expert. We're lucky to have him in the school." I said, "What's that do for me?" [laughter] Well, to answer your question, I was kind of disappointed with Rutgers, the whole educational system.

Then, it got worse, because it was the drugs, the partying here. You had, later on, all the protesting, the anti-war stuff, and then Martin Luther King was shot, so, there was racism on campus. That was a tough time. We had some of the African Americans in our dormitory. I lived at Davidson. It was nice and quiet, because I hated this environment down here. It was too noisy. I stayed at Davidson the four years. I was a preceptor, what you call RAs [residence assistants] today. I had blacks in the dorm, African Americans.

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

SI: Please, continue. You were telling us about turning the flag upside down.

RS: Yes. I jumped to 1968, by the way. It's important. I came down here to College Avenue after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968. All the African Americans were, basically, it was a riot, and they went and they took the American flag off the pole and turned it upside down. We were all shocked and upset that the man was killed. I mean, all of us

were. The whole campus was horrified, we had John Kennedy, so, you said, "What's going on in this country?" We were all upset, but this is a time to be calm, take it easy. Who on Rutgers Campus are you going to blame for Martin Luther King being shot? People found people to blame. Then, what happened was they came in our dorm forcefully, and they were going after all the African Americans who were not participating and telling them, "You're either with us or you're with these white guys." I said, "No, I'm with Martin Luther King," who was peace. He would be the last guy to tell you to go out there and cause all kinds of a ruckus. So, they had a lot of fights between them, but they almost dragged the poor African American guys out of the dorm. As a preceptor, we tried to maintain calm. Most of us, what we did was we just kept out of everybody's way. You didn't even go near these things. That was the first thing. So, it calmed down after a while, but between the Vietnam War and these assassinations, 1968 just didn't exist here. [Editor's Note: When editing his transcript, Mr. Sees noted that Robert Kennedy was assassinated after he left Rutgers.]

SI: When you describe it as a riot, what do you mean?

RS: Okay, when I say a riot all I'm saying is you get a bunch of people together, and as a mob, as a group of people, they have no individual minds. Everybody has a mob mentality. To me, that's a riot, because they can lose control totally, and one guy in that group can throw that whole group into a complete chaos, because individuals cease to exist. That's what I meant, and they were trying to [get] more people to join this group. People were angry, and so that's the tendency, "Okay, I'm mad. What am I going to do? Let's all go together, and let's turn the flag upside down." I don't know, I don't remember if they did damage.

The ROTC protest, they did damage, that time, but I don't know what they did. In any case, the thing that bothered everybody here, you're paying tuition, but people are blocking classrooms, so, people couldn't go to class, just disrupting the whole campus. They have no right to do that, because you're paying for an education. In fact, they canceled the final exams one year it was so bad. [Editor's Note: ROTC is the Reserve Officer Training Corps.]

SI: Had you followed Martin Luther King and the whole civil rights movement up to that point?

RS: Yes, we were. We watched his speeches on TV and read newspapers. We were following him, and you had a change of view. You realized that these people were suffering and they were pushed around, and so you agreed with that. I would say, at that time, most of the student body here was kind of on the liberal side. Even if you're in ROTC and all, it didn't matter. You didn't have what you have today with conservative-liberal. At that time, people recognized that African Americans have a right to have the same rights everybody else had. That didn't exist on this campus, by the way, because we all got along. I mean, we all had friends and we all went together, we partied together. That was not an issue here. Rutgers invited speakers to have lectures and discussion sessions, such as Dick Gregory, which helped.

TO: Did you know anyone that went down to the South to participate in marches or sit-ins?

RS: No, no, I didn't know anybody personally who did that, not to my knowledge, no.

SI: Going back to your first exposure to Rutgers, you said you were in Davidson from the start.

RS: Right, right. I was assigned there originally, and I liked it there and I decided to stay there.

SI: What was it like meeting these different people? You mentioned that there were drug problems and wildness. Was that the people in Davidson or other areas?

RS: Actually, other areas, for the most part. I had a lot of friends in Davidson. I think, for the most part, they were kind of level-headed guys, but there were some. What they would do is we had our commons. They invited these hippie groups up there to do a show. It was outrageous things they would do, but most of that, I would say, was around the campus, like down here on College Avenue, the main campus. Davidson, you had your science students for the most part, engineers, and so on. Actually, you couldn't do that and go through the engineering curriculum, smoking dope and all. I don't know how you could make it through there. [laughter] So, they were kind of level-headed guys.

SI: What was that campus like back then? You had Davidson and the sciences buildings over there, but it was not nearly as built-up as it is today, obviously.

RS: Well, across from Davidson [on what is now Busch Campus] was married student housing. Those were small buildings. The chemistry lab was at the green building, they were there, and the bio building, but the rest, that was all open fields. There was nothing there, none of that student center, none of that was there, none of the athletic center. The engineering building was the only thing in that area. We used to have intramural sports around the fields there, but there was absolutely nothing there. Davidson Road was just a farm. There was farms on either side of it, nothing behind it. It was all woods, as far as you could see. You went down Davidson Road, you crossed over, I guess that's Metlars, and you hit Camp Kilmer [now Livingston Campus], which was old barracks and things like that. There were no Rutgers buildings in there of any kind. We used to go in there at Christmas and cut trees down for the faculty, like in their houses, things like that, but there was absolutely nothing in there. In fact, it was kind of interesting to drive around in the woods.

SI: Was it an isolated campus?

RS: It was very isolated.

SI: You were your own community.

RS: Right. Davidson, especially, was isolated, but the advantage, Davidson, also, you can have a car, as a freshman. There was no problem having a car. Everybody had motor scooters at that time, all the engineers, so, they can get around. That was the most common. I had no problem with the busses, but for us it kept you away from the main campus. To me, it was noisy, especially on weekends.

SI: You were not tied up with the fraternity and football aspects of Rutgers.

RS: I had never that, never.

SI: Did you participate in any kind of social events, like dances or football games?

RS: Yes, I did. I went to Georgian Court, Princeton; I did all that stuff on the weekends. Douglass had dances, so, we did that. Davidson had its own dances. For activities, I was the photographer for the yearbook, so, for '67- '68, I did most of the photos. There were two of us. That took an awful lot of time. Then, I was in the Ledge Social Council. We planned activities for the Ledge. Do you know where that is? I don't know if they renamed it. The Ledge was a little building on the river.

SI: Yes, the SAC.

RS: Yes.

SI: Yes, today, it is the Student Activities Center.

RS: That's it, right. There were a lot of social functions. They had dances on the roof and all. So, we did a lot of those.

SI: Did they have concerts there?

RS: Yes, they had things, small things, yes. I was part of the social planning. I didn't do that very long. I was on the Army's drill team for a few years, which now it's big again.

SI: How did you become involved with the Scarlet Rifles? You were in ROTC from the beginning.

RS: Right. I went in right away, immediately, because I felt that, "This is something I want to do" and I was planning [to do it]. I wanted to go in the military, and I said, "So, I'll go into this." Now, Vietnam wasn't even hot then at all. We didn't have troops there yet, but it just seemed the Army was something I wanted to do, become an officer. It appealed to me. Then, I saw the Scarlet Rifles. They had these activity weeks, and I said, "This looks like something." So, I joined it just to get the discipline and something to do, an activity, and I kind of enjoyed it, because they asked for precision, discipline. I was in one competition. I never got into "A" team competition, and I had a bayonet injury to my hand. I'll do a diversion here. After Vietnam started getting hot, I wanted to do something different, so I tried to get in the Marine Corps program. I was not a match for that at all, and thank God I never went that way. [laughter]

SI: Around what year was that? Was that while you were at Rutgers?

RS: Yes, '66. They had what they called a PLC program. See, the Marines then, at that time, they were very selective, because they didn't need a lot of people in Vietnam. We didn't have a build-up then. So, they were playing a game. They were taking the high school quarterbacks, the big athletes and all that type, but I was going to New York for interviews and all. So, I was in the program, and I was supposed to go to summer camp. I had to drop out of ROTC, but this

major was arrogant, a Marine major. He just rubbed me bad, and he didn't like some of the comments I made.

SI: Like what?

RS: Well, he was talking about do I think the Marine Corps is the greatest branch of the service, that gung ho-type stuff. I said, "Well," I said, "not really, because it's part of the Navy, isn't it?" [laughter] So, he didn't like it, but he told me to go look at the National Defense Reorganization Act of 1948. It does say that the Marines are a separate branch. I think what got him, too, they had a statue of Iwo Jima, and I passed a comment, I said, "I don't know if you saw this, Sir, but it's made in Japan."

SI: Really?

RS: They don't like stuff like that.

TO: Definitely not.

RS: No.

SI: You must have been pretty.

TO: Bold. That was what I was thinking.

RS: [laughter] I said what I always felt like saying, yes. So, they told me that I was not really a good match, that the Army's probably a better match for me. I said, "I think so." I came back here, and I went into see the PMS, professor of military science, to get back in the program. They said, "The Marine Corps didn't want you." He said, "Do you think we want you?" I said, "Yes, sir." [laughter] I just said to them, "All right, your move." So, they took me back in the program. That was just a diversion. The Marines are totally different. I realized that when I went into Vietnam, it would've been a mistake. I was lucky.

SI: From 1964 through the time you left Rutgers, had the situation in Vietnam come up at all, things like Tonkin Gulf?

RS: Oh, yes.

SI: You followed that.

RS: See, my thinking, and it was the thinking of most people at the time, you're talking about '66-'67, was that the Communists were going to take over. The Chinese and the Russians were providing arms to the North. They were sponsoring a revolution in the South to overthrow the government and make it a Communist government, and I firmly believed they would do that. Laos was also in trouble from Communists. What's going to stop them from going into Thailand, Malaysia? So, it looked like a serious threat, and, also, what got me, too, was that the people were enslaved and I felt that you need to do your share to free these people. I'm the type

of guy, you'll see this today, if something bothers me, I'll go fight rather than sit back and complain. I get mad and I'll go, and my daughter, if somebody bothers her, my first inclination is go do something. At that time, that was where I was. If people were being pushed around by the North, then they need help, fine, I'll go help them. That's what I felt, and everybody at the time, in the beginning, everybody supported that war. That's what bothers me, that's the way it works in America, and the same thing with Iraq, everybody supports it and then all of a sudden, it goes the other way, then, less than half do, but that's what happened in Vietnam. In the beginning, everybody said we're doing a noble thing being there. Friends of mine who failed out of Rutgers immediately got drafted and were sent. I just felt I had to do my share; that was it.

SI: Was becoming an officer something you came up with, or did your father suggested it might be a good idea?

RS: No, my father would rather I didn't go at all, right. [laughter] No, he understood, but he'd rather I stayed away from it. He was proud. He was proud I was going to be an officer, but he knew what I was getting into. See, the problem is that, with the older generation, when you find out what war's about and you look at your kid and you say, "The dumb kid don't know. What am I going to do to convince him he shouldn't be doing it?" but then he realizes, "Well, when I was his age, I did the same thing." In a way, he's proud that I'm following what he did, same type of attitude, but, on the other hand, he's said also, "Why do you want to do this?" I know he went through that.

SI: You were a preceptor at Davidson.

RS: Right.

SI: What did that entail back then?

RS: We had a faculty member who was actually in charge of the preceptor program. Davidson had a married faculty member who was actually our boss. We had a head preceptor, of course, for Davidson complex. We had two in a room. I was in Building A. There was two on each side; there's two wings. So, there were two of us in the room. We had to be there at all times, one or the other. If I was going to study at the library, I'd have to make sure he stayed. Somebody had to cover that building. It was two in a room, four in Davidson "A."

We were responsible for discipline. If people had fights with each other, we've got to break it up. We were responsible for maintaining order. If people say, "It's too noisy," we had to keep people quiet. We're supposed to nail people who drink or had drugs, supposed to turn them in. We actually had the authority to tell you to get out of the building for a week. We had the authority to throw you out for a day, two days, whatever. We said, "Go, get out, go find a place, and then come back in a week." We had authority to do that.

Serious discipline cases, we could go right up to the dean, and Dean Howard Crosby was, at the time, they've got the building named after him, he was a fine individual. I got involved with the people over drugs. It started at Douglass, people told me about it, and there was somebody in our dorm, and it turned out it was out of Princeton, because what happened was there was a big

investigation, the FBI. So, Crosby kept me out of it. He knew about it. So, I happened to hit it, find out that this was going on, and he said that they wanted us out of it, because it could have been dangerous. You don't know who the people were that were in at the higher levels, but they busted up a whole marijuana ring, drugs. At that time, it was LSD, and marijuana, for the most part.

The thing I was saying, you get the outsiders. We had a dance on the weekends. Davidson A would have a dance, so, people from all over could come, from Douglass, whatever. They would advertise it. That's when you get your hippies in with the marijuana, and our job was to throw them out. Then, we were supposed to counsel new students if they're having problems. We were there as counselors.

SI: It sounds like you worked closely with Dean Crosby. He has come up a lot in our interviews. He left quite an imprint on the university.

RS: He did, yes. He was a fine gentleman, very intelligent, fair, and you can go in his office, he had a huge office, and feel like you could talk to him. He never acted above you or anything like that. He was a down to earth guy, and he had a lot of power and authority. Then, Mason Gross was our president. He was good. I was here at the classic time.

SI: What did you think of Mason Gross?

RS: He was good, but as president of the university, he didn't have a lot to do in actually running it. He was kind of more of a figurehead. We had Sonny Werblin here, the whole crew, everybody was here then. Mason Gross was accessible.

As I say, Crosby was good. I went on probation one semester, my grades dropped one point, but Crosby allowed me to stay as preceptor. What they did was they told me, "You have to cancel all your activities." They wanted me to cancel everything, but they wanted me to stay as yearbook photographer. I said, "Well, that's not fair. You're going to tell me I can't be a preceptor, but I can stay as a photographer." That was a lot of work. That took a lot of my time. I had to run to every sport event, go take every faculty member's picture. I said, "I'd rather give up the photography job and keep the preceptor if you're going to have us play that game." So, Crosby intervened, and he said no, I could stay as a preceptor. "If they're going to do that, the fair thing is to let you stay as a preceptor," because it was money. So, he let me stay.

SI: How did you get involved with the photography and working with the yearbook? Had you been involved before going to Rutgers?

RS: Yes, high school. It was a hobby of mine, photography. My brother was a naval photographer, too. So, he sent me books. I got interested in it and bought a camera. I had a darkroom at home, and I got really involved. In high school, I did the yearbook there. When I came down here, I went and said it's something I could do, and I turned in pictures. They were very happy with it.

There was a local guy who did the processing. In fact, there was an argument. I took a picture in the 1967 yearbook in the center. It shows Bob Lloyd. It was NIT. The clock shows us one point behind, one second left on the clock, and Bob Lloyd's up in the air and the ball is in the basket. I took that picture, because I was at the NIT in Madison Square Garden and all my friends knew that. I turned the stuff in, and the photographer here, who wasn't there, got credit for it. He did developing. They always said that was his picture. They never gave you credit. All they do at the end of the book, they tell you that these were the photographers, but they never individually credit the pictures. Then, he keeps the negatives, so, that was the hard part. I was proud of that picture.

SI: Yes, I can understand that.

RS: You know who Bob Lloyd was.

SI: Yes.

RS: Valvano, Jim Valvano, he died recently. They were playing Walt Frazier, who was Southern Illinois, was playing, but Bob Lloyd had to get his 2000th point. I am not sure it was the same game. I'm sitting on the court. Every time he was going up to shoot, I'd take a picture, and he would look at me, give me a dirty look. [laughter] I felt terrible because I thought he was blaming me because he missed. He shot, and he missed. [laughter] He got his 2000th point, and he comes over and he said, "Did you get it, did you get it?" I said, "Yes, I got it." [laughter] So, I gave him the picture. Walt Frazier almost stepped on my hand. I mean, it was dangerous. You're on the court, they're running, I'm looking with the camera, he goes for a pass, he steps right on my hand, and he puts his hand on my head to balance himself. He's a big dude. It was exciting. [Editor's Note: At the 1967 NIT Tournament at Madison Square Garden, Southern Illinois University (SIU) defeated Rutgers 79-70 in the semifinal game. Walt Frazier, a junior guard for SIU, earned tournament MVP honors and went on to be drafted fifth overall by the New York Knicks in the 1967 NBA Draft.]

SI: Did you work closely with the basketball team, or was it like sports teams in general?

RS: All sports teams. The only reason I was close with them was because they were in the NIT. It was the first time Rutgers basketball really, they called it the Cinderella team, they weren't expected to get that far.

SI: Was Bob Greacen on that team?

RS: I don't remember. I know Valvano and Lloyd. I would take photographs of football, whatever the sport was, even lacrosse, wrestling. It took a lot of time; that was the problem.

SI: Why did you decide to stay in the Army ROTC as opposed to maybe going into the Air Force ROTC or anything like that? After your second year, did you have a choice?

RS: You had to choose. Well, you could go to advance course, either one, that's true. Junior year is when it counted. The reason I went to the Army is, number one, my father was in it. I

kind of looked at the service, I liked the Army. It just appealed to me. The only other one would have been the Marines, because I liked the idea of being outside and all that. The joke we always had was I could run faster from a snake than I can swim from a shark, that type. So, the Navy didn't appeal to me. My brother was in it, and he was on a ship for two years. They don't do that anymore, but two years on a ship. I said give me a break. [laughter] We talked about it, hurricanes on a ship, they couldn't even get out of their bunks, couldn't eat, because the ship's getting thrown all over the place. I always had this thing for the Army, being outside. Nice days like this, it's perfect. I loved it.

SI: Did you go to any summer camps while you were in the ROTC?

RS: Yes. In 1967, we went to Indiantown Gap, all the Rutgers students did, the ROTC, so, we went there for the six weeks of summer camp. At that time, we had a big class because in junior year, Vietnam started getting hot, so, a lot of people were going into the program just to get out of the possibility of getting drafted and winding up in the infantry, so, they would join the Army ROTC program. Most of the graduates of ROTC, like Rutgers, would go to non-combat arms, normally. So, most of them went in to avoid the draft basically; that was a big thing. Also, you could go to grad school. We had a very large graduating class. What happened is that we all went to Indiantown Gap and we all knew each other, but there were people from all over the country. That was the only place they had it, and at Fort Lewis in Washington, so, the whole East Coast, all the colleges went to Indiantown Gap for summer. It was grueling training.

SI: Yes, I have heard that. They really put the ROTC cadets through rigorous physical training.

RS: Physical abuse, yes. You couldn't be outside unless you ran. They wanted to show you what it was like to be in basic training.

SI: Do you think they were harder on you because you were officer candidates?

RS: Yes. Then, the problem too was that every private that was supporting you would be your boss, so, we had some sadists. [laughter] They'd come in and then have a lot of fun just pushing you around. It was tough training. I trained ROTC cadets later as part of the Reserves. At that time, I have to admit that they were reducing the standards. Probably a lot of us, including myself probably, might not have made it if they had the selection standards of today, because I know that, at that time, they were kind of bending the rules to get more people in. They needed officers bad. OCS was just turning them out in big numbers as well. They were relying quite heavily on ROTC. Little known to people, West Point admissions dropped during the '60s. [Editor's Note: OCS is Officer Candidate School.]

SI: Really?

RS: Yes. A lot of people didn't want to go anywhere near West Point, because that's a six-year obligation. You could be sure of going to Vietnam a couple tours. I understood it dropped. I'm talking about '67-'68, that time frame. The problem was in West Point, this is a fact, they won't tell you this, they looked at the West Point officers as valuable, so, when they came out of West Point, most of them went to Germany, not Vietnam, and then they made captain in Germany.

Then, they'd send them over to Vietnam as a captain, so, they didn't have to go through being platoon leaders and low level. We didn't catch a lot of West Point, very rarely, unless they volunteered, we didn't catch too many unless they were captains on their first tour even. The Vietnam War relied on, the majority of people were ROTC and OCS graduates.

SI: I want to ask a few questions before we move on to the military. In your junior and senior year at Rutgers, had the student body already began to kind of split into anti-war and pro-war?

RS: Yes.

SI: Were there protests at that time?

RS: Yes. I understand Rutgers was the first university in the United States to have a protest against ROTC. They wanted it off the campus, but they basically blockaded the ROTC building, and later it got kind of nasty blockading the buildings here at school. You can't go to class if they're blockading those, I don't know what buildings are over here, Winants Hall, whatever.

SI: Old Queens.

RS: Yes. They were blocking a lot of them. I'd say there were three parts. Some kids, students, were here just to get an education. They didn't care about any of this. You also had very militant people that were hostile towards the Vietnam War and were going to disrupt this campus. Then, you had the people, who were supporting it, in ROTC. They used to harass us when we're going to drill.

What started it was Rutgers had Professor Genovese, one of the history professors, they started teach-ins here, and they were the first to do this. That's what started the ball rolling. They started these anti-war, teach-in protests and lectures and all that. Teach-ins, that's what started things going, I believe, and that just fired up the crowds. More and more of them came to listen to these guys, and then they all went out and they became very militant. I don't care what your point of view is, but militancy I don't accept on either side. [Editor's Note: On April 23, 1965, at a teach-in at Rutgers University's Scott Hall dedicated to discussing U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam, history professor Eugene D. Genovese declared, "I do not fear or regret the impending Viet Cong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it." Amidst the firestorm of controversy that ensued, Rutgers University President Mason W. Gross, with the support of the faculty, resisted public pressure to dismiss Genovese and staunchly defended the principle of academic freedom. (From Thomas Frusciano's *Leadership on the Banks: Rutgers' Presidents*)]

SI: You were here when Professor Genovese made his comments. What was the reaction in that immediate period?

RS: People, again, totally thought he was a God and that he was doing the right thing, as a hero, and other people said, "Throw the bum off the campus," because there were some veterans went and would try to protest in the session and he just pooh-poohed them. He wouldn't even let them talk, so, everybody jumped on that, "Well, why don't you let the veteran talk? They kind of had their rally, but [would] keep everybody who has a different point of view "out of my rally." It

was a hostile environment, no question, and even guys who were in ROTC with me, they quit ROTC, went over and then they got hostile.

Then, they had the SDS Society, and that became the focal point of all the protests. When you said protest on campus, it was SDS. That got messy. I was at a meeting and the professor was all upset because somebody published the names of the students and said, "Guess what. They're all Jewish." They said, "This is typical." Then, it became an anti-Jewish thing. At that time, there was a lot of, I'm telling you the facts at Rutgers, so, there was a lot of ethnic hostility on campus at the same time. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1959, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) became involved in the anti-Vietnam War movement on college campuses.]

SI: Really?

RS: Yes, so, you had the Vietnam protestors, they were looked upon as bunch of, SDS, as a bunch of Jewish people. Now, for right or wrong, that wasn't true, but because somebody published a list of names. Then, the professor was saying, "This is wrong. You shouldn't be picking on an ethnic group." Others said, "Fair game, they're picking on us." This is the kind of dialogue that was going on. It was madness, actually. I didn't want any part of that, but we're going to ROTC drill and they're putting flowers in the rifles and all that and they're just insulting us. It was bad; you had a cancer. Today, you've probably got liberals and conservatives here. I see the *Targum* once in a while and some of the other stuff. Then, it was hostility, really.

SI: My uncle was in the ROTC here four years after you were here, and he said you would come back and you would be covered in egg.

RS: They would throw stuff.

SI: Would they do that type of stuff?

RS: I didn't see that, no. They didn't do any physical damage, but I could see, later on, they would. They were mostly insults and putting flowers in your lapel and stuff like that. I don't recall anybody doing anything dirty like that. They tried to lay across the road and block you and block classrooms.

SI: You had a little vignette that you mentioned about getting your commission from Major General Edward Bautz. Can you tell us about your graduation, getting your commission and that process?

RS: Right. I'll tell you this, when I went, you had to fill out forms, so, I volunteered. My first choice was infantry, that's what I wanted to do, and that happened in summer camp. I was in summer camp, and there was a sergeant I kind of respected, this sergeant major. I always tended towards infantry, but you look and, "Why the hell go over there and get shot at?" Seven days was the average life span. "What am I, crazy?" He said, "It's dangerous and all that, but," he said, "an infantry officer can do anything. You have to be able to do anything. You train in your mind there's nothing you can't do. You have to be that way." He said, "If you live through it, if you go to war as an infantry officer, you live through it and don't get hurt," he says, "you've got

one hell of experience you'll never get anywhere else, okay?" Then, he said, "It's greatest thing in the world when you get through this." I'll explain it later, it's true, because you were in charge of people's lives.

I got back, and as soon as they asked, "How many want to go in the infantry?" few wanted it. What bothered me here is that all of the students, the military students on ROTC scholarships were finance, adjutant general, that's what they all picked. If you were in the top ten percent of Rutgers, that includes all academics and so on, you'd get a choice of where you want to go. You have three choices, and they tried to honor one of the three, but if they couldn't, forget it. So, a lot of people got combat arms, but the most top students picked, except if they were going into helicopters or something, all non-combat stuff like finance, adjutant general.

So, I put down infantry. There was a big protest, because nobody got their choices. Everybody's upset, "I put three choices; I didn't get any of them." So, the colonel brings us all in a room, in one of the lecture halls, and he says, "Okay, let's go through this. How many got their third choice?" Some got their third choice; a few hands. "How many got their second choice?" A few hands go up, not many. Then, he says, "How many didn't get what they chose?" Most of the hands go up. I said, "What about the first choice? You didn't ask that." He said, "Did anybody get their first choice, because none of you are distinguished military graduates." So, I put my hand up. He said, "What branch did you pick?" I said, "Infantry." He said, "Sit down" [in a dismissive manner]. So, I picked infantry.

Then, we went to graduation, to answer your question, in the morning, we had the commissioning ceremony in the gym. What they did there, you went up on stage, they called your name, then, you got your commission. When you got out, and whoever was with you, parents, whoever, pinned the bars on, but they had Air Force fife and drums, bagpipes, entertainment, speeches and all that.

General Bautz was a Rutgers graduate [in the Rutgers College Class of 1941], and he was brought down as a major general. He was brought down to give the speech. He talked about his years at Rutgers and so on, and he gave us the actual swearing in ceremonies, swore us into the military and gave us our commissions. We went up to the stage, and he gave it to you, just like a diploma. He was the one that did that, because he was a Rutgers graduate.

When I was in Vietnam, as I was saying in the letter, he was my commanding general of the 25th Division. I was awarded a Silver Star, and he was the one that signed it and approved it. So, that's just a thing. He was Rutgers graduate here and commissioned me also. They were going to make a big thing out of it, at the time, but unfortunately, we were in Cambodia then and I was a very busy dude. [laughter] So, I couldn't go to the ceremony. I missed that, so, they just handed it to me. They were going to make a big splash out of it, Rutgers graduate and all that, he swore me in the Army and now he's giving me an award. I sometimes regret we did not get the recognition.

Then, later, I worked for Bell Telephone, and his brother worked with me. [laughter] He was a totally different guy. He was like one of us. He says his name is Bautz. I said, "You wouldn't

be related to the general." He says, "Yes, he's my brother." So, I told him I was in the 25th Division. He knew his history. They both went to Rutgers.

SI: I did not know that. I actually interviewed General Bautz a few years ago.

RS: Did you?

SI: I could see what you mean like he is all general.

RS: He was straight-laced.

SI: Yes.

RS: That's why when you see a general, you stand at attention and don't say a word. [laughter]

SI: Even when they are retired, you can kind of tell when someone is a general.

RS: A quick aside.

SI: Sure.

RS: I was at Fort Polk. I was on a hand grenade range as a safety officer. It was really raining hard, and it's just pouring. In the range shack, they have steel helmets for visitors. They're all different ranks, and there was a four star general's helmet. I asked the sergeant on the range, "Have you ever seen anybody wear that?" He said, "No, they never get any four stars out here." So, I took it and I put it on, took my first lieutenant helmet off and put the second one on. I say, "How does it look? Now, you see somebody out here with four stars." We were joking.

All of a sudden, a car pulls up with the general's flags. Without even thinking, I ran out. It was the post commander, a two-star general, General Williamson. I went up, "Lieutenant Sees reporting, Sir." He says, "I should be saluting you, General." I thought, "Oh, my God." [laughter] I said, "Excuse me, Sir," so I took my helmet, put it back on. He laughed. He said, "Don't worry." He told me he was sitting back there and saw the rain, and he wanted to see how us poor guys were doing out there. He said he felt sorry for us. So, he came in and was talking to us. Now, policy is in the military, if you get a visitor from a high level, you had to immediately get on the phone, call your next commander and tell him that General So-and-So was out here, everything he said and what you said. I told him I was wearing a helmet with four stars. [laughter] That way, they're prepared if anything comes down, they said, "What are you talking about?" but that's worse, so, you've got to tell him everything. I just want to get this in, as an aside.

SI: That is a great story. Where did your service take you after leaving Rutgers?

RS: Okay. After Rutgers, I couldn't get a job, because you're ready to go in the military, nobody will hire you. So, I went and I worked in a hobby shop, and that was fun, until October. You can apply when you want to go. West Pointers all went to Infantry Branch School during the

summer. The first I could go was like September, so, I applied as early as possible, so, they put me in October 21, 1968. I reported to Fort Benning something like the 19th, and I had to go through a lot of in-processing.

I was not a good student, I wasn't good here at Rutgers, but there, it was great, because they had class, they tell you what you need to know. I'll give you an example, let's say the M-16 has a range of 460 meters. You get an exam. They say, "An M-16 has a range of A.) Three hundred meters, B.) 460." Rutgers says, "The M-16 butt plate has A.) Five screws, B.) Two screws, C.) Fifteen screws." It has no relation to what's important. That's the way I viewed things. The military gave you tests that measures your knowledge. When I studied for their test, I got all hundreds or nineties, so, I came out in the top ten percent of my class. I made the commandant's list they call it, instead of dean's list, at Fort Benning. I had an overall average of "93.4."

I loved it. It was challenging. You're out and shooting, you don't realize it, but you've got people on line with live bullets. You've got to practice and figure out how to do that without hurting people. We had to start with you walking down the lane, and you had guys holding on your straps, you're firing, so, that everybody's in line. You go out after you practice that a few times, so, you can all stay together. Then, you go out in an open field and do it without instructors until you learn how, and then you go on an actual attack using live bullets. We're out in the woods. It's beautiful weather in October, November. You learn many skills.

Then, what really killed me was December, then it got pretty cold in Georgia. Then, we had to go to this Ranger week, not in Ranger school, Ranger week, we're out in the freezing cold, and I was the coldest I've ever been in my life and never was ever since. You had plastic canteens, and they froze and nobody could thaw them out. We found that out the hard way, when you wanted to make a hot chocolate. I felt like I was going to freeze to death any minute, because the clothes weren't warm enough. You'd lay down and they'd give you like two to three hours sleep a night. You would lay down, move to a position at, let's say, three o'clock in the morning and stay there until five. Then, you would attack as soon as the sun came up, when it got light. While you're laying there waiting for the attack, if you get up, you've got all this frost on your hair and your eyebrows. We had out of 250, we had something like, well, three quarters didn't make it, that was one week's training, either frostbite or pneumonia. It was bad news. We were kind of saying, "Why are we doing this? We're going to Vietnam." [laughter] They said, "Well, you could go to Germany." Well, two of my class went to Germany. The other 220, whatever it was, went to Vietnam.

The training was outstanding. There were more modern training facilities than I've ever, ever seen. We'd be in a class, and they had this whole Infantry School designed by psychiatrists and psychologists and behaviorists and learning experts. They spared no money. You'd be in a class. There was a little keypad with buttons, the instructor would ask, put a question on the screen, and this is the first multi-media education I've ever seen and it was back in the '60s. They would ask you a question. The first question, you pushed A, B or C or D, the choices, or they had true or false, so, you pushed the button, you had instant feedback if you're getting the material or not.

Then, they would show you a movie, and then the movie would break. It would be a battle scene, for example, your company commander gets killed, you're the lieutenant, go through the

whole scenario, and then they'd stop and say, "What's your actions and orders?" You would discuss it, and then they'd play the rest of it, show you what the school solution was. The training was just outstanding. I felt I was well trained to go into anything. I came out high, which was good. In the physical, everyday you're doing PT [physical training], you had hand-to-hand combat or PT, and I really felt this was great. I thought the training was outstanding and put you in great physical condition.

Then, I went from there, I had leave, went to Fort Polk, Louisiana, that was my duty station, because if you're going to Vietnam, they would always give you a troop assignment first, you didn't go right over, so, you'd get used to working with the troops, get some experience. I went down to Fort Polk, and I was a range officer. Basically, a committee group, advanced individual infantry training center, these guys would be taking weapons training. I was in charge, primarily, of the fifty-caliber machine-gun range, but I'd have to sub in other committees, hand grenades, grenade launchers, M-16, LAWs (light anti-tank weapon), pistols, whatever weapon we're talking about, M-60 machine-guns. You got proficient because when we had ammunition left over, you'd shoot the stuff. You got really good at it. If you want to talk about movies, where they have Special Forces and all these guys, snipers and all that, the guys that are the best shots are the ones that worked on ranges. You just shot every day. Anyway, I did that. That's a lot of stories around that stuff. I'd be working with these kids, they're coming in, throwing hand grenades, dangerous stuff, but you had to train them.

We had, which is interesting, we had the Project 100,000 came in. I don't know if you're familiar with that. They took people that were basically learning disabled to see if they could function in the military. We had them come through, and everybody said this was a failure and thought it was ridiculous. I'm there with the fifty-caliber machine-gun, for example, and they go to the class, they teach them, and the kid's trying to put the machine-gun, the belt in, and I go over, you had a lot of patience, that's all it took, and I says, "You take the thing, you turn it around, see the point, the bullet, you point that where you want it to go." We trained them like that. The interesting thing, it turned out, they're having a little break area in the bleachers, and they were arguing, like one guy says, "I'm the smartest one in this company." I says, "Excuse me?" "Sir, I'm the smartest one in this company. I did better on my tests." It turned out that these guys now had people all their own intelligence level. They were able to compete with each other on an equal basis, so, people now were saying, "I'm trying harder and working harder, because I'm smart enough. I was stupid all my life. Now, I'm the smartest one here." It turned out that they had a role; they were successful. So, I did that at Fort Polk.

SI: What was that called?

RS: Project 100,000, I think it was.

SI: That was the name of the project.

RS: Yes, they took 100,000.

SI: Would they put them in limited service roles?

RS: Yes, they did that. The point is we proved it worked. I don't know what the government did with it later and what happened, I don't know, but we saw this, by putting them together and isolating them, you can, in fact, train them, because they got their self-esteem back and everything else, even though they didn't have the ability. You'd tell them, "Okay, point this thing in the direction that you want it to go," and other people would say, "These damned retards, you can't train them." You'd tell the kid, "Put the bullet in, point it to where you want it to go," and he did that. After that, he had no problem doing it. It worked. The argument against the program was it was viewed as putting challenged individuals into harm's way.

Fort Polk was another wake up to me because you had, most of them, everybody there was a Vietnam veteran. What happened was all the guys that came back were assigned there to train the troops, and I've got to say that I have the highest regard for those guys because they came back from Vietnam and they did everything they could possibly could to keep these kids alive. They only had less than a year to go before they got out, but they cared. It wasn't that they'd come back, say, "I'm just going to skate. I'm almost short." They put their hearts and souls into the training. I had some NCOs [non-commissioned officers] that taught me the ropes. They were all mavericks. I'll tell you a few funny stories, if it's okay.

SI: Please.

RS: I was in trouble a lot because I was a kind of down to earth. You worked basically five days, and sometimes I volunteered nights because Fort Polk, there was nothing to do anywhere. Rather than go get drunk or whatever like many did, I volunteered at the night ranges. On Thursdays, you had maintenance day. What started out was at breakfast, I was a single, so, I'd go eat in the mess hall, and everybody in my unit, all the enlisted people, were sitting at tables. You have a separate section for officers with a gate and all that you go through. Well, I couldn't see me sitting there in the morning by myself, so, I used to go join them at the table. Thursdays, I'd have a meeting at the snack bar, and we'd all sit down have coffee and talk.

Well, it got to my commander. I had a commander who was relieved of command twice, he was on his way out. He was a major, not promotable. He was a real bad person. He didn't like me. He was out to get me, and he was using this fraternization thing. This colonel, his father was a two-star general, used to go out and eat with the troops at night. He would always come out to the ranges, night ranges. You eat in the dark. He'd be talking. All the NCOs and myself were all sitting. The joke was his wife must be a real bad cook, that's why he's always out eating with the troops. He sat there, he said, one night, he said, "My father was Major General," the way he said it was, "Major General Bolte. He was in the Italian Campaign." I says, "Well, my father was a staff sergeant, and he was in the Pacific." I just said that, not thinking. That story went to every sergeant on that post, and everybody said that here's this lieutenant who tells the colonel that his father was a staff sergeant after he just said, "My father was a major general." I was king. Right from the post sergeant major all down, they all knew me.

The major tried to nail me for fraternizing. He told me, "I'm giving you an order. You don't do that. You stay away from the troops. You go your way. You're not allowed to that," so on and so forth. He got me because I was at the grenade range another time, I relieved a guy to let him go back, take a rest, and I was standing there in the pit with the guys throwing the grenades.

You're not allowed to do that, because if this guy went to Vietnam, the government got their money out of him. If he gets killed because a kid drops a grenade, so, what. He said, "If you get killed," he said, "we didn't even get our money back from all the training we gave you, so, stay the hell out of the pits." Well, I ignored that, too.

I ignored orders, which was not good. So, he decided he was going to nail me for fraternizing if he saw it. The sergeant major supported me, they all got together and they said, "We're going to end this once and for all." They had a beer party and they asked me if I'd join it. It was [at] a bachelor's or enlisted quarters, so, I went over there and they're having a barbecue and beer. The general, the post commander's coming down the road because his house was just past us. The sergeant went out and flagged him down. He says "General, why don't you have a beer with us?" He says, "Us lowly NCOs would never get a chance."

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

SI: This continues an interview with Robert M. Sees on November 5, 2005 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and ...

TO: … Tom O'Toole.

SI: Please, continue. You were talking about this beer party, when the general came in.

RS: Right, right. So, he stayed about ten, fifteen minutes, got back in his car and left. The sergeant major then goes and tells my major, the commander, that I was fraternizing, I was at a beer party with all the NCOs, so, he wanted to let him know I was there. He was going to nail me, said, "I'm going to get him." He said, "But there's also other officers present as well." He said, "I want a list of all those names." He says, "This is it. I'm going to get him." The first name on the list was the general's. I never heard another word about fraternizing. These guys were good.

Then, another time, he put out a directive, came from the post, his boss, that we were all sloppy and that we were going to have drill. Now, these guys worked from like five-thirty, six o'clock in the morning all the way until eight, nine o'clock at night. Some clown up there decides that we're going to have drill, "Right face, left face," just to keep them in practice. Actually, everybody rebelled, "This is nonsense. Why are these guys doing this? This is Mickey Mouse." I refused to do it. To the commander, I basically said that the people are rebelling. He said, "I don't care. They're going to do it. That's the post directive." This actually got embarrassing.

He then decided he was going to get me again, try again. He says, "I know nobody's doing this." The sergeant major says, "You'll really be singling out the lieutenant?" and he says, "I don't care." He wanted me. He didn't like me. He told him to go over to the mess hall, get me out of breakfast, "I want him back in the office here." Now, the sergeant major sent somebody down to get me.

Now, this is maybe less than a half an hour's time for me to get out of mess and go over to the headquarters. He brings me in his office, and he brings the sergeant major in as a witness. He

said, "I'm going to ask you, 'Did you receive that directive?'" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Are you following that directive? Are you having drill every day?" I said, "Sir, are you planning on disciplinary action?" He says, "Yes." I said, "Well, I'm not going to say anything. I'm not going to answer the question." I said, "If you're planning to do something, then I have a right not to say a word." He says, "Okay, we'll fix this." He told the sergeant major to go get my range staff, fourteen guys, so, he starts bringing them in. I'm sitting there, and the major brings them in. He says, "Sergeant, do you have drill?" "Yes, sir, every day." He says, "What did you do yesterday?" He told him he did this, we did columns, and the next guy came in, exact same story. Everybody told him that they had drill every day, and I'm just sitting there. They're lying. What happened is the sergeant major says, "This is commendable." He told the sergeant major above him, and I wound up getting a commendation, because I was the only lieutenant on the whole post doing it, following the directive. I said, "This is terrible. This is ridiculous." Anyway, the NCOs protected me. They were really good. From that experience, I learned how to work with NCOs. I was not happy that they lied for me.

Finally, you don't know whether you're going to go to Vietnam or not, so, you just hang out. All of a sudden, out of the clear blue, you go to your mailbox, and there's your orders, "Report, August," sometime in June, I got my orders that I had to report to, actually, I think it was Charleston, South Carolina. I was going to go to Panama first for two weeks for training, jungle training, and then over to Vietnam.

I told the NCOs. One of them called my mother to talk to her and said not to worry about him, "He's going to be fine," just to make her feel better. They were all upset, my mother and father. I had to say goodbye, and I had made some really good friends there and loved these guys. I covered for them.

One of the sergeants I had never took leave. He had no family. He had a claymore pellet in his head. In the meantime, it was really hot. Come June, it starts to get hot down in Louisiana, believe me. It would start, the heat, and he would go nuts. You'd have to calm him down; he'd just lose it. He disappeared. He left. We couldn't find him, so, I had to report him because if you don't report somebody AWOL [absent without leave] and they're dead, you're in deep trouble. I had to report it. They said that they're going to court-martial him when he gets back, as soon as they find him. I went through the chain of command, and they were adamant. Then, finally, I went all the way up, and I said, "Look, the man never takes leave." I explained that he has a problem. I said, "Could you just let me take care of him when he gets back? I'll chew his ass out or whatever, but lay off the court-martial," and so on. He came back. He was feeling fine and all that. Then, he found out he was okay, and he was just grateful that I went to bat for him. That's how we protected each other.

SI: Were your NCOs, at that point, regular Army guys?

RS: Correct, yes. He had twenty years in. He was an E-7. Then, there were some E-5s. I also had Mexicans. One of the things that was happening, at that time, if you were a Mexican or a foreigner (on the wall, the Vietnam Memorial, there's fifteen hundred names that are Canadian, they just went and joined), and joined the military and you went and served in Vietnam, you got your citizenship immediately when you came back.

In fact, one of the games was that the draftees would come in, they wouldn't speak English, and you know they do. I'd say, "Okay, fine." I asked, "Is there a bunch of people here who don't speak English?" They said, "*No comprendo*." I said, "Out, go." I put them in a separate room. Specialist Fourth Class Villarreal was Mexican. I brought him in to teach the class in Spanish. [laughter] Then, all of a sudden, they speak English. I had a mixture of people. There was a very diverse group, Chicago, Mexico, Texas and the like. The thing about the military, more even than college, you get people from all over, which is tremendous.

Then, I left Fort Polk, said all my goodbyes, and went home first, took thirty days leave. I drove from Fort Polk, which was on the Texas border, to New Jersey, nonstop, just for gas and food. I didn't stay the nights, just wanted to get home, and I stopped in Atlanta. I figured I'd spend the night, but there was some kind of convention going on. They told me all the hotels were all booked, so, I just went all the way home. I was speeding, probably about eighty-five miles an hour, ninety, through North Carolina, and I pulled into a gas station. A state trooper pulls in behind me and says, "Do you know how fast you were going?" [laughter] I said, "Yes, Sir," and I said, "You want to give me a ticket?" I said, "Give it to me," and I told him, "I'm going," I showed him my stickers. "You're in the military?" "Yes, I'm going home and then going to Vietnam." I says, "So, if you give me a ticket, that's fine." I says, "Just don't delay me." [laughter] He told me, "Have you got a map, a road map?" I said, "Yes." He showed me places that were unsafe, where I might hurt somebody else or places where the police were going to get me. He said, "Don't speed in these areas," and then he wished me good luck. I said, "Fine," and I slowed down because I said, "You know, he's right."

I got home and spent thirty days home, and then I went to Panama for two weeks' jungle training. They found, at the time, people that went to Panama had a better survival rate in Vietnam, for some reason. It was a voluntary school, but then they made it mandatory for all officers and sergeants. They made it mandatory, I think around 1968, they started. We all had to go through that.

SI: What did that course consist of?

RS: Two weeks out in the jungle, and they taught you jungle survival. You had to learn how build hammocks and all that stuff and how to find water, navigate through the jungle. You learned all about the deadly animals, about snakes, the different types, and the different types of plants that could kill you, but it was more practical stuff. They would teach you, for example, if you see something, you're not sure whether to eat it or not, take a little piece, wait a half an hour and if you don't feel any ill effects, then it's okay to eat. So, it wasn't, "Try to identify." We had to eat different things, insects, snakes, we had to eat monkey meat, all that. They had a whole buffet that you had to go down and try different things, just to show you that you can survive.

Then, we had tactical problems. The last one was a survival, escape and evasion. They dropped you off. Panama was a very rugged jungle terrain. The problem was they had streams that were maybe four or five feet wide, they were thirty feet deep, because they're between mountains. You had to wear gloves. You had this what they called black palm, which are very prickly things and would get in your fingers, they'd break off and you'd get infections. Then, we had to

dig these things out with a knife. It was rough, rough terrain. They taught us, basically, how to survive in that jungle.

Then, we went through amphibious assaults in boats, landing craft. We learned how to put in a small boat, with eight guys rowing, and if you get ambushed, you just keep rowing. You don't try to shoot back, because if everybody starts shooting back, the boat don't go anywhere and you're dead. They teach you all this. Then, we had river crossings, and we had to cross the Chagres River like seven different ways, single line, monkey crawl across. You had to go through a single-line bridge, two ropes, go walk across, underneath the water, pull yourself across. They taught you how to, in very strong currents, you had to make a poncho raft and get across, and they showed you that if you swim upstream and just swimming up, you're automatically going across. If you try to go straight across, the current takes you out to sea. That was the type of training we had, water survival, river crossings, rappelling.

Then, the ending was a survival and escape. They drop you off by truck, and you had to make it to a point, which is about four kilometers away on the Atlantic Ocean, through solid jungle and then Special Forces guys were in the woods. If they caught you, they brought you back to the starting point. They dropped us off at four o'clock in the evening, and you had to get there by eight o'clock the next morning in order to pass. What it was they gave you a hundred points per day, and I think there was a possibility of a thousand points. You had to get like eight hundred to get the jungle qualified patch. People were dying just to get a stupid patch, but I did the same thing.

I ruined my feet, because you were in water all the time. My feet, I got immersion foot, and then they'd march you on a solid road, concrete road, for six miles with messed up feet and you're just trying to crawl along. You get there and I finally got there, and the colonel's standing there. He looked at me, "You look like hell," and I said, "Yes, but I made it, didn't I?" I didn't even say, "Sir," and I walked in. I was so mad, and I walked into the barracks.

Everything we had from one training center, boots, uniform, you had to throw away. They were useless. After two weeks, they were no good anymore. The mildew rotted the boots. I went through my second pair of boots, because everything fell off. They were trying to show you how bad the jungle was.

After that experience, a lot of us felt we didn't want to go to Vietnam after that if this is what Vietnam is like. Some of the NCOs had been there, and they said, "No, it depends on where you are. If you're down in the Delta, you may find something like it, but it's not like this. This is the worst," so that the Army gives you the worst case. It got bad, because I went down in quicksand, but everybody's in a hurry to get somewhere and then you go down, "Oh, damn, he's in quicksand." "Oh, the hell with him, leave him there." It was my fault, according to them.

At that training, I saw the worst come out of people. It was a great education, psychologically, because you saw fellow officers were willing leave people behind, because the conditions were so bad. You'd get mad at people, because they would refuse to help you, blaming you because you'd fall off a cliff and were hanging by a tree. One of my friends, during the night, the guy got hurt, and he couldn't walk. He's one of my friends, and I said, "Okay, we're going to have to

carry him, make a litter or something." The other guys on the team said, "No, we'll leave him here, and tomorrow morning we'll just tell people where he is and they can come and get him." I said, "Bullshit, we're not going to leave the guy here," and I said, "You'll never see him again. The jungle's so thick." Well, he was scared, and I said, "No." We agreed I would work with him. "If you want to take him, then you do it." These are officers. I said, "Boy, I wonder what it's going to be like serving with these guys in a war. If I get hit, they're going to run." We're walking, and it was interesting, because all of a sudden I started smelling something strange. The air is cool, fresh, and we're in this big, high elephant grass. It's all wet, because Panama gets eleven feet of rain every year. We're walking through the elephant grass, and all of a sudden I hear something. [Editor's Note: Mr. Sees makes the sound of waves crashing.] I said, "Must be the Atlantic Ocean." We break out, and there's the beach and the Atlantic Ocean. That's great, and there's a guy with a flashlight. You have to find him. Then, he puts you in a landing craft, and they take you back to the base and the course is over with.

The reason I'm talking about all these stories, it was so tough that I really felt, in warfare, how these guys can react [like that]. I mean, I saw movies where everybody's camaraderie and they're brothers and all this. I saw a different side of the military there and I says, "This is scary." I said, "People just wouldn't even help each other. So, I hope that was an aberration." It turned out it was, and I can't explain why that condition was so bad and the Vietnam condition was just the opposite, where everybody really pitched in and helped each other. That was one of the worst experiences I ever had, and I said, "You know, it can either bring out the best in you or the worst in you, I guess," and it might have been just the guys I was with, too.

SI: You also mentioned that at Camp Polk and I would assume in Panama, too, that you were being taught by or having interaction with Vietnam veterans.

RS: Yes.

SI: What were they telling you that you were not quite getting through your training?

RS: The most common advice that everybody gave me was, "Take the book and throw it away, because Vietnam is totally different." Then, some of them said, "If you're lucky, you can go through the whole Vietnam experience and never see a gun fired, never hear a shot fired." Some people said that. Basically, you were hearing two stories, one, depending on where you were, it might not be as bad as you think it's going to be, but there were people who also loved it. They wanted to go back. The best advice was, "Always pay attention."

In Fort Polk especially, we had a lot of people volunteering to go back, rather than stay at Fort Polk. A majority of the people I interfaced with at Fort Polk told me they had it better in Vietnam than they did in Fort Polk. They liked it better. Things were easier and their life was better, but there were some telling me, when I said I was fed up a little bit and I was going to volunteer to go to Vietnam early, and the sergeant told me, "Don't do it. You've got showers here." Everybody had a different opinion, but you had a gamut. You had a gamut.

You had people that loved combat. They loved the experience. You had NCOs that had bars, they owned bars over there and had girls working for them and they were making money on the

side. For the most part, people were telling me, "Throw the book away," if you're talking about tactical stuff, and, "Rely on your NCOs," that was another one, and the people that had been there a long time, "Don't come in there like you know everything, because you don't, and even though you're well trained, they have experience. They've been there, and they're survivors." The best advice was to latch on to people that knew, that had been there awhile, and, theoretically, they know how to survive and get advice from them. That was basically what they were telling us.

The same thing was happening in Panama. When I was having trouble walking on that paved road with immersion foot, one of the NCOs walked with me, and he was older than me and that's why I felt bad. He told me, "All you've got to do is pick it up and put it down, your feet. That's it." He said, "You can go anywhere you want to go. All you've got to do is put one foot in front of the other and just keep going." They told me, "In Vietnam, you're going to feel the same. You're going to be tired." They also said, in all the training we had, the things they emphasized were, "You can go without food for longer than you think. You can be cold or hot and you still survive, and you can get no sleep and still survive." They wanted to show you how miserable you can be and be in all kinds of weather and still make it, that a human being's capable of doing a lot more than you give yourself credit for.

The thing was to push you. They said, "When you're in a battle," and this is what you learned, "it doesn't stop because you're tired. You don't say, 'Let's time out, come back and fight tomorrow,' or 'It's time to eat.' You have to continue on." That's what they try to stress, that you're going to have to do things, but you can in fact do it. It's all in your mind. Believe me, when I get older, now, at my age, I still think I can do things I really shouldn't be trying to do, but you've got it in your mind you can still do it. I hope that answers the question.

SI: It sounds like you felt physically and in terms of education prepared for Vietnam, but what did you anticipate for combat and for leading men in combat? Did you think about that?

RS: Yes. Well, remember, we had a lot of practice in Fort Benning. We took rotated leadership, so, we learned all the platoon tactics, all that, by the book. I felt that I was well prepared, that, "I'm going to have NCOs that all have a lot of experience, fifteen years, so, they're going to help me through this, but I'm still in charge. I've got to remember I'm responsible." Fort Benning told me how to handle all these situations. I'd been in a lot of mock battles, so, I had enough confidence that I would be able to do it.

At the same time, I was apprehensive, because, as you know, I'd never been there, never been in a battle. What's it like when the first bullet fires at you? I've been in that type of terrain; we had mock villages at Fort Benning. All the exercises we were going to do, cordon and search a village, we practiced. I said, "But knowing war, is this going to be the same thing?" I felt I had enough training, if I remember, and I studied the book and I knew how to do all these things, I said, "I should be okay." Then, I felt there's going to be some luck involved, obviously, that I don't get hit. I was confident. I had enough confidence in knowing my ability. If you don't have the confidence, you shouldn't even be on the plane. So, I felt I can do it, but I knew it was going to be some kind of a learning experience, thought I was going to rely on some of the NCOs that had been there.

The thing I was worried most about was that, me, coming over as a second lieutenant, you're brand-new, people worry. They're scared, because here's this guy, "What the hell kind of a nut am I going to get? Is this guy going to kill us all?" The thing is you've got to learn how to take charge, because you're going to have some strong personalities. Now, we didn't have Fort Benning movies and all that in those days, but, if you had all these strong personalities competing with you for control, are they going to override your orders? What are you going to do in these situations? Are you going to shoot people who disobey, put them in jail? So, I was worried about those type of things. I didn't care whether they liked me or not, but I was worried if I was going to be able to assert my authority over them. That was the biggest fear I had, and it turns out to be something totally different.

SI: This is usually associated with the later years, 1971 and 1972, but, eventually, at the platoon level, the traditional officer-enlisted men command structure gave way to almost like a democracy, where everyone debated within the unit on what they should do. Other officers that I have talked with say that that was totally the wrong way to do it, that you were in charge and they should follow your orders. It is not a democracy.

RS: Right, right, no.

SI: Was that the case at that point, or was it still the traditional structure?

RS: No. It depended on where you were. See, it would depend on what unit you were, depends on the leadership. I would not allow that to happen. I saw one of the officers who did that in my own company, we got in a real serious ambush and he lost total control. If you think about it, I've got a bunch of scared people and I'm saying to you, "Okay, what are we going to do, guys? You know, let's talk about it," and you're arguing with me. It hits the fan. How much do you think they're going to listen to me, what I've got to say? If I can lay the law down, say, "I'm in charge here. You guys can make suggestions, but I make the final decisions," then, when you get into a real bad fight, everybody looks to you, "What do we do?" because, then, nobody knows what to do when you get ambushed and you've got that strength and that positive, "I'm in charge" [attitude]. You're much better off, and they appreciate that, too. It works.

The buddy-buddy officer stuff, all those guys failed, in that their units had high casualties or whatever. I actually had punched one of the lieutenants in the company, because he was buddy-buddy, "Oh, screw the commander." They were all these lifers, and he had that attitude. Everybody who was with him overlooked everything they were doing, but when it hit the fan, he was not the guy you looked to. Then, he started yelling, "We're all going to die, we're all going to die," and everybody starts running. I went and I grabbed a hold of him. I punched him. I didn't know he was wounded, I felt bad later, but that's the kind of chaos it was. You've got to have somebody in charge in the military. One guy makes the decision, and I firmly believed that.

SI: Can you tell us about going to Vietnam and being assigned to the 25th Division?

RS: Yes. This is where it gets interesting; my first reactions there were interesting. After Panama, they took the alphabet, so, for one time in my life being in the end of the alphabet helped. The first part of the alphabet, put it right on the plane, I think, to San Francisco, [then] to Vietnam. Since they didn't have another flight, they said, "We only have a flight going to Charleston, so, you guys in the last half of the alphabet, you're flying from Panama to Charleston and we'll give you a week to get to San Francisco and fly commercial, and your government pays." I flew to Charleston and went home, and I spent three days. That was bad, because I'd said goodbye and all and now I'm home again. My mother and father, they didn't want me to leave.

I get three days, and I go back on the plane. I was in coach, and they put me in first class. They were doing that. They were nice to soldiers then. American Airlines said, "You can go in first class. Thank you for your service," all that good stuff. You go to Oakland, and that's where we processed in. Some guys, officers even, friends of mine, disappeared. They met girls downtown, didn't show up for weeks. They didn't care, as long as you went over there. I got there, and they put me on a plane like in a day or so. I spent one night there.

You're on a plane, it's packed, Flying Tiger Airlines. You fly to Alaska, to Anchorage, Alaska, because planes then can't fly across the Pacific. Now, you've got non-stop flights, because I've been doing that. You fly to Anchorage, Alaska, that was one of the routes, and from Anchorage, Alaska, they fly you to Yokota [Air Base], Japan. In both places, you get a cheeseburger in the snack bar, whatever you eat, get back on the plane. Then, you fly to Saigon to Bien Hoa Airport. So, that was the trip.

We're flying over Vietnam. It's nighttime, because planes arrived at night. It was like a storm, and you're looking out the window, "Is that a battle down there? Is all this artillery?" You had no idea, and the plane comes in very steep and lands at Bien Hoa Airport.

They take you out, you do some more processing, and they put you on a bus. The bus has all these wire screen windows, because they said, "People throw hand grenades through the windows of the bus." "This is wonderful." You're scared. You don't know what to expect, but I'm the type of guy, not that I'm scared, but I'm just thinking, "What's going to happen? What's next? Let's take it as it comes." I'm never afraid to go to the dentist or get shots or anything.

They take us into Long Binh, which is the main base, and we go and they issue all your jungle fatigues and all your uniforms, your rifle, you get everything issued, all your field gear, and you wait. You sleep in the barracks there.

Then, you've got to go through this routine. They fluoride your teeth. If you ever saw *The Boys in Company C*, and the guy's yelling they have to brush their teeth, what's that, *Hamburger Hill*, whatever it was where they're brushing their teeth, that was funny, because every veteran went through this. The medic stands, they have to give you fluoride and a toothbrush and you have to brush until he tells you to stop, "Brush the tops, brush this, brush [that]." So, you brushed your teeth. It was a noxious thing, and you can't spit it out or anything until he tells you. You go through all this, and you take a shower. It might be your last shower. Then, you wait. [Editor's Note: The scene featuring soldiers brushing their teeth is from the 1987 film *Hamburger Hill*.]

Then, what they do is they bring you into, officers were a little different, they brought us into a building, and they said, "Okay," and they posted a list, "you're going to be assigned to the 25th Division." It was just at random. Now, some people got on the phone and called people that they knew in the Pentagon or whatever, buddies from West Point, whatever, and they said, "I need to go to the 101st," or whatever. So, they played games. I just said, "I'm here. You've got my body. Put me where you want." They assigned me to the 25th [Infantry] Division. I said, "Okay."

Then, we take a plane, they tell me what time to be at the runway, they take a C-7 Caribou flight to 25th Division Headquarters, which was at Cu Chi. Go to Cu Chi, you go through the same [thing]. They put you in an orientation course. You go in, and everything's, "Aloha," Hawaii. I've never been to Hawaii, but the 25th Division, everything was Hawaii-based. I said, "Well, this is great. I'm from New Jersey." I said, "Aloha," and they had the lei and all that stuff, "Welcome to the 25th Division." It wasn't bad. Cu Chi wasn't bad.

They put us in a barracks, and then we had a two-week course. Well, the thing that was impressive, it rained one day and they canceled it. I'd never, in the military, ever had anything canceled because of rain. They said, "Yes, we don't practice misery here." He says, "Here, we have real misery, so, there's no need to practice." [laughter] What it was was two weeks of, roughly two, maybe a little less, how to call in helicopters, the 25th Division's way of doing things, basically, because you learned the military stuff, well, the 25th Division has its own little quirks, so, they explained how they did things. We had to practice calling in helicopter gunships and artillery, so, we all understood their procedures. While we're doing that, we had to go up to division headquarters, and they sat you down. They went through your records, and they assigned us, "You're going to the 2/22nd Mech." [Editor's Note: 2/22nd Mech is the Second Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment (Mechanized)]. It's a mechanized unit' that sounded good.

My buddy, who was with me for most of the time, he was assigned to another unit in Tay Ninh. They helicoptered us from there to Tay Ninh, both of us. I said, "I'll see you," and he said he'll see me in about a week. His unit was due to come back into Tay [Ninh]. Mine was already there on R&R [rest and relaxation], they have the three day, every six weeks, you get three days in the base camp to clean up and take showers. He said, "I'll see you when mine comes in, and maybe we can get together." I said, "Okay." He was killed his third day with his unit. I went to the unit, and I reported in. Everybody's different; nobody gives a shit. [laughter] Nobody's smiling. I said, "What am I into here?" It's just that people are like dead, just had this what they call the ten-thousand-yard stare soldiers had.

They asked if I wanted the adjutant. I said, "Okay," and he assigned me to the platoon and all that. He said, "But they're not here, so, you have to wait," and I said, "Why?" He said, "They're on their way in. They're going in stand down for three days," and I thought, "Okay." I said, "Well, who's the company commander?" He says, "He's gone. He's relieved. The lieutenant lost his legs and another lieutenant was killed, so, your company don't have any officers right now. You're the only one." [laughter] I said, "Oh, this is just wonderful." I was it. I'm the only officer in the company. They had an XO [executive officer], but the XO in an infantry unit is in

the rear, does all the paperwork. So, they had a temporary captain who flew out with a helicopter and then brought the unit back in.

What happened was they'd gotten into an action. Then, they called in artillery, but they called it on the wrong place, right on their own men. They were off on where they were supposed to be, so, they had a bunch killed. The company commander then decided, the battalion commander told him to move, to attack, he refused to. He said he wants to just get these guys evacuated, he relaxed and he lost two officers. The colonel says, "I want you moving that company now," and he refused to do it, refused the order. The colonel came down, told the troops to move. They did. He relieved the captain, "You're gone," and everybody was upset. I said, "Yes, but nobody backed him." That was the problem. So, he was gone.

They came in and I looked at them; what a ragtag bunch of people. I said, "Who are the NCOs?" The platoon sergeant in my platoon, I didn't like him. He was an "instant." What happened was, when you get drafted, if you show good performance, they send you to NCO School at Fort Benning and you take a six-week course or ten-week course and you come out and you're a sergeant. So, I looked and I said, "What experienced people do we have?" and you don't have any. Everybody, it was their first tour. I said, "This is a little different than I thought it was going to be."

Then, we get an alert that night. What was really funny is that guys were all drunk, because that's when they come back and they were all plastered. I saw them. They had cots set up in a Quonset hut and all that for them to sleep. They're all laying in the mud, laying across the ammo [ammunition] boxes. I never saw anything like this. I said, "What am I into? These guys are just absolutely drunk." All the sergeants were drunk. I went and tried to talk to one. The guy goes [Editor's Note: Mr. Sees imitates drunken mumbling].

They get an alert. They called me for a meeting. They said that the VC [Vietcong] unit was going to attack the temple in Tay Ninh, "You're the only unit nearby. You have to get ready." One of the sergeants from headquarters was going home, came down to help me out, because he said, "The lieutenant doesn't even know where the hell the temple is." So, he came down. He starts waking people up, says, "Get ammo and water and that's it and we're going to be prepared to move out in an hour." I go up to get my operations order and all, and I come back down. Here's all these guys, that half an hour before were all laying there drunk, with their helmets on, flak jackets, like they never even had a drop, and I said, "Whoa, what is this? These guys are good." [laughter] It turned out it was nothing, so, they go back to laying on their ammo box.

Then, the company commander comes in, who was a West Pointer, Captain Richard Goldsmith. His father was a three-star general in World War II. He was from Wyoming. He was strict, by the book, totally military. So, he came in; he decided he's going to clean this unit up. He didn't like the appearance. He was on his second tour of Vietnam, second time. I was scared to death when I first saw him. He was too military and straight and never smiled. He came up. Another sergeant came, and he says, "I'm Sergeant Joseph Such-and-Such." He says, "You're Sergeant Such-and-Such. There's no first names in this unit." To me, he said, "We're going to start going by the book."

Everybody named the vehicles whatever name, girlfriends' names, so, he wanted the military procedure, which is basically if you're Charlie Company, all the vehicles have a C. Their names begin with a C. The trouble was that some of these guys had vehicles, like Snoopy II was famous, the gunner got killed in Snoopy I, and they still had friends and they renamed it Snoopy II in his honor and all this. He wanted that all changed. One guy cocked a fifty-caliber machine-gun. He said, "Okay, get rid of this guy right away." [laughter] I said, "This is crap." I was worried, because they looked like *The Caine Mutiny* [by Herman Wouk]--everybody's falling apart here. The unit didn't look like they knew what the hell they were doing, but they could "stand to" when they had to. ("Stand to" is a military term meaning ready and prepared.)

So, I was not getting any support from the E-6, sergeant, that I had. He was an instant sergeant from Florida, and the guy was, basically, short--his tour was almost over. I'd tell him to do something; it wasn't getting done. I got annoyed. They wouldn't talk to me. "Who the hell's this guy?" that was their attitude. One of the E-5s I had (also an instant NCO), who was a squad leader, from South Carolina, he came over, and he was the only one that even attempted to help me. I said, "Look, I want to talk to you." He says, "Fine." He gave me all his information. He was helping me, telling me about what they do, about the area, answered all the questions. So, I fired the other guy. I made the decision to get rid of him. I told this to Sergeant Cleveland from South Carolina, "You're my new platoon sergeant, because I'm not going to fool around with this guy." He was mad, the other guy, because, "Who the hell am I to come in here?" I said, "I've got to run this unit. I'm in charge. I've got to worry about lives." Then, they all told me, "Oh, you just watch what we do, because you're a new guy. You don't know. Even though you're a lieutenant, you could take the book and shove it up your ass," basically, excuse my language.

SI: That is fine.

RS: "Shove it up your ass, because the book don't apply here." They said to me, "Just let us run it." We go out, and it was three days. You clean all the tracks, get everything ready to go, load up on ammunition, water and all that stuff. We moved out. I'd only been basically with the unit four days or so. The next day, we were all bivouacked in this wooded area. It was notoriously, it was on the Saigon Corridor, on the Cambodian border, near it, between Cu Chi and Cambodia. This area was a big infiltration route, because the Vietnamese could come across from Cambodia and they only had ten kilometers to get to the tunnels and hide. This wooded area was full of them. We lagered, that's the night position, put up a perimeter that night.

The next morning, Sunday, September 7, 1969, I got my orders. Every night, you meet with the company commander, and he tells you what battalion wants you to search in this area. What you did in Vietnam, seven days a week, no break, was to get up at six o'clock in the morning and eat breakfast, on the road by seven, and you walk through these wooded areas for three, four miles and then you check it out. If nothing's there, you get on your vehicles, go back, set up for the night and do the same thing day in and day out, boring until something happens.

Well, for some reason, and people will confirm this with you, we stopped the vehicles, and we used to dismount because in mechanized infantry you're on foot. The vehicles are support. In a cavalry unit (this is not known by many), in a cavalry unit, everybody rides on the vehicles and you ride the whole trip. That's the difference between cav and mechanized infantry. Cavalry has

only like three or four people on a vehicle. We had eleven on each, four vehicles in a platoon. We got off. We went maybe less than two hundred yards, and I just felt, "Something's wrong." I don't know if it was because of my first day, but I just felt there was something wrong, the environment I was in. I said, "Look," I told my new platoon sergeant, I said, "I think something's going to happen," and he's looking at me. He says, "You know, I've got the same feeling." I said, "Let's go back and carry all the ammunition." Everybody was complaining. "Go back to the vehicles, load up everything you could possibly carry," and they were all complaining. I said, "You're not going to need it long. It's going to be gone fast." [laughter] Everybody loaded up on extra ammunition.

We went in two hundred yards. We went another hundred yards, and all of a sudden, all hell broke loose. Well, first, it started with a sniper. We got one shot fired at us from over there in that direction (south). The company commander comes in. He wants us to maneuver and go towards the shot, and I said, "No, wait a minute, let me just follow logic here." I said, "You don't have to be a military genius. If we're going there and the guy's shooting at us from over there," and I said, "the reason he would shoot at us is, there's two reasons, one is to keep us out, the other is to draw us in. If we're going that way and he's over there, what do you think he's trying to do? He's trying to get us to go over there." He said, "We're going to go after the sniper, because we've got an enemy over there. Let's go get him." We turn, we start going over, and then we get hit in the flank just like I figured (from the east).

We wound up in one hell of a fight. It's my first day. They were all dug in in bunkers. What the sniper was doing was maneuvering us, so, we would right in the middle of these things. It was a fiasco. This is when it hit me, all of a sudden, that it's complete chaos. Now, I can't stop the thing and tell the umpire. You've got bullets flying while you're trying to maneuver people, and people are down. In the training, I could say, "Get up and move," they'd get up and move. They're not going to get shot, but here, now, you've got people that can't get up. They're pinned down and so on. [I thought], "This is not what you taught me at Fort Benning." [laughter] The thing that hit me, more than anything else, is there's people that their bullets are flying at me. Then, I get a RPG [rocket-propelled grenade], came past, burned my arm and hit behind me, and it knocked five guys out. They're all hurt. I start yelling, "Medic," and the guy's pulling on my pants' leg. I turn around, and he says, "I'm the medic." [laughter] He was hurt.

In the initial thing, out of twenty-five I had with me, I lost eleven. They're wounded, nobody serious, and I said, "This is not good." As I was going to say, all of a sudden, the reality is somebody is actually shooting at me. I said, "What the hell did I do to these people? They're actually trying to kill me. These guys are actually taking shots." The reality just hit me, all of a sudden, that somebody's trying to kill me. To me, it was getting personal, and it was not impersonal anymore. In training, yes, everybody's in green uniforms, but, to me, it felt that they were all after me. I said, "I'm sitting here and I'm getting shot at by people I don't even know," and that hit me for a second.

Then, I pulled everybody back a little bit. We had to regroup here. The company commander said, "All right, I want you to move your platoon." I said, "What platoon?" That was another thing that bothered us. You could have forty-three in the platoon or you can have ten, and they

always look at a map or whatever, they say a platoon, they think forty-three people. I told him, "I lost half of them," wounded. We got them all out.

Then, the other problem, you have to find people. See, you didn't have to do that in training, because everybody's playing a game. Now, I'm looking, "Where the hell is the other thirteen guys?" Some of them were back with the wounded and said, "We're securing the wounded." It was crap. I said, "Get up there." The battle went all day, and it went back and forth. My vehicle, everything I owned was in it, the extra uniforms and all that was hit by a RPG.

What happened was one of my squad leaders was a real good guy. He was throwing hand grenades. He had a whole box and he's just standing there, throwing hand grenades into the woods. One of them hit a tree and came back and took out two of my own guys. He knew it and he looked at me and I saw it, but I never told anybody that. Those guys didn't know that. They thought they got hit with a VC RPG or something, but I didn't see any purpose in telling them that his hand grenade bounced back. Those things happen.

He said that there's a bunker in there, and he couldn't get it. The guy hops in my APC [armored personnel carrier], guns it, drives it right up on top of the bunker. Then, I hear him yell, "Oh, shit," because it didn't cave in. He was trying to cave it in. Then, all of a sudden, that APC blew up. He comes flying out. He was hurt. I picked him up and pulled him back. We're leaving. It's on fire, and it's [got] a fifty-caliber machine-gun sitting on top of it. I was worried [that] if we're pulling back, they're going to turn that thing around. Even though it's burning, they might turn it around and start shooting at us.

I was firing, but they were coming out of the woods running towards us. So, I was shooting. You don't know if you hit anybody. You just don't know. You're just shooting. It's just a scary situation, so, everybody just shoots. So, they were running towards us, and I was pulling back, shooting. I called the Phantoms [U.S. F-4 fighter-bombers], they finally got air support, and I told the FAC [forward air controller], because you have an intermediary, I said, "You see that APC?" I said, "Knock it out." I said, "I want it destroyed." The Phantom comes in, and, all of a sudden, "Zoom," that thing blows up. We got out. We broke contact. There's nothing more we can do, and it was just too strong and well dug in a force.

As we pulled back and we're bringing in air strikes and all that, I said, "They're here." I could see the grass moving. We were in an open field, and the grass was moving. I said, "They're probably coming in close." I heard that anyway, they try to get in close to you, so, that way the air strikes don't affect them. I told the guys to fire the two fifties [fifty-caliber machine-guns] on the side, to fire across each other, and I wanted the helicopter gunships to come in and strafe that whole area in a triangle.

One of the guys I had was from California, a Mexican, wouldn't listen to anybody, never obeyed orders. He starts firing. I went up, and I hit him with my helmet I was so mad at him. It turned out he was a good guy, but I'll get his story. He was wounded in the leg, and he refused to get evacuated. Anytime he got wounded, he wouldn't go. I was wondering, that was kind of odd, but, anyway, I hit him with my helmet.

We started moving a little bit, and, all of a sudden, the VC pops up in the grass and puts his hands up. I run between him and my guys, because I did not want him hurt, "Just calm down. We've got a prisoner." The procedure is you cover him, make him strip, take all his clothes off, turn around. We took the prisoner. We pulled out, and it was getting dark. We had to break off, and the ARVN, [a] South Vietnamese Ranger unit, came in, and they went in to check the area after us. Then, we pulled out, and then I got a little bit unglued. [Editor's Note: The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was the regular army of South Vietnam.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RS: What happened was I was not happy with the performance. We went back to the lager sight, and we spent the night. After a battle, everybody's just done. You're tired and everything, beat up, because it lasted almost ten hours. We go and sit in the lager site, and then the next day, we had to recuperate the next day. We had some time off. I got everybody together, and I said, "Look, we're going to discuss this." I got mad. I said, "I come in here and everybody had the attitude that, 'You're a second lieutenant trained at Fort Benning, you come in here, what the hell do you know? The book don't apply here.'" I said, "Let me tell you something. You guys didn't do a good job. If you've been here eight months, then you've got eight months of bad habits that you learned. Don't tell me you know something I don't." I said, "We're going to go back to the book." I said, "I'll tell you what. If you know the book and you can answer all the questions I ask you about the book, then you can modify it, but if you don't know the book in the first place, don't tell me to throw it away." I'm mad. No one except the captain had more than a year in the Army.

Then, I put them through training, started right then and there. Every time we had a chance, I'd train them how we were going to deploy and who's going to watch out for who and what we're going to do when we get hit. When we're in the jungle in a column formation, this unit swings out this way, the point man, and I got all the organization and that's what we're going to do. We're going to reorganize and it's not just going to be a mob out there walking. I clamped down on them. I said, "This is the way it's going to be." They had respect, because I was running around getting shot at, so, they kind of respected I was already in a battle. They were fine with that.

I don't want to go through every battle, all these war stories, but I was in several battles after that. We'd rotate as a mech unit. When we were checking the woods out, you do that for a couple of weeks. Then, you go back, and you may go in the rubber plantations. We swept the roads of mines, and then we'd just sit there all day and let the trucks pass through, all the supply trucks. That was a break really. Then, another one you'd get, we'd go out and check villages out. You'd get different assignments. The worst one was in the jungle, but I liked it because there were no people around. See, villages were a problem, because if you get shot at, you don't want to shoot into a village and hurt somebody. I was very careful. I can sit here and tell you I never hurt a civilian the entire time I was over there.

Most of the units had AK-47s with them. Now, we never used them, because I would not allow anybody to have an AK-47 because in the jungle an AK-47 has a unique sound to it. If somebody's shooting that thing and they're off in a certain direction, they're going to get shot by

Americans, because you're going to hear that gun and that's where you're going to shoot. So, then, nobody carried them. That's a lot of nonsense, if you see that in the movies. If you did that, you didn't know what you were doing. They did have AK-47s, in case they shot somebody that didn't have one. They'd make sure they had one. So, that, we stopped. I said, "We're not going to do this, because if we're going to shoot somebody that don't have a gun, we're going to go through the investigation, find out what happened, because accidents happen out here.

We had curfews. So, six o'clock, anybody's out there, you could shoot. That was the rules. I had a different attitude, "We're in a country and we're trying to get these people to like us and to help us and we're trying to help them. Why the hell would we be shooting people at six o'clock that are innocent?" but they said, "Yes, but they're told not to be out there."

We had one instance, I was in the rubber plantation, they said, "We're going to set up an ambush." I said, "Okay," and we set up an ambush in the rubber plantation. The last time anybody set up an ambush in that rubber plantation was way before my time. We go into the rubber plantation.

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

RS: I was in the rubber plantation. We had an ambush set up. It's five o'clock in the morning. Now, six o'clock to six o'clock is curfew. Nobody's allowed out. In an ambush, people in the middle of the night, you shoot, that's it, because you're taking a risk if you don't.

Five o'clock in the morning, I hear an oxcart coming in the dark, and, through the plantation, you can make out a few people with it. Normally, through the rubber plantation, the VC would move supplies and troops. That was a tip off. We had to call back and report that we had movement. I was told to blow the ambush, but I said, "It's five o'clock in the morning. It's potentially possible that civilians are coming out to work, because it's going to be light probably in less than an hour, so, maybe it's civilians." I always worried that I was going to do something I was going to regret the rest of my life. I had that fear. I didn't want to shoot somebody and then instead have to live with it. I said, "I'm not going to blow the bush until they get closer," and they said, "No, don't take the risk." People sit back in their headquarters telling you about your risk to your men and all that, "You can't risk their lives. There might be enemy that have a machine-gun." I said, "Okay, fine."

Then, I cut off the radio communication, and I was talking to the guy. "Look," I said, "this could be dangerous. It could be the enemy, but it also could be civilians because nobody's been here in a while. They wouldn't suspect an ambush and it could be just people not obeying the curfew." I took my platoon sergeant, I said, "Look, we're going to go," and I said, "If something happens, the rest of you guys just shoot. Don't worry about us." We went, and I took the platoon sergeant and I had an interpreter. I had two usually. The three of us went. We went across, away from the ambush, and got behind a tree. As the oxcart came up, we turned on flashlights. The M-16's pointed at little kids and an old man, just what I thought. They were coming out to work. There was three little kids, sitting on the oxcart.

We checked their identification, and they checked out. I told the interpreter to just let them have it, tell them they shouldn't be out here and they could have been killed, and then I pointed to the guys who were over here with machine-guns, ready to shoot. "You tell them, 'Don't ever do that again.'" A little thing like that, the military says, "Shoot," but you can spend the rest of life regretting something like that, you see a bunch of little kids dead. To me, I always followed that philosophy.

What happened in Vietnam, you got orders all the time; people just decided whether they wanted to obey them or not, the reason being, it was different, Vietnam, from other wars. You're out there in a small unit, and somebody's back in the tent in the base camp. They don't know what's going on; they don't see what you see. You justified, in your mind, "I'm going to do what I think is best for this unit and for this war. I'll fight it the way I think." I got in a contest, I almost got court-martialed later for it. I'll get into that. Then, they started this defoliation program.

SI: Agent Orange.

RS: They decided they're going to bring bulldozers in, and they cut down this whole wooded area. They were supposed to be rotating companies, and we had to secure these bulldozers. Well, the NVA/VC put out the word that there's no way that we're going to cut these woods down without paying the price. They said, "These woods are valuable for resupply and for base camps" and tunnels and that they've got to do everything possible to stop us. We had intelligence, found documents, saying, in effect, that they've got to stop us. We went in there for a whole week, and we secured these things. They're telling us how to do it, the commanders. My thinking was that we'd set up the hard points and let the bulldozer go between us, but they want us to ride around with the bulldozers.

Long story, we were getting ambushed all the time. They were shooting at us from the bushes and the woods. It got to be a mess. People were getting hit, but we managed to do it and we just struggled through it. I lost about twenty pounds during that whole time. We did it a week, and we were so happy to get out of there.

The next unit comes in, and they started getting heavy casualties. They pulled them out. They said, "Okay, you're going back in." I said, "That's not fair. We're supposed to rotate between three units." They said, "No." We didn't have serious casualties, so, they sent us back. They said, "You guys are doing something right." I said, "I'll go back but on the condition that we plan our own operations."

Then, I found out they had an artillery unit. The night before they were going to cut the woods down, the artillery would fire at the area. If they thought you were going to be here tomorrow, the artillery was shooting in preparation. Then, the next morning, they'd fire again, and the unit would come in and start cutting. I said, "Fine." I said, "Now, you're going to fire the artillery over there." "Yes, but you're supposed to be over here today." I said, "Exactly." [laughter] He said, "Well, we're going to waste ammunition." I said, "Yes, but we're not going to have casualties, either." They fired the artillery over there; we went over here.

The North Vietnamese, Viet Cong, their troops, had to then move to us. They were not dug in now, because they didn't know we were coming. We went to a different place, so, they all had to walk. The helicopter spotted a whole unit moving in, and then another one was coming in from the other side. My company commander was up in the helicopter. He spotted them, but I'd say he was gung ho. He's hovering over them, said, "They're right here. Get them, get them." He said, "They're only like a hundred meters from you." I said, "Get the hell out of here, will you?" I said, "I understand what you're saying. Get out of there." So, the helicopter's getting all these bullets flying at it. [laughter] This helicopter got hit. The helicopter's smoking, a little Loach [Hughes OH-6 Cayuse], and he says, "You're in command." He says, "I have to go back. The helicopter's damaged." I said, "Fine." The colonel comes, and he said, "What's the situation?" because he knew the helicopter got shot down. I said, "Well, I've got enemy moving in from the northeast and the east," and I said, "and I'm in the west." He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, we're going to eat lunch. Then, we'll deal with them." [laughter] He said, "You're going to what?" I said, "We're going to eat lunch, and then we're going to deal with them." I was just being, that's the way I was. We're eating C rations and drinking Cokes. We had them with the APCs [armored personnel carriers].

Anyway, we had the enemy contained. We had a perimeter set up, and we were bringing in air strikes and gunships and all that. We knocked the hell out of them. The [reason] why I was okay, I said, "I'm not stopping the bulldozers." I said, "We're not stopping them. I'm keeping this mission going." He was so impressed by that, and then he told me that he wanted to see me the next day. I didn't know whether I was in trouble or what.

The guys in Vietnam, you see all the movies; everybody is sloppy and dirty. I said, "We're going to do something different." We were going into the base camp. They were going to have a formation. I said, "Okay, what we're going to do is we're going to wash everything up." I'm going to tell you, something happened before that, so, I said, "We're going to wash all the vehicles." We went to the river, cleaned everything, spotless. Everybody did the best they could to clean themselves, but you couldn't because you were all full of dirt. The fatigues were different. You needed to put them in the laundry, but we polished the vehicles, everything, as best we could do. We drive into the base camp.

We didn't know how to do inspection arms on our M-16. All this marching around we did here, Scarlet Rifles, you used Springfields. At Fort Benning, we used M-14s. So, I did not know how to do it with the M-16. The troops forgot. I had no idea, so we made it up. I said, "We're going to do this for inspection." We pull our tracks up. The colonel's having his formation. We're a little late. We pulled the vehicles all up. Everybody, I formed them up outside their vehicle, and I gave them a, "Right face." Then, we marched into formation, and I gave them an inspection, arms, present arms, all that military stuff. That colonel was beaming from ear to ear. He promoted me to first lieutenant. He said it was a little early, but he said he was so impressed by what we did. That operation was totally successful. We cut everything we were supposed to, but we went through hell. I just gave you the ending of it. The colonel tried to convince me to go regular Army.

Before that, we had word that the VC were going to be moving in a force of 250. We set an ambush down by the river, because they were going to come along the river and blow the main

supply road bridge. That's what intelligence told us. We set the [ambush]. The guys were scared and they blew the ambush, because they believed they saw the enemy. They came back, and we had to go back. I said, "You never go back if there's an ambush where there's 250 of them." I went with volunteers, and we went back down there. The next day, our engineers blew the bridge to build another one. Then, we're in there with the plows. They're all done for the day and going out.

Meanwhile, some guy comes out of the woods with a stick and a piece of paper on it, waving it up in the air, a VC, black uniform, and he collapsed. We go over there, and the guy's wounded. I give him my water. I put a cigarette in his mouth, and he spit it at me. My guys said, "Shoot him." I said, "Sorry, buddy." I said, "Probably, he doesn't smoke. You ever think of that?" We had the medics treat him, but then I got worried, because if we put him in the vehicle, they would go after him. They would have suicide attacks to kill him, because he knows where they are and all that intelligence. I wanted a helicopter to come in and get him out of there and make it obvious that they were taking him out. I said if I have to put him in my track and drive out of here, down these trails in the woods, I said, "We're dead meat." They finally agreed to bring the helicopter in, and they took him out.

Then, we throw a track, because tracked vehicles throw tracks off. That was the biggest problem with armor in the woods if you throw the track off. He threw the track off. We had to fix it to get the damned thing back on it, and that took about twenty minutes. On the way out, it got dark. I was on the company commander's track, because I took his while he was in base camp. All of a sudden, we had them fire some illumination from the base, parachute flares, and I see the enemy all behind us following us. I said, "This is great," and we're just two vehicles. We didn't shoot, because I don't want to mess with these guys, [laughter] as long as they ain't shooting at me. We're driving, and they were running out of illumination rounds. They told me, "Well, we've only got about ten left," and I said, "Well, just keep shooting them." They had to get permission, because they were down to nothing. Then, of course, they got hell, because, "Why didn't you have enough?" We were going as best we could. We then used hand flares or star clusters.

Long story short, we got back to the base. They were following us in, so, they could hopefully get into our base. Then, they came in. They hit the base, and the base just opened fire. The artillery and everything were ready for them. I said, "It seems where the luck is involved. They could have jumped us and knocked out two vehicles, but they'd rather go after the base and follow us." I was surprised. I knew they saw us, but that kind of thing you run into. It's scary. It's dark. We always used to say, "When we were kids, we always heard about the boogieman," and we said, "Then, we found out it wasn't true." I said, "Now, we're adults, we find it is true. There is a boogieman out there." [laughter] I said, "Isn't that a bummer?"

Then, we had another time we threw a track. Every time you found bombs or things that didn't explode, you had to blow them up. It was a 750-pound bomb, which is a big one. It was a dud and didn't go off. You had to pack it with C-4 and light the fuse. We'd usually give it a half-hour fuse and run. The track, we get about a half a mile, and the thing throws a track. We're still within the range. I said, "Oh, my." [laughter] I told them, "You guys, you've got fifteen minutes to get the track on." It was a half an hour job. You're under such tension, and they're doing

everything. We put wood under it to try and drive it on, rather than break the track. That would take longer. Finally, they got the thing on. We went, and it got down to, I figured we had about two minutes left. I tell everybody, "Get off." We got as far as we could, got off and laid down and the thing blows. You get this type of stuff you think only happened in the movies.

Then, we had the worst case. It was in November, November 25th. It was Thanksgiving time. We'd been on an operation with the whole company. We had a new captain. We found a 750-pound bomb, and we didn't have any explosives to blow it with. We were deep in the woods, in the jungle. We had no vehicles or anything. We had to leave them behind, because the terrain was just as rough as you can get. We left the vehicles back. Then, we marched through, and the guys were cutting, with a machete, cutting notches on the trees. The company commander [asked], "What are you doing that for?" He said, "We're not coming back the same way." I said, "Yes, but they don't know that." See, I tried to do things that might throw them off, so, hopefully, they think we're coming back this way. I said, "They're in here." I could tell.

We're going through, and we see the little snares for rats. They have the twine, what do you call it, branches and everything on the ground. You see a little hole, and there's a thing in there, a little snare. You see these signs. One of the things you learned was to look for signs of the VC. I had Indians, Sioux Indians, and Cherokee, they didn't know how to do that. We taught them. You learned that if you see footprints, for example, you looked to see if there's water in them if it rained the night before. If they're dry and it rained the night before and you see no water in them, then you know that they came in between the rain stopping and now. If you see footprints, you take a line, draw it at the heel; at eighteen inches, you draw another one. A man would walk one step in an eighteen-inch range, so, you can count how many people went through there. That's the tricks you used. We looked for leaves that are turned over.

We saw all these signs, footprints, everything, and they made no attempt to attack us. I said, "There's a big base in here. It has to be." I was doing an avoidal. See, the commander says, "You go on this azimuth, fifty degrees." That became a joke, the fifty-degree azimuth, and I refused to do it. I kept deviating. As soon as I saw signs, I went the other way. It was getting late, and I said, "I don't want to run into a base camp at this time." We leave the bomb. We couldn't do anything with it. I didn't worry about it, because it was up against a tree. I said, "If it was a dud, it would have landed flat." I said, "They probably got everything they needed out of it anyway, powder and all that." We finally got out of there, and everybody was swearing at me because I went all around. I got lost. We finally broke out at a road, and we had to walk two miles back to our base at night.

Then, the captain reported the bomb, and the colonel got ticked off, said, "I want you back in there tomorrow to blow that bomb." Then, we had to find it again. Next day, we had other operations. Then, the geniuses say, "We're going to split the force. Half the company goes out with the South Vietnamese unit," they were all scheduled, "the other half goes and blows the bomb." You're half your strength right off the bat in an area I knew was crawling with North Vietnamese. We go in there, and we find the bomb. I don't know how we did it. We were able to find it. We blew the sucker.

We're walking. I said, "This is not right. There's something wrong here." I was always on point in my platoon. I tell the company commander, we had an argument, and everybody sat down in the woods, and I'm telling him, "We've got to change because we're walking right into something. Look at these footprints. There's animal snares." I said, "We've got to go another way." He said, "No, yesterday you got us lost." We were in hurry. We wanted to get out of there. You don't sacrifice security for speed. That's a military axiom. Well, he insisted. I said, "Okay, if you're to insist we follow this trail through here, then I'm going to insist that my platoon is not on point." He said, "Fine." I regret this to this day. We pulled back and let the second platoon come up and walk point, and we didn't even get five minutes and all hell broke loose. They walked right smack into a big base camp. They had us with machine-guns, .51 caliber light machine guns, and just chewed us up. All the radios got hit. We had M-60 machine-guns, one after another, knocked them out. I said, "This is it." I never saw anything like this. [laughter] The firepower they had was incredible. I'm laying there; everything slows down in a battle like that. To me, it was like slow motion.

All of a sudden, I see the command group, my company commander's radio's antennas, and I see all this white stuff. Contrary to the movies, you don't see flames and all that when things explode. So, you see this white stuff, and all of a sudden, boom, and they go above flying and I see radios going. I said, "Oh, my God." He was wounded but not bad. The radios were knocked out. Luckily, what happened was the platoon leader behind me was new, so, he had an M-60 machine-gun. As the last guy in line, which you never do. You always move them up. By mistake, he put him at the end. The guy was a good gunner, and he complained, "I shouldn't be at the rear." The North Vietnamese, they tried to encircle us. They were moving around in the woods, and he saw them. He opened up on them with his machine-gun. He got knocked out; they hit him right away with a RPG. My theory was that they pulled back. They figured that he can't be the last guy. They were trying to flank us, but they figured they ran up against a machine-gun, that means we had more people somewhere.

The hardest decision that you have to make, this is the type of thing you find in war, the second platoon, that was the platoon that I told you I hit the platoon leader because he was yelling, "We're all going to die," that was the incident, so, he was up there and he was getting clobbered. His men were starting to crawl back. My guys were in line now, so, I had to order them, "Open fire." You don't fire until people tell you, so, I gave them the order to fire. I'm sitting here. All hell broke loose up there. I'm hearing this shooting's coming from in front of us. Now, you can sit there and lay there and be nice and quiet and let your buddies get the hell beat out of them or you can join the fight. That's a tough decision, to sit there and then say, "I'm going to start shooting," knowing that that machine-gun that's firing up there is going to turn on me next. That's exactly what happened. We were getting shot up. The only radio that worked was mine, but it had a short range antenna.

Then, a rifle grenade hits a tree, bounces, hits me, causing a bruise. It didn't go off. I had another one that landed in front of me, and it stuck in the ground. It didn't go off. I'm laying there; bullets are flying, hitting the trees. I'm seeing little pieces of wood flying. I'm trying to give you a feel for the battle. Two machine-guns are working me over. All of a sudden, I see this thing land there, and I'm waiting for it to go off right in my face and it doesn't.

They talk about how you feel. Then, the machine-guns came; things are hitting my helmet. I felt I got hit; I must have. I didn't know what it was like to die, to get shot. I said, "I just got hit in the head with machine-gun bullets. I must be dead." I turned around, and my platoon sergeant was laying on the ground behind me. I looked at him, "Sergeant Cleveland." He looks at me. I said, "Did you hear me? Do you hear me talking to you?" He says, "Yes, what's your problem?" [laughter] I said, "Nothing, forget it." I said, "I guess I'm not dead." What happened was the machine-gun was hitting rocks, and the rocks were hitting me. You just had no idea what it's like to be dead.

We were stuck, and they had us. The first time it was really eerie, they were all yelling commands and all that, and we never heard before. They always were hidden, silent. You hear them all running around, and they're yelling to each other. I said, "They're going to overrun us." I had one of my guys go back, and I said, "Best you can, find a hole to get out of here." He was circling around. He was punching. He found a place to get out, because we were in a U-shaped ambush. They did not close it. Luckily, we weren't encircled. He found a way out. I said, "Okay, we're going to get all the wounded." I think we had forty-two people, and there was like twenty-nine wounded and two dead already.

I tried to go up to get the men who were killed. They told me the two guys that were hit in the second platoon, they were not accounted for. We had everybody accounted for but those two. The one sergeant told me that they were both dead. I said, "Are you sure?" He said, "Yes." I tried to go up and they raked the place with machine-guns, so, I couldn't get there. The medics were all hit except one. Most of the sergeants were hit. Every officer was hit except me and the Artillery FO [forward observer]. I lost my hearing and I got some cuts and bruises, which got me a purple heart later. I was not really seriously hurt.

We found a hole, and I told them, "Get all the wounded together." The company commander was still functioning, still giving orders, but I had to organize the withdrawal. He was kind of out of it, scared. I found a hole, and I said, "Okay, we're going to get all the wounded out." I told him what we were doing. What we did was we teamed up. The guy that got shot in the foot would team up with a guy that got hit in the other foot, tried to get them to walk together, good foot to bad foot. Anybody you had to carry was a problem. There were people saying, "Let's leave the wounded. We have no choice, or we're all going to die here." That was the advice people were giving. I said, "No. We're either all going to die or we're all going to get out of here." People didn't want to hear that. They said, "We can all run and get out of here, the ones that are okay." There was like eleven of us in total that can function. "Sir, how are we going to carry the wounded, take these guys out and fight a superior enemy force at the same time?" They wanted to exfiltrate, get the hell out, and leave the wounded. I said, "We can't." I just couldn't do that.

Guys were hurt bad, bleeding. That's when I realized it was a good thing that I didn't make it through bio-sci, because I never would've wanted to have been a doctor in an emergency situation. [laughter] There's blood flying all over the place. You don't know how bad they're hurt. The medics were all hurt, so I had to pitch in. A guy comes up, and he falls down right at me. My hands are full of blood. His back is full of blood. I took his shirt, picked it up and I see all these holes in his back. I didn't know how bad he was hurt, shrapnel in the heart, you don't

know. I'm scared. What do you do? I'm not a doctor. I'm here in the middle of the woods, and you can't bring in helicopters. They didn't even have communication with them. What the hell are you doing? I said, "That's it." I could not do that. I couldn't be a medic either.

Then, they heard the shooting, the unit that we had sent separately. They said they heard all the shooting; they reported it to headquarters. They flew a helicopter out, and all of sudden, the helicopter, I was able to pick it up on my radio because I only had a little antenna, like this. The rest of the radios had antennas blown off. I couldn't hear, so, I had to relay it through my radio operator. They wanted to know how many casualties. I said, "Don't answer that one." The last thing you want to do is tell the VC you've only got eleven guys out of forty-two still functioning, "That's what you want to put on the radio?" I refused to do it. I said, "We just need to get out of here." We found a hole. [I said], "We're going to try to get all the wounded together and punch their way out." By that time, gunships came, but they didn't know where to shoot. I was giving them direction to shoot, but they were too close to us anyway. They were shooting up the place. I said, "Okay, let's get everybody." The wounded, they started moving out through the hole. The rest of us stayed back and were holding the enemy.

I didn't shoot my rifle very much over there at all. You've got to maintain control, so, as a leader, you don't shoot. You watch what's going on. You listened to how many enemy guns. I heard two RPD [7.62 mm] machine-guns. I heard a .51 [caliber machine-gun]. That tells me it's a regimental headquarters, because they're the only ones that had .51s. That means there was 240 of them; a company usually secures a regiment. They told me that the unit, what happened was there was a battle going on on the other side of us, they were attacking a village, so what we did we run into their headquarters, the rear end of a battle. They'll go off to battle, and then troops were coming back to meet us. Time to get the hell out of here is what the word was.

We found a hole, got all the wounded out, and then we're stuck. Now, how do we extricate us out of here? I thought they were going to rush us. I had everybody go. It was just my platoon sergeant, myself and the radio operator. We called in a gunship. I said, "Make a pass." He made a pass. I said, "Next time, make the same pass," you gave him the directions, "head towards the south," whatever. I said, "Make the same pass, but I'm going to drop smoke. I want you to shoot the smoke, right at the smoke, because that's where they're going to be." He's flying. He's making his pass. I dropped the smoke on the ground right in front of me, and we took off running like hell. They came in and shot the place. That gave us the ability to break contact.

Now, it gets dark, and everybody's on the radio. This was another problem you had. Everybody's on the same frequency, and you've got generals asking colonels what's happening, the colonel's asking the lieutenant colonel and so on. Everybody's clogging it, and you're trying to get help. They're asking all these absurd questions, "Why are these people out here? What are they doing?" You've got to brief the general. Some Australian guy, he was a forward air controller, he said, "I don't know who you people are. Get the hell off the radio." So, I'm trying to help these guys.

Then, a full bird colonel from the Air Force was flying out as a FAC, forward air controller, and he contacted me directly. He said, "We're going to get you to an open area in the dark and have

helicopters come in and pull you out." I said, "That's fine, but we're in heavy jungle and I've got a lot of wounded." I said, "They're not going to make it too far." He said they'll bring in helicopters with jungle penetrators, which is a seat you drop down on a cable and you put the wounded on. I said, "Fine." They had to take them out one at a time. The helicopter sits there, and you put them on and they go up. The next one comes on and so on.

A helicopter comes in, and what they do is they put five helicopters around and they dropped cables down, so, the VC would be fooled and maybe get the wrong one. They have a one in five chance of getting the right one. We're there. They had lights on, and then all the helicopters are all lit up. I said, "What the hell's the difference? We're in the jungle." We all have cigarettes. People that never smoked in their life said, "Can I have a cigarette?" [laughter] Everybody was smoking a cigarette; it just seemed like the thing to do. You've got to picture, we're all sitting there, watching, the props are hitting us, it's cooling us off, and everybody's smoking a butt.

Then, the helicopter dropped a little bit and it hit the tops of the trees, and it sounded like an AK-47. Everybody panicked, and the pilot said, "Don't worry. It was me." They were getting fired at from different places but not much.

Here's a problem too, that I don't think anybody knows, under the Geneva Convention, only wounded people can get on an ambulance helicopter, even though the enemy shoots at them. The minute you put combat troops there with nothing wrong with them on an ambulance helicopter, they're fair game to be shot down, because it's tactical then. We cannot get on it. They pull all the wounded up, but everybody else that's only slightly wounded had to stay. That's the way it works, Geneva Convention we followed. Even though the VC would shoot them anyway, we couldn't do it.

One guy was from Jamaica. It turned out he was a coward. He wanted to be a citizen, but then he gets to the war and he finds out this ain't the place to be. He was just a drain. I had to keep him. I couldn't send him out of there, but he was a drain on us. I put a guy on a seat, his legs were all shot up. This guy goes and jumps on him and grabs his legs. They guy's screaming; he's in pain. I hit him with the rifle butt, knocked him the hell off. I said, "You're staying with us." He was crying; he wants to go. I said, "You can't. You're staying with us." I had to have somebody watch him, because he was no good.

What happened, it was a long story, but we went around to different places to find an opening to get the hell out of there. I went to one place, and it was all pine trees and small trees. At that point, [I] was a little frustrated. I said, "You can't land a helicopter in these trees and the brush." He said, "Relax. I've got another one about a klick away." I said, "Ah, another kilometer. I want to get the hell out of here." [laughter] We didn't know where we were. He's firing these white phosphorus rockets, so, that's guiding us. I knew damn well the VC probably could see them too, and they're probably figuring this out. You don't know what the outcome [will be]; I figured we were going to get it any minute.

We're going as best we can, and finally, we got to an area. I said, "You can probably bring one helicopter in, probably." He says, "Okay." We're there, and they bring the helicopter in. I put the company commander on it. He was wounded. His arm was messed up. He got on. All of a

sudden, he said to me, "You know what happens when a helicopter gets hit with a RPG." He kept yelling this over and over again. He lost it. [He said], "Do you know what happens?" I said, "Yes, I know what happens." He said, "I'm not getting on this thing." He said, "They're going to hit it was a RPG." He said, "Do you know what's going to happen?" I said, "Yes. Get on the helicopter." Two guys help him on. We put several on. Another one comes in; we put the rest on. I knew I had to be last; this was expected.

There's four of us left. I thought, "That's it. We're going to die in Vietnam." We have no chance. We wait and we wait, and it seemed like forever for the next helicopter to pick us up. They put a light on, so, they can see the landing area. They have to do that. I'm waiting and waiting. You hear all the helicopters flying around. All of a sudden, the light goes on. He's right there. He hits, and you jump the hell on. I start shooting. I don't know what got into me. I just start shooting. The pilot turns around, "You're not allowed to have loaded weapons on a helicopter." You have to clear it. That's their rules, because they worry about you shooting through the roof and all. He yelled at me not to shoot. I emptied the magazine, and I said, "Get the hell out of here, will you? Fly." He took off with the four of us. I started laughing. I just somehow laid on the floor in our helicopter and I felt the cool air and I started laughing, that we got out of this thing. I was never this scared in my life, nor ever since.

Now, they had, I found out later, had a unit, 250 troops, ready to fly in by helicopter. The commanding general canceled it. They were ready to go. They were sitting on the helipad. The helicopters landed, and they turned the rotors off. They waited. What my battalion commander told me later was that they decided that there was forty-two of us on the ground, they knew we were up against a big force, they'd rather lose forty-two people than 250. They decided, "No help. Get out of there the best you can." That was what their thinking was.

We got out, and we flew down to the landing zone. I joined up with the rest of the unit. We had to leave the two dead behind. I had no choice. They're dead. There's no way I was going to get them out. Everybody told me they were dead. I didn't know, and that bothered me, even to this day. You just don't know for sure, but we couldn't get near them. They were too far away from us, two good friends of mine, too. I cried when I got to the lager site.

They were sending another company in to try and find the bodies, and they couldn't. I said, "I want to go in." They wouldn't let me, because they said, "You had enough. Take it easy," and I said, "No, I'm not leaving those two guys." I went in a loach helicopter, and they found the bomb crater and dropped me off. I'm saying, "What am I, stupid? I'm in the middle of nowhere, the jungle. I don't know where I am. I have no radio." I said, "What am I, crazy?" [laughter] I'm in the bomb crater, and I said, "What the hell's going [on]?" The pilot said, before he landed me, he said, "They're nearby. They'll find you," and I'm thinking, "Well, shit, they'll find me all right. They'll think I'm a VC." I laid flat, and I see the units coming, the point man, they're coming right at me. The guy gets only a few feet away. I reach up, put my hands so he can't raise his rifle, and I said, "Friendly, friendly." The guy almost jumps out of his uniform. We're walking, and we found the two guys. They weren't touched or hurt. We flew them out of there. Then, we went for Thanksgiving dinner the next day. Happy Thanksgiving.

SI: What year was that?

RS: 1969. That battle was November 25th. Then, the colonel comes in, the brigade commander, we're at our after-action meeting, and it was myself and the company commander and my battalion commander, and he was going to prepare, just like the old Custer thing, what did he do wrong that he lost to the Indians, not that the Indians had a bigger force and they were better. What did we do wrong? He said, "Well, you didn't have your flank security out." I said, "Wait a minute," I said, "Colonel, flank security in a jungle?" I said, "You can't see five feet. If you've got people out there and we walked into an ambush, we would have lost them anyway. Then, you can't even shoot over there, because you don't know where they are." Then, we got in this contest. I don't remember all the details, but we got in this contest of, "Damn wet-behind-the-ears lieutenants, who don't know what the hell they're doing, getting all these people killed." I said, "You know if you feel that way," I said, "the Army sends second lieutenants out here to run platoons." I said, "If you don't think that's appropriate, then maybe you colonels ought to come out here and run these platoons instead and let us go back in the rear and tell you what you did wrong." [laughter] He got mad, and then he started saying, "Well, you left two of your buddies behind. That's what you did." I said, "Look, I ate with those guys, we slept with these guys, we joked with these guys." I said, "We smoked together." I said, "Don't tell me I left them two guys behind," I said, "because you don't give a shit." I said, "I did, and it hurts to have to leave them behind, but those are decisions you have to make." He wanted to charge me with insubordination. I really was mad, because I really lost it. I was mad. I was just ticked off. Now, they're telling, "What you should have done, what formations you should have been in, and why did you do this, instead of that?" They're not there.

What happened was, the general, which was Bautz, he heard the whole story--he had been in one of the helicopters--and he said he was amazed that we were able to get out of there. He said, "These guys got out?" Then, the company and I saw the bunker complex when we retrieved the dead. It was huge. He never saw anything that big. He said, "I hope you give that lieutenant an appropriate decoration for all that." All of a sudden, I got a Silver Star, and the colonel loved me. I was great, "Oh, yes, he's good, he's one of my best lieutenants." That's how it works. I got out of that one. What I was trying to relay to you is the fear, the feelings you get during something that ridiculous, and these are seventeen, now, nineteen-year-old kids that you're with. Then, the last one I had, I'll go [into], if it's okay.

SI: Can we take a quick break?

RS: Yes, please.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: Before the break, we were talking about this standoff you had with the colonel. It sounds like there was a lot of tension between commanders behind the lines and guys on the line on the officer level.

RS: Yes. There was tension between the rear and the frontline troops continually, right, and we had a lot of problems between officers who were not out in the field and the guys who were out there on the ground. That caused problems, especially, like, we would get people flying around

in helicopters, telling you to move faster or whatever, and you're in jungle. Up from a helicopter, if you've ever looked at the perspective, it looks like a golf course, and they can't understand why you're not moving faster. They have a different view of a battle from a helicopter than you do on the ground, especially when they're back at some headquarters somewhere, distant. The same problem happened with World War II, to a minor extent, because they were always complaining you never saw generals on the frontline. That wasn't true with some, but in a lot of other units, like in the north, under [General Omar] Bradley, they were complaining they never saw, historian Stephen Ambrose mentions that in his book, that you never saw generals, so, how could they tell the guys what they should be doing?

SI: You mentioned earlier that one of the types of missions you would be sent on was to go into villages, and at that point you were very careful not to accidentally shoot civilians. What would an average village operation be like? Can you give us an example of that?

RS: Yes, I'll tell you. To me, it was common sense ways of handling people. The problem with the Vietnam War, as everybody knows, is that you couldn't tell who was the enemy and who wasn't, but you could make enemies out of people in a minute who weren't previously. Sometimes, we had to set up near a village, near a house, let's say, for example, we had to set up a road security to secure a convoy that was moving through. That means you set up, and you had to go into the house, check it, make sure there's nobody in there that could ambush the convoy.

You would check all the houses. What I would do is I'd take a Vietnamese interpreter I had with me. We'd ask permission to park our vehicle by their property, number one. Then, what I did, one time, is that I greeted the person who owned the house, and I said, "I've never been in a Vietnamese house before." I said, "I have an opportunity now. Would it be possible if you could be kind enough to show me around your house?" You'd give him a couple cigarettes. That's the standard in Vietnam, and you take that approach. He'd take me around the house, show me that he's making rice and how he mills it and all that, and, at the same time, I had two guys looking around, make sure there's nothing going on there.

Now, there's other times we'd have villages that might be in a hostile area or they're taking fire. I really never had to get into these real cordon and search, because at the time I got there most of the villages were either secured or they had moved the people to places that were. What you'd normally do, you'd set up a perimeter around the village, and I had to do this once. Then, you check house by house, hoping nobody shoots at you. That's the reason I didn't like it, because you could be in a house, somebody could open fire. You've got people out there with machine-guns. You run the risk now of not only shooting your own troops but shooting the civilians and so on.

After the Calley case, all the troops and all of us were brought in, and we were taught by military lawyers. The 25th Division had every troop in and told us about the rules of engagement. [Editor's Note: The Calley case refers to Lieutenant William Calley, who commanded a company that massacred over five hundred Vietnamese civilians in the village of My Lai in March 1968.] This was after the Calley case and all, the trial, and they spelled out all the rules we had to follow. Basically, they said that you cannot fire into a village unless you have an absolute hostile target and if you're fired upon first. You had to, in other words, see somebody you can

aim at. We weren't allowed to use fifty-caliber machine-guns near villages. We weren't allowed to fire artillery near villages. It caused problems at times, because we were given operations and this comes out all the time. They sent you near villages to check things, and yet you had to be careful not to fire. That's why I said I didn't like them. The other problem around villages, they'd usually put a lot of booby traps. Now, I sometimes wondered if the booby traps were not necessarily from the enemy but for people to keep you off their property. I sometimes wondered that.

I had an incident, to give you an example, and it's a matter of caring or not about the people. In armored units, and in mechanized it's true, they give you an axis of advance, and you have a certain path you had to follow. They spell it out on a map. A boundary I had was a road. The road was given to the unit on the other side of it. One unit gets responsibility for the road, not both. I had no responsibility for this road.

I was going with my unit to check this path, and we run right smack into a farm. The woman had a field all plowed, and she had all her cabbage planted and peanuts, whatever. I could not go around it, because I couldn't use the road, and on the other end was woods. I said, "Okay." I called back, and I said, "I've got to use the road." They said, "No, it's not your area. That belongs to the other unit." It was not part of my battalion, so, again, that was a problem because you had to communicate all the way up and back down. They said, "You can't use the road." I said, "Well, I'm not going to run over this woman's flowers and plants and all that. That's not going to happen." [laughter] They said, "Well, just follow your path."

I went and I told the guys, and I was obeying orders. Sometimes, you had to run over plants; I can't refuse that one. It's not illegal or anything. That's borderline. I told the guys, "Start moving," and I was walking out in front, because the lady was yelling at me. As soon as they start, she picks up her broom, and she's whacking the hell out of me with it. I've got hand grenades, a M-16, I've got a smoke bomb, all this stuff, and you've got this woman chasing me all around her flower garden, plants, hitting me with a broom. Everybody's laughing. The whole platoon is laughing. Then, she comes over. The drivers start moving. She goes over to the APC, and she attacks the APC with the broom. She just throws the broom down. She starts crying. Well, that got to all of us.

Long story short, we used the road. We just did it quick. I went back, and they said, "Are you checking that woman's cabbage patch?" "Yes," because I am checking it. I took the lady, and the two of us walked through. I said, "I will proceed through her cabbage patch." I didn't lie. I told the vehicles, "Go up on the road." I walked through it, like I was supposed to, on foot, just the two of us, and she was all smiles. The problem was, what I'm saying, again, you've got to have some sensitivity. If we were to run and tore all that up, we'd have had another VC on our hands, and that's why they hate you, but, if we were compassionate, give the kids candy and treat the people nice, they were fine.

We had a case, this is true, and I wished I had pictures of it to prove it, but we were on this road that was mined all the time. A convoy would go down that road to get to this base, and it turned out it was a colonel saying, "We're not going to get kicked off this road." A unit went through there and they lost many people killed on that road with mines. The worst case was, they blew

an APC up and everybody was sitting on it. I was sent in. They always said that I had nine lives, so, they always sent me on these ridiculous things. We were always working with the people. I had a guy who was a bricklayer, so, he helped a guy with his house. He was the guy that was putting the bricks up. We interacted a lot with the people, and we did our job. We went through the road.

After about ten days of securing this road and going through and checking for mines, what I did was I left the APCs behind. Everybody walked. You had to walk six miles and six miles back, but I said, "Tough. It's safer that way than to have the damn APC blow up under you." We went out there one day, and there's all these signs, for us, "GIs, Stay Off the Road." As it went down, they're explaining to you, in English, that there was a South Vietnamese lieutenant that killed a lot of civilians and he was wanted by them and they know he was going to be on that road later today and they were after him. They said, "You stay off. We don't want to hurt you guys." That's what they were telling us. It's amazing. Now, these were local VC, probably they might not have been Communist forces, they might have just hated this guy for some reason. I don't know.

Then, we had a kid. Here's another example of things that happened. This little kid was really good. He liked us and he always said he wanted to be GI when he grew up. Well, he saw them putting mines in this one place, and he came out and told us that there were all these mines. He was going to take us and show us. I told him to get lost, "We'll go through with mine detectors and find them." My commander had a problem with that, he said, because, "If this kid knows where they are, he could save lives." I said, "Yes, but the problem is if he takes us down there, that kid's dead meat. If they know he showed us the mines, what do you think they're going to do to him?" I said, "I don't want this kid hurt." Then, he told me, "Well, you're going to get your people killed." I said, "That's up to us to make that decision. If everybody in this unit agrees that we don't want this kid involved, that's our decision." Anyway, we went, and we looked for it. I told the kid to go back to his house.

Yes, we tried to protect people. We were not mean, and we went out of our way to try to become friends with these people. You knew that the main mission you had there was to get the VC's influence down, but that relates to the whole thing of being around civilians in villages, a whole different set of problems. People get hurt. We had a case where the VC would get behind the civilians or go into their houses, whatever, and it became a difficulty.

SI: Did it become pretty obvious to you, when you got into Vietnam, that there were warring factions among even the South Vietnamese and that the ARVN was not necessarily doing the best job or fighting in your best interest?

RS: When I was there, they started the Vietnamization Program that Nixon had. [Editor's Note: In 1969, President Richard Nixon proposed Vietnamization in order to withdraw U.S. troops and turn control of the Vietnam War over to South Vietnamese forces.] [To] give you a couple of examples, rain, they [ARVN forces] wouldn't go out with you, because it was raining too hard. "We ain't going on operations today. It's a holiday." I said, "What holiday is this?" "George Washington's birthday." They had an excuse.

I was supposed to go pick up a South Vietnamese unit and go with them, and then we'd take them with us on an operation just to show them. I had to give them C rations, money, whatever, to get them to go. They didn't care. That was a real sore point, because that's what a lot of the GIs experienced, that they didn't care and they wanted us to fight the war for them is what it amounted to. "Why the hell are we going out there? You're here." "What do you mean, turn the war over to us?" At the same time, there were some that were really good, some of the Ranger units, Airborne, Marines, that I had a lot of respect for, but these were the regular Army.

The trouble, and I found this out later, anyway, the trouble with the Vietnamese Army was that you got to be a general if Thieu liked you and you were in his inner circle. You gave him money. They bribed each other; that's how they got to the top. That's why, when it fell, in 1975, it all fell apart, the generals and everybody were the first to leave, and they got to get out of the country. I had a lot of bad experiences with the South Vietnamese. I didn't even want to be operating in the same thousand-meter grid square as they were, because you're worried about them being wrong and shooting at you by mistake.

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

SI: This continues an interview with Robert M. Sees on November 5, 2005 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and ...

TO: … Tom O'Toole.

SI: Please continue. We were talking about the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam].

RS: Yes. Another problem you had was we had them with us at night in our positions. They would steal. They would take everything they could get their hands on. You had to have guards inside your own perimeter to watch for them. I had interpreters. I was pretty close with them. They would tell you the reason is that every American is rich because you had TV at home, you had a portable radio and you had a car. They had none of those things. They felt that we should share it with them. They didn't feel anything wrong with stealing a portable radio. "GI would just buy a new one."

The other thing that they would do, and I had trouble with one of my scouts, they would take their rifles, tell you they lost it and they would wind up selling it to the VC, they would sell their equipment. We had a thing, for example, where cigarettes were shipped over, Philip Morris sent Marlboros, and they would try to buy them from you to try and sell them on the black market. There was a lot of corruption. Everybody was trying to make a buck, and the war was the last thing I think that they were worrying about for the most part. I think that's what disillusioned a lot of GIs later is why we're here and they don't really care.

On the other hand, the North Vietnamese soldiers fought hard, and they seemed like they really cared about throwing us the hell out of their country. I think you'll find that you can do these interviews to every Vietnam veteran in combat and they'll all tell you they had more respect for the North Vietnamese than they did the South Vietnamese. They'll probably tell you that. I could tell you doing business there that it's the same thing today.

SI: Could you clarify what you were talking about when you said you were against the VC and then sometimes you say the NVA? Was it a mix?

RS: Yes.

SI: Was it one or the other?

RS: Okay, I'll explain it. The Vietcong are the National Liberation Front. I'm going into some things I learned since then as well. They had a mixture of Communists, they had non-Communists, and nationalists. Their goal was to overthrow the South Vietnamese government, which they felt was allied to, puppets of the United States and put their own guy in. They ultimately then wanted to keep it separate.

This is something people don't understand. Ho Chi Minh had a solid lock on the north. [Editor's Note: Ho Chi Minh was a Communist revolutionary who led the movement for Vietnamese independence from France and served as the president of North Vietnam from 1945 until his death in 1969.] He was fighting, because he was the head of the Communist Party in Southeast Asia. He was fighting internally with his own Communist people as to how to run the war and so on. He had different views. They wanted to take over the south, throw the government out and take over, and then with Ho Chi Minh supporting them with the understanding that they have separate governments until such time that they can unite to a system everybody agrees to. Ho Chi Minh didn't even want to start with Communism. He was a nationalist, "Let's unite the country, get foreigners out, and then we worry about whether we're going to be socialist or not." His books bears this out.

When I say VC, I'm talking about the people in the South. They were supported by the north, but we wiped out most of the VC in the south, most of them were killed during the Tet Offensive in '68. They lost a lot of soldiers. North Vietnamese units came in, infiltrated in bigger numbers. I tended to meet more of the North Vietnamese in the jungle areas, in regular combat, in the base camps, they fought normal tactics. The VC would set up booby traps and were hiding in villages; they did more of that. Then, there was units that were pretty much mixed.

When the war ended in '75, the first thing they did was the North Vietnamese took all the VC units and integrated them back into their own units and made one North Vietnamese, PAVN, the People's Army of Vietnam was the final outcome. That was when they took all the VC and moved them into the units from the north. The VC, at the time, realized the game here and the NVA took their flag which was blue, red with a yellow star, the blue went out. The people in the south knew that they were in trouble because that meant the north was going to call the shots, and they took their army away. There were separate armies for the most part, but then they had to work together because we wiped out most of the VC and it became a war really between us and the north in a lot of ways. The north was better equipped, and most had green uniforms, like fatigues, very similar.

SI: For the most part, the ones that you were fighting in regular battles were the North Vietnamese?

RS: Combination, yes.

SI: They had North Vietnamese uniforms.

RS: The units were kept separate, so, you'd have a North Vietnamese regiment, but the VC, I would fight, sometimes, I'd fight the north and sometimes you'd fight both together. You'd find a lot of them up north and delta and then also in the Central Highlands. They did not like tunnels. They did not like booby traps, that type of stuff. They were different.

SI: How often did you encounter booby traps and mines and that sort of thing, harassment attacks like that?

RS: The booby traps we found quite a bit. Around the area I was in, it was called Hau Nghia Province, that was the most heavily booby trapped area in Vietnam. We'd find them all the time, but it was not as difficult to locate them as you might think. See, I was also mechanized infantry, so, if I was in a booby trap area and I spotted one, I'd let the APCs run through it and then we'd walk in the tracks. The APCs would run over everything that shouldn't be there. We found mostly explosive devices. Mines were the threat to vehicles but on roads.

One time, we were walking in the jungle, and I just happened to arbitrarily stop to take a map check. Everybody just sat down and lit up cigarettes, and I just noticed a guy puts his rifle down and the ground shook. There's something wrong here, so, he pulls it up. There was a bamboo mat, and there were sticks, bamboo sticks, all sharpened nice. We destroyed it, put explosives down there and blew it up, and then filled it in the best we could. We said some poor slob sat there probably for two days cutting all these things, and nobody stepped on it.

The other thing you've got to realize is booby traps can only be put where they think somebody's going to walk. It's kind of senseless to put booby traps out in the woods if you don't know if ever anybody's going to walk through there. The trick was to stay off known paths, so, you didn't walk on trails. I enforced that.

On the other hand, I actually was asked to, since we were successful, to teach a course on that after I got out of the field. I ran a booby trap course, and what I did was I booby trapped the whole training area. I had like little dirt things you'd play with when you're a little kid, little dirt bombs, I put an exclusive device, and these were all simulators, but they exploded. I put them under there because the point I was trying to make with these guys is these GIs will sit there bored and they'll start crumpling the stuff and the thing blows up. There was a board I put on top of rocks knowing somebody's going to sit on the board rather than on the ground. The point I was trying to show them was that you can figure out where they're going to put a booby trap.

There were heavy casualties. I lost only one guy to a booby trap. After I left the unit, we lost eleven in my platoon, because another thing you had to do was stay away, don't clump up, everybody gets together too close, that's it, you're asking for trouble. Where I was mainly they would take Coke cans, fill them with explosives from our bombs that didn't go off and put

pressure sensitive devices on them or trip wires or they'd use 155 mm artillery rounds that didn't go off, and they would booby trap that.

SI: The actions that you have been talking about were mostly in 1969, the later part of 1969.

RS: Yes.

SI: This was before the Cambodian incursion. [Editor's Note: In April 1970, President Richard Nixon authorized the bombing campaign and ground invasion of Cambodia.]

RS: Right.

SI: I think we went up to after you destroyed these woods with the bulldozers. What happened after that?

RS: We actually moved down to, this is where we went into village areas, this is when I was telling you about the road, we moved down there for a while and spent Christmas in that area. Now, that was another funny part, the Bob Hope show. [Editor's Note: Actor and comedian Bob Hope participated in USO shows for the U.S. Armed Forces during the Vietnam War.] What they'd do is that only ten percent of the field troops get to go, because they can't send too many combat troops in to see Bob Hope. All the rear-area people, people that worked in air conditioned offices and all that, would get to see the show. The poor slobs out in the field don't. You had to pick, this was a tough one, and the toughest thing you had to do is pick some guys in your platoon, one in ten or so, ten percent, so, you had to pick one out of every ten that deserves to go. That's a tough one. I said, "Do we draw lots?" I opted to do it to the people who had been there the longest. I figured let them go. Because I was the oldest officer there, I was oldest officer there as soon as I got there, so, after that they let me go in as an escort officer in charge of the rest of the guys. We could go in and then come back out immediately after the show.

We got there to Cu Chi. Nobody would give us seats. Air Force guys were sitting in the seats and all these rear-area types, that's why I talk about hostility, and I asked them if they could move over and give a couple of guys seats. They said, "No, it's too hot. It's too tight here." All the GIs wind up in the rear standing. It wasn't right. Anyway, that's where I was at Christmas time. We did the operations there.

Just before Christmas, our company was out, and we did an operation. We settled into an area that was nice and quiet. I was eating an orange with a pocket knife. All of a sudden, you get a call that our Alpha Company, another company, was in deep trouble. They lost a whole platoon. The colonel wanted my platoon to go in and help them.

My company commander used to always get mad because they always sent us. We had the experience, and we had very light casualties. We never had anybody killed. They always sent us in. He was mad. We left the area, and I said, "Let's go." I'm going in, and you'd get a little bit scared. There's all the shooting going on. I said, "Where do I go?" You're going into something, and you had no idea where. They said, "Well, just go about another hundred yards, you'll see a clearing, a helicopter, and you'll see a downed Huey Cobra." [Editor's Note: The

Huey Cobra was the Bell AH-1 Cobra.] I said, "Excuse me?" "You'll see a Huey Cobra sitting in the woods," [they replied]. I said, "Wait a minute, what the hell have they got that they shot down a Huey Cobra?" They said, "Oh, don't worry about it. Just go."

Then, they tell me that the mech [mechanized] unit went in, they got ambushed and they pulled out. They left a kid; the gunner fell inside the APC. He was wounded, and nobody would go in and get him. They wanted me to go in and get the kid out.

We went down, and I deployed everybody. Then, the company commander for the other unit pulled out. He was told to go back in with me on my left flank. I was only a platoon. He was a company. He had two platoons, and one was wiped out, according to him. There was a lot of casualties. I told him, "You stay on the left. I'll go in. We'll get the guy out, and we'll all pull the hell out of here one big happy family." He said, "Okay, fine." We go in, and all of a sudden, I'm taking fire. RPGs are flying. I said, "This is a little heavier than I anticipated." Then, on the left flank, I'm getting shot at. I said, "Wait a minute." I told my artillery, a lieutenant, "Go check my left flank. Alpha Company is supposed to be there." He went over there, and there's nobody there. He said, "There's nobody over there. After our last guy, there's nobody."

We tried to get the guy out. This is a thing where you second guess yourself years later. I said, "Okay, let's try to drive it out." I put a guy in, who has to drive it out, and we take another RPG. He gets wounded, not bad. He hops out. I said, "That didn't work." I said, "All right, let's bring the VTR," which was a tracked recovery vehicle. They came too close. They took an RPG, and a guy got wounded. I didn't want to lower the ramp, because if you lower the ramp to get the guy out, then you can't drive it out anymore and then people will get hurt too trying to go in. I didn't want people inside this thing getting this guy and get another RPG. They'd get killed because it's just all full of ammunition. I opened the back door, and the guy was dead. He was absolutely dead.

Then, it became a case, "Let's retrieve the body at least." I decided we're going to get in there. Then, all of sudden, we're taking too much fire. I said, "Okay, we're going to pull back, and then come back in." The brigade commander, the same one that gave me a hard time, gave me an order, "You're not going back in there." He said, "You had three casualties already." I said, "But they're only slight. We can do it. All I've got to do is redeploy slightly over in this direction and cover my left flank where the captain pulled out." I went over to the captain, and I said, "What the hell did you do?" He said, "I'm not going back in there," so I lost a whole platoon. He said, "These people are crazy," and I said, "Yes, but your guy's in there." "Yes, but he's dead." I was mad, because he left us hanging. He could have gotten us in trouble.

We were going back in, and the colonel gave me a direct order not to go back in there. I said, "Fine." I had no choice because he's flying around, so, we didn't go in. Then, my battalion commander told us to come back to the fire base, and they had turkey sandwiches for my platoon. He was happy, and I told him about the company commander who left me. He was very close friends, their wives, everything. He was West Point, and my battalion commander knew him from their past Army days. He knew him from West Point, because he was an instructor and all this, closest friends. He relieved him of command. I had a lot of respect for this man. He did what was right even though the guy was his friend. He said, "That's it. They're

going to send that company back in tomorrow to get their guy out of there. They're going to bomb all night."

We've got turkey sandwiches and we're sitting on the bunkers. They're firing all night. There's only about five miles in to the site, but you can see it. We had the radio on, the Armed Forces Network, and this I'll never forget. They're playing *Silent Night*, all the Christmas carols, because this is like the 18th of December and they're playing *Deck the Halls*. In the meantime, you see all this firing and bombs going off to the background of *Silent Night* playing. The guys, all of the platoon, everybody's watching this. I went to a meeting. I came back out, and they're all standing there. I said, "What's the problem?" "We want to go back in there tomorrow and get that guy out," they replied. [laughter] I said, "You don't have to." "We want to go back in there." I went and told the colonel, "Is there any chance?" He says, "I would have been disappointed if you guys didn't ask." I said, "Yes, he [told] us it was okay."

Two companies were coming in. We got there in the morning. We had farther to go, because the other company had stayed near that site. Meanwhile, the whole place is bombed out. The Air Force can wipe out a whole area of woods. The APC's all by itself, so, there's no problem there. We get in there.

Then, all of a sudden, this North Vietnamese officer was shooting at the other company. Basically, we found out later he was holding that unit up before we even got there. He was holding them back so his men can get the hell out of there. They went around with flashlights. They had a lot of casualties. During the night, the Air Force said they were going around with flashlights looking for bodies and everything. He was shooting until he ran out of ammunition, and he was wounded. He gets up out of the hole and puts his hands up, and the same company that pulled out on me shot him. They just opened up on him. That guy was a mess. I was angry. We were all angry. We went over there, and I said, "This is a guy we would have a lot of respect for and admire. Here's a guy that stayed behind, a colonel," because he has his uniform with the stars, "that gave his life to get his guys out of there." I said, "These bastards shoot him."

Then, they go, and all they had to do is take the dead body out. They decided somehow during the night somebody might have booby trapped it. The lieutenant goes and takes a hand grenade, throws it in the APC, which now blows up and all the ammunition and everything else, and the thing's on fire. I said, "What is this?" Then, he told me that they were afraid of booby traps. I said, "That's ridiculous. You put a rope on or a grappling hook and pull him out with it. What's the issue?" I said, "They didn't have any time to booby trap with the Air Force working the place over." It was a dumb thing. I was really upset, all of us were, that they shot this colonel. Then, what happened was after the fire goes out, they have to bring a guy from maintenance, he was a warrant officer, and a doctor out to go through the debris to see what's human and what's part of the APC. Then, they put it in a bag, and that's what they sent home, some ashes.

SI: They had not taken the body out.

RS: No, no. They thought it was booby trapped, so, they threw a grenade in. This is just the type of sad stuff that goes on. You're sad the guy's dead. It's sad.

SI: There seems to be two competing ideas of some people who do not want to leave anybody behind and others who do not care. Was that always the case?

RS: Yes, I relate it to the unit and the leadership, because that captain was bad and he got relieved. They had incompetent lieutenants, a couple of them. That's all it takes. I think it went right on through the unit. We enforced discipline. Some walked around with peace symbols; we didn't allow that. Everybody had a helmet on at all times. I wouldn't allow them not to go without helmets because they did save lives. Then, some of these guys with peace beads, we stopped that. It was a matter of discipline. I found out later after corresponding with one of the lieutenants that the captain decided he had enough of the Army and wanted out.

The deal I had with our guys is you play the game and then you go home in one piece. That's what we do, we all stick together and everybody gets out of here together. The average GI realized that if you leave this body behind, "What are you going to do when it's me? I hope you take me out of there." Then the worst cases, they make some of these guys missing in action for a while until they can verify. That was the thing. He was missing in action. They declared him missing, because they couldn't identify the body. Now, I didn't know who he was. The company said he was in there. We went through so many cases like that that were absurd, but they said, "How do you know that he wasn't still alive, that you were mistaken, the VC came and took him out and put one of their dead in there." It was stuff like that. They play this game. They asked me, my own men, "If you see me in that situation, do me a favor and tell my family I'm dead."

The same thing happened on several occasions, where guys, gunners, would be inside an APC, it blows up, and they declare him missing. You have a board of officers do a review, and you have to interview people to decide whether he's missing or not. Then, you get these clowns, you get them in school, too, they come up with all these cases, "Oh, he could have been taken out in the middle of the night, and they put their own dead." Why would they do that?

SI: I understand it is a very emotional issue for the POW and MIA groups, whether these people are actually missing or if they were cases like this.

RS: Right. I'll get into that because when I went to North Vietnam, I had some discussions with them about it. That was that fighting, and then we went into Christmas. When you're a veteran, certain things stand out. I know World War II guys that were in Normandy, you never forget that day. There's a lot of things in my mind, whenever I hear Christmas carols, what do you think I think of? Then, you always had this regret, "I did the right things militarily with this kid, but I regret that I didn't open the door and pull him the hell out of there in the first place." You regret that.

Then, we went through Christmas, and I was assigned to some battalion. George Armstrong Custer III was the colonel, but he has no relation because Custer had no kids. He was a George Armstrong Custer III. I was assigned to him over the holidays. Now, he loved cavalry. He wanted to command the Seventh Cavalry. I'm thinking, "Why?" On one occasion, he rode right behind me, as a colonel, which was a no, no. That's crazy. He'd ride on my APC, and we'd ride around. He loved that.

I had a couple of Sioux Indians. He decides that he's going to make big publicity. The 25th Division had a newspaper. I regret I didn't save it, but it says "Custer Fights with the Indians," "Sioux Indians are with Custer." My guys, one of them, his name is Skeeter, I don't know what his given name is, but we called him Skeeter, and he said that to him, it was bizarre. He said to me, we're joking, he said, "Next time Custer comes out, you want a real good story? We're going to scalp him, and then you put that as 'Custer Scalped One Hundred Years Later.'" [laughter] He had the suggestion that they go out on an ambush with bow and arrows. He says, "Bow and arrows?" He says, "I never shot a bow and arrow in my life. [laughter] He says, "I've got a twelve-gauge in my pickup truck back in South Dakota, but I've never fired a bow and arrow."

Then, the funny part, there was a river, which separated Cambodia from Vietnam. It was near us. There was a valley across the river where they suspected a lot of North Vietnamese were hiding in Cambodia. They were across that river. It's a big base camp there. He was suggesting, he says, "Well, over at the other side should they come across and they attack us and fight and they go back," and actually they thumb their nose at people and everything because you couldn't shoot across the river, that's Cambodia, that's taboo.

It was just an interesting story. He was telling us that we can take my unit, he always considered me cavalry because I was mounted, and I said, "No, I'm not cavalry. I'm mechanized infantry." He wanted to helicopter a unit in on one side to pin them down and have us cross the river when it was dry, ford the river, then attack them straight on. We're talking. I said, "This sounds a lot like Little Big Horn, very similar, the river and all this." [laughter] I said, "One side is attacking on one side and we're on the other." [laughter] Then, I find my unit, which was the 22nd Infantry. They were with General Alfred Terry's Column, so, they were at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. I said, "Boy, history could repeat itself pretty bad here." [laughter] I said I didn't want any part of this. Anyway, that never happened, because they wouldn't attack across the river. [Editor's Note: During the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876, Sioux forces defeated U.S. Army forces led by General George Armstrong Custer near the Little Bighorn River in Montana.]

On Christmas Eve, this is the one time I forgave everybody. They had a little Christmas tree set up in the APC, and they were drinking Cokes with whiskey that somebody smuggled inside a loaf of bread. You couldn't have alcohol at all; it was taboo. I was making the rounds. I looked, and the guys were singing Christmas carols and just talking, smoking. They said, "Would you like a Coke, Lieutenant? I said, "Sure." They gave me a Coke, and there was whiskey in it. I said, "This is a strange tasting Coke." They said, "Yes, you get that kind of crap in Vietnam. You never know what you're going to get." I knew it, but I didn't report it. I didn't say anything.

Then, at midnight, it was Christmas Day. Everybody fires the red and green star clusters, the flares, just to have fun. All over the place, everybody is firing. Custer comes out in his underwear. This is laughable. He comes running out. He is screaming, he said, "Where is that goddamned lieutenant?" I came over. He says, "You get these people to stop right now," and he was yelling, "Stop, stop." I said, "Yes, sir." I told him that they were just having fun, and everybody's doing it all over the division bases. "I don't care," he said, "stop this. You're wasting government property." I tell everybody to stop.

Then, to move the story a little bit further, on New Years, the general was at Cu Chi at the headquarters. He saw this, over all the fire bases. He was impressed. He said, "What unit was the best, had the most spirit?" He said, "Let's repeat this New Year's Eve. Let's see who can set off the most fireworks." Custer comes out and tells us, "Come on." He gets us more star clusters. He said, "All right, New Year's Eve, let's go." New Year's comes, and one of my guys pops one. That's it, [laughter] just so they'd know we were there, and then nobody fired another one. I'm trying to relate the stuff that happened in the war that have nothing to do with the battles. Everybody was disgusted, said, "To hell with him." They were good.

January came along, January 10th. Now, they had a policy that a maximum for officers was six months in the field. They liked to do four months if you had a lot of heavy combat especially, so, they decided to pull me out. I didn't want to go. I said, "I'd rather stay in the field with my guys." That was fine, and I knew what I was doing. They wanted to give me a rear job, and I said, "No." I thought I being a hero by saying, "No, I'm not going," and then I get a direct order. The colonel was actually upset that I wouldn't go in. They said, "You're coming in," so I came in. They gave me this ridiculous liaison job, and all I had to do was go to division once a day and brigade, make a trip on a jeep. I had a driver, and I coordinated notes. It was nothing. I said, "This is not challenging. It's not even interesting." Then, they put me in the S-3 shop with operations.

Then, what happened was there was a captain, who was an adjutant, S-1, it's a captain's position. He was a really sorry individual to say the least. He had a staff of guys that were probably the best in the Army in administration, and one NCO in particular was a sergeant, who did just paper work and forms. He knew every Army regulation. He actually ran the place.

They had IG [inspector general] inspection coming up, and they come and inspect all your records. He said that he had to get the unit ready, the battalion ready, so, he went and broke his neck. He did not sleep for three nights getting everything in shape. They come in. He had three minor gigs, which was outstanding. They found nothing wrong with the procedures.

His boss was this captain, comes down and gets me. I was with the headquarters XO [executive officer] at that time. He says, "I want you to come as a witness." I said, "What are we doing?" It's like ten o'clock at night. He goes to the NCO hooch, and he wakes this sergeant up. He says, "Search all his stuff." I said, "What are we looking for?" He said, "Drugs." The sergeant said, "Drugs?" This is a guy that just made him look like a big hero. He said, "Drugs?" He said, "What makes you think I have drugs." He said, "Nobody could stay up three nights like that and not take something." I said, "This is crazy." He had me run him down to the hospital, and the doctors found nothing wrong with him other than the fact that the guy was exhausted and needed rest. He said, "No, he's malingerer. Send him back." He harassed this guy constantly.

The captain was a nut case. They came to me, because the captain wanted a command out in the field, they came to me and they said, "Take the job." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Take the job." I said, "I'm not an administrator. I'm infantry officer. "Take the job." He said, "It will make you look like a star," because I was easy going and fair. I wasn't going to harass them. I took the job as S1, and it was outstanding. I didn't have to do a thing. It was the end of March, April 1970.

One time, a division memo came down and said that our paperwork was the best in the division, all our reports and all that, which I didn't care about. My battalion XO called me into his office, and I'm standing in front of his desk, he's telling me that the division report, he said, "That's outstanding work." I said, "Thank you sir," but I said, "I owe it all to my PSNCO (personnel specialist NCO). It's him and his guys because I don't know a thing about this. He's the guy that did it all." Well, I didn't know he was standing right behind me and he heard that, so, I was golden with those guys because they did all that work. I learned the importance of giving credit where it is deserved.

Then, I thought everything was going to be great. I only had a few months left. My departure date was August 1, 1970. They tell us in April, the end of April, "Okay, bring all the units back, the whole 25th Division, all the mechanized, all the infantry, all the material." Usually, when they bring a whole division back, that was the signal that they were going to send us home. Everybody was happy, "Oh, we're going home." They did this with the Ninth Division. The orders were, "Everybody has to be back in within twenty-four hours. Drop all operations." That's how we got the order. "We're all going home." I was short. I was supposed to leave in August. It was April. [I thought], "Maybe I'll get reassigned. Maybe not." We're all happy, and we're drinking beer at the club. Our unit club is very small. We just had beer and a refrigerator and a bar; that's it. We're drinking beer, and everybody comes back. Everybody's absolutely as happy as you can be. They say, "Clean up everything, all the vehicles, pull maintenance, change all the oil, do everything." I said, "Yes, we're going to turn all in." Then, they told us the officers will have a meeting at six p.m., a staff meeting.

We had them every day at six p.m. What we do, you review the day, what happened, I'd get casualty reports or whatever, that was my job, and the S-2 would talk about the operations for the next day and so on. We go into something different.

There's that big map board that they're using. We're all sitting in the chairs, and there's the GI blankets, OD [olive drab] blankets hanging over the map board. I said, "This is odd. What the hell is this?" The S-2 gets up to the briefing. His assistant goes and drops the blankets off and there's Vietnam and a different map. There's Vietnam and there's Cambodia, and you've got all these red lines going across the border. I said, "What the hell is this?" [laughter] We thought it was a joke. It had the 25th Division, they had the First Cav Division, the Eleventh Armored Cav, and I said, "You have three divisions going into Cambodia?" It's got to be a joke. They had the North Vietnamese locations and all that. He said, "Tomorrow at six a.m. we're going to be invading Cambodia." You could hear a pin drop. We were waiting for somebody to tell us, "It's a joke, guys. We're all going home." It was unbelievable, and then we weren't allowed to tell anybody because it was top secret.

The colonel then left after we had the briefing and knew what we had to do. I had to go and plan all the support requirements. That was my job, so, we all sat and did a plan. You had to figure out how many helicopters you needed to run supplies, so, I decided, with the other people who were going to run [supplies], to have two intermediate bases right on the border. It's like ninety miles away. We drive all the trucks there to Tay Ninh, drop all the supplies off, have another

convoy take them to the Cambodian border under security and escort. It was good. We had to write the operations order, and it was all done.

Then, division says we had to have it in at three o'clock in the morning, but our colonel disappeared. Normally, anybody of rank, you have to know where they are at all times. There's no cell phones. You have to know where he is. I didn't know, and I'm supposed to know. They said that our battalion commander has to physically sign the operations order putting our battalion in Cambodia. It's a legal requirement. Normally, that was signed by the S-3. I told the S-3, "You can't sign it. The colonel has to. Where is he?" The division wanted that order. I said, "We've got a problem. We don't know where the colonel is because he took off and he went to the club or whatever." I said, "We've got a problem." We forged it. We signed it. We could sign his name. I knew how he signed it. I had it forged. I don't know whether I signed it or my sergeant did. We signed it and sent it up to division. I figured we were going to go to Leavenworth, that's it, falsifying an operations order putting us into Cambodia. The colonel finally gets back and I told him, "I'm in deep trouble." He said, "No, you're not." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because if they ask who signed it, I'll say I will. I'll tell them I signed it." [laughter]

Later, when everybody was in Cambodia, they were all sending me leave requests, because everybody was scared. They were short, so, they were sending me back requests for leave and telling me just sign their name to it. That became a thing. I was signing reports, our reports were always on time because you didn't have to send them out by courier and then wait two days to come back.

Then, we kicked off, and the unit went into Cambodia. I'm in charge of the rear, actually, at that time, but I had to make trips, regular trips, in. Then, I'd go, and they're all in Cambodia. The problem was the VC had mines all along on the road from Vietnam into Cambodia. They knew we were coming, and the question is how did they know? Some of the chopper pilots claim that they went out, and they had loud speakers in Vietnamese telling people across the border to leave. They were saying it in Vietnamese, because there was going to be some bombing in there, and the VC knew we were coming, the North Vietnamese knew we were coming. The unit went in. It turned out that helicopters dropped the battalion in. Then, ours was supposed to cross this bridge, but the bridge didn't get there on time. These guys were hung out, but the North Vietnamese always pulled back. They don't know what's going on, so, they left.

Now, this is May, May 1st, so then back home there were major protests and riots. I had a friend who was still at Douglass that I had known. She was a photographer, too. She wrote me that the campus was going nuts, because we were expanding the war. I wrote back, a long letter, which she hung up at Douglass, and I was explaining that Vam Co Dong River at this time of the year is dry. I says, "I'll tell you right now, if I took you here and I showed a map, you would not know we were in Cambodia or Vietnam. You wouldn't know the difference, because there's just a little dry strip, the river." I said, "But, at the same time, that little dry spot that you see on the map is the difference between them having a sanctuary and bombing the hell out of us and killing us and again sneaking back across to the little spot on the map. That's the difference." I said, "This is something we had to do," I felt. We were kidding ourselves. We're sitting here taking that from these people and they're all supplied through Cambodia and we can't touch them. So, I thought it was good, and it turned out it was a good operation. [Editor's Note: On

May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen fired on students at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine others. Some of the students had been protesting the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, while others had been passing by or observing the demonstration. On May 14 and 15, students at Jackson State College protesting against racial harassment were fired upon by state and city police, resulting in two deaths and a dozen injuries. As a result, protests, strikes and shutdowns spread to hundreds of college campuses nationwide.]

I had to go, and I thought I was safe and all that. Then, all of a sudden, a new world comes up. My sergeant and I are riding in a jeep. You get to this mountain, which is about forty miles from where my base was, and they had a convoy from there. I could take the jeep; it was not that dangerous. You'd get to the mountain. Then, they'd put you in a convoy of all vehicles that are heading north, and we go. Then, we were getting ambushed all the time. I'm in a jeep. The truck in front of me gets an RPG through the window. It kills the driver. All I have to do, though, see, it's the difference of being on a staff, I'm nobody in command, I'm not an infantry officer now, is get out of the jeep and get in a ditch and hide and just keep my ass down. [laughter] I said, "In the infantry, I have to go get them. That's the big difference." I felt a little difference in the war here. In the infantry, we're going after the ambushers; all I had to do is lay down.

This was a whole different thing to me, Cambodia. The people were different. They had sarongs. When we first got there, we didn't see any women under, let's say, forty to fifty years old, because they didn't trust us. They were told a lot of things, and then finally we sent doctors in and teams of psychological operations people, medical. Then, the people started bringing their kids. Pretty soon, we started seeing young kids. I was saying we were getting ambushed. Another time, I was in the base, it was Thien Ngon, it was right on the border, and they were bringing up a truck full of replacements, and they didn't give these guys any guns. They figured they'd give them when they got to the unit. Here's a truck full of GIs with no rifles. They get hit with RPGs. The guys were new. They didn't get out of the truck, and the truck came up and it was a mess. These guys were just blown to hell.

Then, I had to go into Cambodia and meet the colonel and other staff members, round trip. It was dangerous, but it was a different war. It was my birthday. Because my birthday is May 15th, I was in there, and I said, "I had to come to Cambodia because I didn't want to spend my birthday in Vietnam." I was trying to make fun of it.

Then, we had a captain who was National Guard, who was totally incompetent, and he got people killed. They were worried about him. One time, they were going down this road. There was no exit. You had to come back the same road the next day. They went down the road to set up a perimeter for the night. They were coming back. They got ambushed. One of my best friends was a lieutenant, who came in just before I left the field. He was getting scared. He had eight months in at that time. He told me he had family, and he was scared that this company commander was just incompetent.

We got a new battalion commander at that point, and he relieved everybody, including the staff. Nine people were relieved. I was the only one he didn't relieve. He had a big thing about urgency. He told the S-2 to get aerial photographs of an area. It takes a while. He had time. He

was tired, so, he went and took a nap. The colonel saw him sleeping during the day, and he got upset, relieved him. The guy was despised by everybody. Then, they asked me to take over a company, myself and one of my friends.

Usually, the 25th Division didn't want lieutenants commanding companies, but they were kind of desperate because these two guys were getting people killed. There was that one road incident. Another one, the enemy fired at them from the wood line. It was an open field about two hundred yards. He sends everybody across the open field on line. They got mowed down when they got within twenty feet of the woods. One of my sergeants, a friend of mine, was killed. They lost, in two days, many guys dead, plus a bunch of wounded. It's hard to imagine many people you know, because I knew them. I saw the casualty list. You just can't imagine. You lose somebody or you lose that many, you just can't even think of them all, "This guy's gone, this guy's gone." It's really tough to go through that.

The XO asked me if I would take command of the company, and I did not want to do it because this was getting towards June and so if I take command of the company, I'm leaving in less than two months. I said, "What's going to happen when I'm gone? You've got to have somebody else come in brand new to replace me, and then the guy will have to be trained." It wasn't that I was scared; I just felt that it was not something I really felt I should be doing.

Then, I was offered to be a general's aide with General Green, who was a one-star general. He needed an aide. Now, normally, you had to be West Point, you had to have a Silver Star, you had to have administration experience, like an S-1 job. I met everything except the West Point. His staff guy called me up and said, "Congratulations, you've been selected to be General Green's aide." I said, "Well, that's fine. I'm honored, but what does that entail?" Well, they slipped through that I had to extend in Vietnam for another six months. [laughter] I said, "That's okay. I'll stay with my unit." You had to play easy. I decided I was going to stay with the unit, and I turned down the company. I didn't want that.

Then, my commander was pushing me to go regular Army. They had a guy who came from the Pentagon. They took a bunch of lieutenants in the room. They're trying to convince us the Army needed good officers, and we all had the best records and why don't we stay. One of my friends from San Francisco, the colonel said, "What could you possible do in civilian life that can even come close to matching what you do here?" The guy said, "I could shovel manure." [laughter] Nobody was staying in; they wanted to get out. I decided I was going to get out anyway. My father was sick also. Then, I took a leave. I went to Hong Kong for leave in June.

My friend, who, I was saying, was another one that bothered me bad. He had enough, and I could see he was losing it. He was just scared; he had enough combat. I went to the colonel and told him, "I've got to get him out of the field and get him another job." That was my job to put him somewhere. The colonel said, "The trouble is who's going to replace him?" I said, "One of the sergeants." I gave him a suggestion. I got that guy, the colonel agreed, and I assign him to a mortar platoon. It's "Four Deuce," 4.2 inch mortars, which is the safest job you could probably have. You're back in the rear area, and he doesn't do anything because the sergeant runs the platoon. He doesn't have to know anything. He was friends with the sergeant anyway, so, I told

him he's coming back. He was elated. He got out of the field, and he was thanking me and thanking me.

He's in the mortar unit. He's with the sergeant, and it was during the day. They decided to take a rest; they were firing the guns at night. They went into a bunker. They had hammocks, and they were swinging in the hammocks. The bunker caved in and killed my friend. The sergeant survived. He had a family. You blame yourself, even though you had nothing to do with it. I got him a better job, but it still bothers you that you were the guy that got him out of that and put him in that position. The first thing you're saying, I was on leave when it happened, when I come back, everybody told me, so, the first thing you say to yourself, "He's stupid. What the hell is the matter with him?" You blame him right away, immediately.

It was the same thing when we were working out of Cu Chi, this would be the last story on this one, and you had breakfast together, all the officers. We had a little section, so, all the battalion officers would eat in the mess hall. They'd be joking and talking, and then you come back for dinner at night and find out somebody's dead. Lieutenant Dee was from the Bronx and just got married in Honolulu. He was short, and he went out on a patrol and he was killed. They tell you that at dinner, and you saw the guy in the morning. That's the kind of stuff you go through.

I still keep in touch with a guy from New Orleans, a friend of mine, and one from Seattle, I keep in touch with them, and one from San Francisco. People you met and you know them for maybe three to four months become lifelong friends. People I knew and roomed with here and I never talked to them again, my roommates, but the guys I knew from there, they become your friends forever, which is interesting.

Now, one of the problems, I wanted to tell the family, you want to write to family, you knew the guy and how great he was, but that was against Army policy. They did not want you writing letters, because some people will do something stupid. They'll write and say, "The goddamn Army put him in this," or, "He was shot by friendly fire." They made a policy you could not correspond with anybody. That's Vietnam. Then, I get to the end. They bring my replacement in.

I forgot to mention, we had a football player, I'm not going to mention names, he was an All American, West Point, and he came in. He was down in Long Binh; he was mapping the supply routes. He was an infantry officer. People knew him. Colonels come in, generals, and they knew him from West Point, football star, "What are you doing here? You should be out commanding a unit, a company." They sent him to our unit, and he walks in the door. I had no idea, I don't who know this guy is, so, I told him I have openings for a company commander of these companies. He said, "Don't you have anything in the rear?" I said, "Excuse me?" "Sir," he said, "a rear job?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, I don't want to go out in the field." He was adamant about it. Then, I go to the colonel, and he said, "Tough, tough." He knew who he was, and he said, "Give him Alpha Company, so, the SOB can go out there and do his job." He said, "That's what your taxpayers paid him to do." We're in the club later having a beer, and he's telling me, he said, "I don't want a company," because he was adamant. He says, "I'm going to play football when I get out of here. I can't play football if I'm injured." He says, "You guys can get injured and you could get crippled and it's not going to affect your lives. It will affect my

whole life." The short captain we had, we called him "Mini Grunt." He was little; he was about five-foot tall. He had two Silver Stars, really a brave guy. He comes in. He almost beats the hell out of him, a little guy, like this guy's a big dude, he was afraid of him, the big guy. He saw the medals and all that, and I said, "You can be a real hero here and get yourself some medals." He said, "No, wait a minute, let me explain the difference. When I'm playing football, you see you've got thirty thousand people cheering in the stands, cheering for you and yelling your name." He said, "You do something over here, who knows about it? You don't have thirty thousand people cheering you on." He said, "You can take all these medals and shove them up your ass," he told me. [laughter] He said, "It don't mean a thing." That was an experience. We got mad.

There was a big hostility toward West Point. What happened later, it was significant, they did a survey and they found out that ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] and OCS [Officer Candidate School] officers, the first six months of your commission, a West Point guy is way over you because he knows all the military stuff. He's well trained. After six months, it's the individual that counts.

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

RS: [West Pointers]. The enlisted soldiers looked at me, as an ROTC, as maybe a draft dodger, whatever, but they didn't look at me as being a lifer or a career person. They said, "You're in this just like we are to get your ass out of here in one piece." West Point, they were seen as worried about their careers, and we'd throw troops to the dogs in a minute. They didn't like West Pointers; the troops did not like them. They'd rather have a commander who wasn't.

My company commander, one time, in front of all the troops, we got in a little bit of a contest. I disagreed with him, and I said, "I'm not taking these troops here." I said, "That's suicide." I said, "People are going to get hurt," and I said, "There's another way to do this." He says, "I don't give a damn. I was told to do this," he says, "and this whole company is nothing compared to my career," he said, "because these guys are all going back or not going back, but my career is going to go on and I'm not going to let these people screw up my career." Everybody's sitting there listening to this. [laughter] He told them I had my head up my ass. The troops all said, "Somebody's got their head up their ass, but it ain't him." I said to him, "You asked for this." That's one thing they tell you in every military training, never have an argument with your subordinate in front of their subordinates, never. Now, who's looking bad here? We had some friction.

That was my Vietnam War. I went on leave. I came back. My friend died, and I was sad. I didn't want to leave in some ways. In other ways, I did. I wanted to get out of there, but I really felt strange leaving. They were still in Cambodia; I felt I still had to stay. I had three days, and then I was supposed to report to leave. The colonel sends a note down. I had a good relationship with him, because he had really good reports about his records and all and everybody's happy because I got their leave papers done. He sent a note that he wanted me to come back to Cambodia to say goodbye to him before I went home. I sent him a note. I wrote it handwritten, I said, "With all due respect, Sir," I said, "if I can get the pilot on the Freedom Bird to drop on to

your frequency, I'll call you from the plane and tell you goodbye." [laughter] [Editor's Note: Freedom Bird was the nickname for the plane ride home from Vietnam.]

Then, I went to Long Binh and did the out process, but there was a problem. There was too many going home. They didn't have enough flights, so, being an officer, you had to wait. You had no idea. Every night, you went down, and they had a list posted. The plane leaves at three or four o'clock in the morning. They listed names, so, you go and you check it out. I had the shakes for a while. I don't know what was causing it, but there was a chaplain I met. He was with us. I was shaking, and he saw it. We became friends. It was a little group of us; we never knew each other until that point. We were going to a club, and they had strippers and beer and all. He said, "I've got to leave." I said, "No, you don't." He was a Catholic chaplain, and I told him I was in the seminary (the same one he attended). He hits me on the head. He goes, "What are you doing in a place like this?" I said, "It's a lot of fun; that's why I come to a place like this." [laughter] We got him a beer and all that, and we're watching the shows. He had his back to the stage. We went out, and he was playing football. He said, "Hey, Bob." He throws the football. I just stand there and let it drop. He said, "What's your [problem]?" I said, "I don't want to get hurt. I'm out of here any day now." [laughter] Anyways, it was a good experience.

We waited and waited and waited. Days go by, and then we were sitting in the club. I was drinking. I'm normally not a drinker, but that time I had a little bit too much beer. I was feeling it. He comes back, he says, "You're on the flight, the two o'clock flight." I said, "What?" He said, "You're on the two o'clock." I go, and I'm half in the bag. I'm feeling no pain, so, I go and I get all my stuff together and I show up. They had this rule. You can only take home the fatigues you're wearing. I had a uniform, clean uniform, in my bag. I had been wearing the same one for God knows how long and I figured I'd change, but I forgot about it. I get to the airport. They're checking the bags, and they say, "You've got a uniform in there. We're going to throw it away." I said, "No, that's my clean one." I stripped. I didn't wear underwear or anything, [laughter] socks, none of that, because I found it was better. I take everything off. You've got to picture [this]. Now, here's a lieutenant in front of all these guys who stripped down to put the other uniform on. These guys were laughing and looking at me, [laughter] but that point I didn't care. I didn't care.

We get on the flight, and we're going back. I'm fine, but it's crowded and you just can't wait to get home. We landed at Yokota Air Base. They closed all the bars, the liquor stores and everything, because you can't have liquor. They frowned on that. A couple of guys who were with me, they go and they asked the Air Force guy, a young kid, he was a door guard, and they said, "Is there a liquor store around?" He said, "There's one across the street." One of our guys said, "How about we watch the door and you go get us a bottle?" He said, "I can't do that." They said, "Come on." They said, "We've just come back from the war and all." The guy went and got a couple of bottles of scotch, and the guy took a towel and they wrapped towels around it. They were drinking on the plane. I didn't touch it. The pilot came out and was trying to get them to stop drinking, give him the bottle, and that didn't work. They told him basically where to go. The funny part, I'm saying, about the flight going home, nobody cared. We just want to get the hell out of there.

I was smoking a lot at that time. I got up to go to the toilet. There was a seat belt sign on. It had to be an hour, and I had to go bad. I said, "To hell with this." I got up. I'm walking down the aisle, and I had a cigarette because at that time you could smoke on the plane, no problem. I'm walking back, and the flight attendant says to me, "Sit down." I said, "No." I said, "I've got to go to the bathroom." She said, "No, sit down." I said, "No, I've got to go to the bathroom." She says, "You're walking down the aisle with a lit cigarette. That's a safety hazard. You could hurt yourself or somebody else." I looked at her and said, "Where the hell were you when I was going over to Vietnam, if you're worrying about my safety?" I just went, and everybody's booing them. They booed the pilot. Nobody cared. It was just, "Get me home."

Then, when we landed, I had to process out of the Army. We were supposed to stay there a few days. They had a welcome home sign. We sat on the tarmac for a good hour and a half in the sun, which we're used to that stuff, but there were big long lines to process. They kept us out there. It's miserable. Then, they said, "Welcome home, GIs," and they didn't give a damn about us. You'd go in, and they'd give you a certificate that says you get a steak dinner free at the mess hall and they tell you where to go with a map. I had to be there a couple days. A guy told me, one of my friends, "Here, take mine. I'm just going home," because he was going to a new duty station. I went through and then processed in, and then I went and had the steak dinner.

Then, it was Sunday, the next day, so, Sunday I went and I had to get shoes. I went through all this processing. They said you had to be in uniform to go home. I had my low quarters, the Army shoes, and they're all full of holes from the ants. Ants ate through them, so, I had no shoes. I went to the PX [post exchange]. There was five minutes, they were closing early. Sunday, they close, and they said I have to try the shoes on. I said, "No, just give me the size." They said, "You've got to try them on. It's policy." I said, "I don't care." He said, "Well, you can't bring them back." I said, "I don't care." I told them, "Give me the shoes." They're not going to keep me here another day, so, they gave me the shoes.

I went now to go eat. The first thing I go for the steak dinner. I've got another ticket from a friend who left early, and the guy said, "Weren't you here yesterday?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You only get one steak dinner." I said, "But." He said, "They're not transferable. You had your steak dinner. That's it. Goodbye." There was no place to eat. I went all over the place. Everything was either an enlisted mess, where I wasn't allowed in, then the officer's mess was closed, so, there was no place to eat. I didn't get anything to eat.

Then, I went to San Francisco to the airport in the middle of night. There's a flight that left at six in the morning; the last bus was like eleven. The military bus, there was none leaving to make that flight. So, I went to the airport. I'm sitting in the airport, and these hippies come and start harassing me. It was six guys. I go, I'm having something to eat, cheeseburgers. When you're in Vietnam for a year, cheeseburgers and milkshakes, they're just fine, French fries, stuff you never had in a year. I was just loving it. They sat right across from me, making fun of my medals. One guy looked, he said, "Why don't you go back? You killed babies over there." I just ignored them. They said, "Well, he's got to go to the bathroom sometime. Then, we'll get him." I had to go to the bathroom, so, I get up and I walked to the bathroom. I walk inside. A whole bunch of Air Force and GIs are in the bathroom. The guys walked in; they all walked back out. [laughter]

I didn't see them again. They were picking a fight. They were making fun of us. Then, I came home. That was the end of it. That was the tour.

SI: You were not required to do like an extra year.

RS: No.

SI: Was there any reason for that?

RS: No, I got out, but I got called for the Reserves. It is unusual for a Vietnam veteran to have to serve in the active Reserves. I was done with active duty; I was separated. It was a two-year commitment. You don't get a discharge if you're an officer; you get a separation. Then I was asked to go into the Reserves for summer camp first. Then, I went with a Special Forces unit up in Falmouth, Massachusetts. Then, I came back. I received an invite to join a Reserve unit. I liked it. I said, "This ain't bad," so I joined it. I joined the Reserve unit. They put me in armored unit. I said, "I'm infantry." They needed experienced officers. I went to Fort Knox, and I trained on tanks for three or four days, just a crash course, literally, then drive it on the range. It was fun. Then, I was in the Army unit for three years. Basically, I got talked into this program they were starting where you go to regular Army units to see how you can function. Because I had combat experience, they figured I could go into a regular Army unit and function very well. I did that. Then, what happened was I was in another unit. It was a MTC training unit. Then, I left that.

What I wound up doing was there was a program where they took me off a civilian job each summer, and I went into a regular Army unit and I served in an actual capacity in a regular Army unit. I went to Kentucky. It was the 101st Air Assault Division, 1974. That was one of my assignments. I went to Fort Benning. I kept up my education. I took the Army Advanced Course at the Command and General Staff College. In 1974, I went and I had to report to the 101st Airborne, which I wasn't a paratrooper, but that was beside the point. They were air assault helicopters. I walked in, and I met the colonel. He was an outstanding individual. He told me all about the unit, and he wanted my input. He told me he was going to have me evaluate their training. He was Colonel Colin Powell.

That was Powell, and he was a colonel. He invited me to his house. He knew how to throw a party. He had a big sailboat made of ice. He had it carved. It was full of shrimp with the sails and all that. We had a party at his house. Then, after work, we went to the club, and we drank beers. He was a funny guy. He liked to party and have fun with his troops. He was always with his family, his wife and kids. When they had officer's call, his wife and kids were there in the house. He considered them as part of his Army family. His staff was like a nice little family. I liked him. We had meetings, the whole staff, and he'd always go around the room and ask for input. He had a lot of respect for all. You knew that he just respected everybody. Everybody felt like they had something to say. He would listen, but then he would give his opinion and his command decision and everybody was happy. He would always say, "Well, you were right, but let me do this. I agree with you on that one, Tom, but ..." That's the kind of guy he was. There were three thousand people in the brigade. There was not one single person that ever said anything bad about him that I heard. Anyway, I was with him.

Then, I went to the 24th Division, which was newly activated. I did a bunch of stuff here in the Reserves. I worked with the Special Forces, as I mentioned. They had me on a B Team as commander. That was a funny story. They all had to go jump in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. I was getting on the truck to go jump out of the plane. I heard enough jump stories. I don't know if I was wacky at the time or what. [laughter] When they find out, I tell them, "Well, that's the first time I've ever done it." "Well, you did at Fort Benning." "No, I'm not a paratrooper." They had a fit, and they had me come in by ground. I'm commanding a unit. They dropped in by parachute, and I come in on the ground with an A Team parachuted in.

What happened was they had a bunch of these guys who were all Vietnam veterans, too. They were all fillers; these are guys that just had to serve Reserve time. A guy was a long-range patrol guy, First Cav [Cavalry Division]. Long story short, this major, he was incompetent, a Reservist. He never saw any kind of action, never was in Vietnam. He decided we're going to be ambushed by his troops. When I see the movie *Heartbreak Ridge* with Clint Eastwood, when see that colonel, I think of this guy. He had said they're going to ambush us. We walked down this road, and my guys are going to be ambushed. I said, "Fine." We're walking. There's footprints, and they go off into the woods. The guy from the First Cav [said], "Look at this." We sneak around, and we hit them from behind. He has a fit and says, "No, just walk down the damn road." I said, "But you've got to learn. You've got to cover tracks. You don't walk down roads. We knew you were there. What are you supposed to learn?" He says, "Just walk down the damn road." I said, "Okay, fine." We spread out, fifty meters apart. We're walking down this road. Only two guys were in the ambush. The rest of us sneak up and get them. He gets mad at that. Then, he says, "Oh, you guys can do it better? You do it." So, we set up an ambush on the road junction; we kicked their ass. Then, we got them from behind and front. We're trying to say, "This is what you do," and then they didn't want to listen.

Then, the real challenge came in, I guess it was, 1978-'79. Women were taking ROTC for the first time, so, they were taking summer camp training. There were a lot of Rutgers cadets. They were taking training at Fort Bragg that summer, so, I went there. That was one of my assignments. I fit in good there, because everybody respects you when you've got your combat infantry badges. It made good camaraderie. The guys who were with me were good; all the officers and staff had combat experience.

I was training the women. It turned out that the regular Army guys were petrified that they would misstep and say the wrong thing and then their careers were gone. I got orders to stay for the whole six-week cycle. Normally, I'd do two weeks and then go home. They said I had to stay six weeks and they said, "Because your career doesn't matter to you." [laughter] "You can go home and you forget about all this." I had to stay six [weeks]. I did that two summers. It was interesting, because you got women, you'd train them in combat tactics. Some were good; some were bad.

SI: How did that go with that initial class?

RS: I treated them exactly like everybody else. I've got to tell you, you were attracted, you see these pretty things, you want to take care of them and be fatherly and all that, but these are

people who are going to possibly be in a war, so, I took it serious. My job was to teach platoon tactics for the second cycle. The first cycle I taught tactical training of the individual soldier. When the women started crawling, they put camouflage on and started crawling, you could not tell who was a woman, who was a man, no way could you tell. The only way is that they had a little pocket on the sleeve for pens. The men had it on the front. That's the only way you knew it was a woman. You'd be looking and say miss or cadet; you didn't know what the hell to call them. Cadet was fine.

For example, this one woman was in charge of the platoon. It was a tactical thing. She was going to be attacked by another ROTC unit, a different unit. She was in charge, and she had to set up the defense. She had everything fine, she had a whistle and then she sent out a patrol to try and link up and give her advance warning when they were coming. The patrol starts coming back in. She sees them, blows the whistle and everybody starts shooting. She found it's her own people, so, she starts crying. She just kneels down on the ground, she starts crying. I came over, and I was talking to her. I said, "That was outstanding because the firepower was excellent. Everything you did was right. You had the right position. You opened fire and put maximum firepower out there." She said, "Yes, but my own people." I said, "Yes, but realize something, you're never going to do that again. That's the last time you'll ever have that happen and you did it in training, but otherwise it was outstanding." There were some good leaders, and there was others. We had women that refused to put camouflage on, because it would affect their complexion.

One incident we had was one of the cadre, he was from North Carolina University. One of his students, ROTC students, who was female, was down there, and he had failed her. One of the tests she failed. She accused him of hitting on her and she refused, and that's why he failed her. She then made a mistake of saying, while we were at Fort Bragg, because this investigation came later, I'd get on a conference call, I said, Why me?" but, anyway, what happened to the poor guy, we were working on platoon defense.

We had to start at four o'clock in the morning. We didn't get through until like eleven at night, and we had an hour to clean up and get to bed. We had four hours sleep. I literally had to go pound on doors to get people out. I was able to handle it, but some guys just couldn't get up. We were dead tired. I'd be pounding on doors, getting them all out, and we'd get on a truck and go to the training area. We had to bring our own food, because there was nothing. We had no time to eat. You had coolers. Everybody had one. She claimed that he took her out, was bothering her, and she mentioned times when we were doing this exercise. I said, "It's impossible," because the women were in by eleven, but the guy only had four hours sleep at night. I said, "I can account for his whereabouts other than that four hours he's in the room." They proved that she's done this before to other people and all that, but because of that, he lost his job and they told him there's a problem with him dealing with women. They blamed him for the fact; he got nailed anyway. The long story short is they liked me to handle it, because I didn't have to worry about those kinds of things.

SI: Did your employer allow you to take all this time? Were they good about that?

RS: They were good on the two weeks, but when I had to do the six weeks, they kind of balked. I said, "I have no choice." The military calls you, and it's like today, you have to go. It didn't affect my job at all. I just came back. They were very supportive.

I went to [CGSC], Command and General Staff College. What happened, I'm telling you the absolute truth and everything, so, what happened was later, I was putting in an awful lot of time, but I had gained weight. I used to be little, skinny, 135 pounds when I was in Vietnam. I started gaining weight like everybody does when you start working at a desk job. It got to the point where the Army got really tight on weight. I didn't know they measured body fat. I just assumed they just talked about your bottom line weight. I was five pounds overweight, and they said, "If you're overweight and you go to camp and they find out you're overweight, they'll send you home." I was honest, and I told them, "I'm five pounds overweight." I didn't go to camp, and I just got fed up. I didn't do anything and didn't worry about it. I could have lost it. I don't know why I didn't at the time. I let a year go by and then two years, and then I was up for lieutenant colonel. Since I didn't have any activity, I was passed over. I was spending too much time with school, correspondence courses and working on a MBA [master of business administration].

I had another shot. I was kind of at the point that I wasn't getting paid for weekends, and I didn't miss the money. Retirement doesn't give you a lot of money, maybe six hundred dollars a month when you're sixty-five. At that time, it was sixty-five. I said, "Well, many people died that I knew that never even collected a dime." Their family don't get it. Long story, I got tired of it. Then, the regular Army at the time was putting us through a lot more exercises. When I was in the Reserves, six days in the Army is three months because you do two weekends a month, so, you just look at the time. They said, "Oh, it's a six-day project in a week, it should take you a week." No, it takes us a couple of months, because we're only here two days a month.

We got in a hassle, and they, at the top level, wanted the Reserves in with active Army. Interesting, Powell, was at first opposed to having Reservists come in. He didn't think it would work and put them right in the regular Army. Now, that's a common thing. What happened after the Vietnam War, and I knew this was coming, I was telling you earlier, was they looked at the West Point versus ROTC and they said there's no difference, so, they started throwing West Pointers out and keeping ROTC guys in based on performance. That's how Powell became chief of staff. Normally, it was West Pointers, but I felt he was competent. He was good for that job. He was one of the best commanders I served under. I have an OER [officer evaluation report], efficiency report, with his signature on it.

SI: Could we just go back and ask a few questions about Vietnam?

RS: [Yes].

SI: You mentioned that you had a friend at Douglass who told you about the protests here. Did you, on a regular basis, get information about what was happening here, and how did that affect morale?

RS: I can't say regular correspondence. Here and there, she would write me once in a while. It bothered me, because I knew it was coming out of here what was going on. The thing that

bothered us all over there was the deaths at Kent State. That bothered us, because, as we said, "Why the hell? We're over here dodging bullets, getting killed, when you have kids on college campuses being shot by National Guardsmen." That really disturbed us, over something like this, the stupidity of it; we all felt that going to Cambodia, I was there, Cambodia was the right thing to do.

The war was quiet after that. The whole III Corps area I was in was quiet. They were able to pull the whole 25th Division out and send them home, because they were hiding in Cambodia and they were thumbing their nose at us, coming in right across the border, hitting us and going back. I said this was something necessary.

When I heard, the other guys were telling me they cancelled the exams and they had this whole fiasco with the draft, the numbers. They were going to give a test. I heard about that, the big Rutgers test scandal. I said, "That's stupid. Here they're going to decide who's smarter and then the dumb ones they're going to put in the Army." I resented that. The whole idea was stupid. Then, people, they turn in a test, I remember at Rutgers they counted them, somebody told me that story, and they were short, or extra ones, whatever. They didn't know who took the test and who didn't. Rutgers was still having a protest. They stopped exams. One of my friends was laughing. He said, "Thank God for the Vietnam War. We didn't have to take exams this year." I resented that remark. I was sad about what was going on here. This war was winding down. I saw that winding down; it really was. I didn't know the eventual outcome, but I couldn't see people dying on college campuses over it. It made no sense. People did give me some information here and there about what was going on, but, again, I was used to it because I saw it firsthand.

SI: Do you have any questions?

TO: No, I am fine

SI: You mentioned that when you came back and you got back into the workforce that there was prejudice against Vietnam veterans. Did we talk about that on tape?

RS: I told you about that drug test.

SI: Yes, I forget if that was on tape or not.

RS: Yes, it's on tape.

RS: The whole attitude, we were killers. One guy told me he had a job, and he said it was with an insurance company. I said, "There's got be something I could do in this company." He said, "Well, you're not qualified for that. We're looking for experience." It's the old, classic story, "I don't have experience, but if you hire me, I'll get experience." He told me, he says, "The only thing I can see you have experience in is shooting people." He said, "Why don't you go join the mafia?" It's the kind of stuff you got.

Then, they had the whole series of movies that bothered me. All these movies made Vietnam veterans look deranged, stupid or killers. Then, they always had these statistics that it was all the dumb ones that went, and that wasn't true. I can tell you right now we kept statistics. The African American population was the same as they are in this country, and they had just as many rear jobs as they had infantry jobs. There was no difference, and these guys served proudly, no mention of American Indians. All this stuff was hitting us. There was all this negative publicity. We were to blame, because the government's fighting in Vietnam. That's the way we looked at it. The fact that you got awards, you put your life on the line meant nothing to anybody. In fact, you didn't dare wear uniforms when you'd come back, even though you had to, and you didn't talk about it. I was working at my wife's bank, same place, and I said I was over at Vietnam. One of the girls, "Oh, you killed people?" That was her reaction. They don't know me. I saved a lot of lives, too, which they don't understand.

SI: I watching an interview with Bob Kerrey.

RS: John Kerry?

SI: Bob Kerrey.

RS: Bob Kerrey, right.

SI: He was the Medal of Honor recipient from Nebraska, and he was saying that he was a Medal of Honor recipient, but when he first came back, he didn't even put on his applications that he was in Vietnam.

RS: Right.

SI: Was it ever like that?

RS: No, I'm a little rambunctious. I am what I am. I'm not going to kiss anybody. I served in Vietnam, and I'm proud of it and even more so now that I went back there and I realized that this was the right thing and these people understand that, too. They have more respect for me than they do anybody else. Yes, I was a Vietnam veteran, and I was proud of it. I had no hesitation telling people that. If they didn't like it, tough.

SI: It sounds like from what you said that you constantly have this vision that we were there to become friendly with the Vietnamese and to steer them away from Communism and so forth. Did that idea ever waver in your mind at all? Did you ever become disillusioned?

RS: No, not really. I felt we were there to help them, but if I was disillusioned, it was against the things practiced by some of our military people. People that shot prisoners and things like that, that I had a problem with. Let's say that what other people did bothered me. They had no respect. Calley, for example, Calley should have been strung up. They did a survey at the time, and ninety-eight percent of the lieutenants in the infantry say he should have been given life in prison, no parole because we don't tolerate that stuff. What does he do? He gets [paroled]. How do you think we feel? How do you think the Vietnamese feel?

I personally felt that we were in their country, we had to try to minimize the effects of the war on the population. To the extent people didn't do that, that's what bothered me, but I still felt the mission was right because I saw the Communists really wanted to take over and that's it. I see what happened later, and then I talked to the people now that were involved in it. [Editor's Note: The Army charged fourteen men for their roles in the My Lai massacre of March 1968, but only Lieutenant William Calley was convicted. In March 1971, Calley was sentenced to life in prison. On appeal, the sentence was reduced to twenty years and later to ten years. He was paroled in 1974.]

I found out even after, which not many people know, is when the North Vietnamese invaded Saigon in 1975, and the VCs, I told you they reorganized, they took their flag, they were looking at the possibility, they didn't want the U.S. Embassy to leave, they wanted us to stay. They were looking at the possibility, they even asked each other, "What's the possibility of getting the Americans to come back into this war against the North with us on their side?" Then, they said, "It's not going to happen," but they were so upset with the Communists taking over the south. That was not necessarily a Communist maneuver on their part. They wanted to have their government down there and then talk about uniting, but their whole goal was get foreigners out and get the puppet governments out. That's what they wanted to do.

I felt what we were doing was the right thing. I've talked to Communists since I've been back. I was sitting there having a discussion with one guy who was hostile about that, "What the hell? You came to our country" and all this. I said, "No, we were there because of what was going on in the rest of the world. The Communists were trying to take over, we had a fear, when North Korea invaded South Korea, so, we had a fear that the Russians were trying to expand. They took over half of Europe, enslaved these people, and we were afraid the same thing was going to happen in Vietnam. They took over Cuba, influence." That was the feeling at the time.

You can't look at things two hundred years after the fact and with two hundred years' experience and tell you what should have happened. At the time, I felt that this was what happened, and then we were doing the right thing based on what we knew. Most of them tell you now that they look at the war as the United States fighting the Soviet Union with them as the proxies in their country. They knew the war wasn't between us and them; they never felt that way.

SI: You mentioned that you went on this leave to Hong Kong at the end of your tour. Did you ever get to go to Saigon for any kind of leave?

RS: Once. [laughter] Yes, it's interesting. Combat troops were not permitted to go to Saigon. That was taboo because they worried about, you would find out later, Saigon was a nice place. You had a lot of fun. Drinks were fifteen cents, plenty of bars, plenty of women, and there are all kinds of clubs. There was no war there, and everybody knew that.

Anybody that served in Saigon, I would, at that time, tell you that most people if they knew what was going on in Saigon would go there and have the military pay for a vacation. They'd all go. You couldn't keep the airports from stocking up with that many people. We were not allowed because if the combat troops went in and they saw what's going on, they were afraid of fights.

That happened with some units. They went into secure the area around Saigon; they wound up getting into fights in the bar.

I went to Tan Sun Nhut airport. I was supposed to coordinate with the Air Force. They were worried about some kind of attack, so, I had to go down and we were supposed to secure the entrance, because the Air Force don't fight. We had to do it. Let's get that clear. I went into Tan Son Nhut after driving forty miles on dirt roads, and you're covered with this red dust. Vietnam is notorious for this red, sticky dust. You wear goggles and you take the goggles off, and you've got the imprint around you. You're filthy dirty. We go into Tan Sun Nhut with the jeep, and we probably look like the Beverly Hillbillies. There are all these Air Force guys in khaki uniforms staring at us going down, "What the hell is this? All these filthy people."

We parked the jeeps, and we get out. We really wanted to go to the PX and get some things. We don't have that opportunity, and they tell us, "You can't bring guns in the PX." I said, "Excuse me." "You've got to leave your guns." I said, "No, we don't leave guns anywhere because you know there's a war going on outside this base camp here." We had this hostility towards these guys walking around in clean uniforms, and we're out fighting the war. They treated us like dirt.

Did I tell you about the Bob Hope show? We weren't allowed in certain places; they just wouldn't let you in. There was a hospital, and they were showing a movie. We're officers. They had an officer's club at the hospital. We went down there to see the movie, because we hadn't done that in a long time. They threw us out. I said, "There has never been a military officer's club I'm aware of that throws officers out of it because of their branch." There was hostility between the infantry versus everybody else, because we felt we were doing the bulk of the war, the fighting. Yet you hear all these stories about the Saigon Warriors, the Vietnamese today even make that distinction, they laugh about it, but the Saigon Warriors come back and they talk about being Vietnam veterans. [Editor's Note: Saigon Warriors refers to soldiers that served in the Capital Military Assistance Command in Saigon.]

With your question, one time just before I came home, I said, "I want to see Saigon. I've been here for a year. I ought to see it." We got in a jeep, so, I took my old platoon sergeant. He was in the rear at that time ready to go home. I said, "Let's go see Saigon." I took my PSNCO sergeant I was telling you about, and we got in a jeep. He knew Saigon very well, because he was in MACV in his first tour. I took my infantry insignia and folded the collar underneath my web gear so nobody would see it, and we drove around Saigon, just took a look, sightseeing, didn't stop anywhere, didn't do anything, just drove around and then came back.

When I was going on R&R to Hong Kong, I went to Japan in January first before my next assignment after leaving the field, then I was going on R&R in Hong Kong in June. We went down to the MACV clubs. It was right outside the base. That was on the edge of Saigon, Tan Son Nhut air base. We went into the clubs and saw these guys had plush rugs and all that stuff, unbelievable. The drinks were like ten cents. We went in there for a while. That was the only time I was in Saigon. [Editor's Note: United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) commanded U.S. armed forces in Vietnam from 1962 to 1973.]

SI: How do you think the rotation systems, the one-year rotation and then apparently officers after six months you said were rotated out of the field, how do you think that affected combat effectiveness and that sort of thing?

RS: There are double arguments on this. When you changed commanders, in six months, they're just getting their feet wet and understanding what's going on. I didn't see that as a problem, I thought, because people get shot too. We had commanders in the field, I went through two company commanders myself and three battalion commanders; it didn't affect my performance in the platoon at all. Plus, your platoon, you have casualties. I know a lot of people tell you that it hurt the Army, and they said it was because of career, a guy gets his six months and moves on and he gets his ticket punched. It was fast career advancement. I think six months in the field for an officer, if you've seen a lot of combat, was enough, because I think after that you start losing your nerves. You start maybe doing things wrong, so, I believed that. I think six months was right.

I would have rather even enlisted men rotate after six months; a lot of them stayed for a whole year and never left. I tried to rotate them out as well. I think after a certain time, you had enough. You just can't handle too much of that. It depends on what you've seen. I had lieutenants that I knew that never saw action and spent six months there. So, I didn't look at that as detrimental, me personally.

SI: You mentioned earlier maintaining discipline in your unit particularly with keeping the peace signs off of the uniform, and so I would assume that you probably kept a tight handle on drugs and alcohol use.

RS: Yes.

SI: Did you see its effects anywhere? Did you see it in other units?

RS: Well, a couple of comments on that. One is in the combat units, and in spite of Vietnam War movies directed by Oliver Stone, you didn't have people taking drugs because their lives depended on it. You have people standing guard at night. If they're taking drugs, the other guys will straighten him out in a minute, because you're sleeping while somebody is supposed to keep you alive. To say that combat troops are taking all these drugs is a lot of crap. The other thing is they came out, if you remember, with a drug amnesty program. Now, think about this a minute. I go up and I say, "I'm taking drugs" and the Army says, "Okay, we're going to forgive you and send you home." What do you think is going to happen to guys in the infantry?

SI: They want to go home.

RS: That's common sense. That's exactly what happened. People were reporting that they took drugs. The other side of it, we had a couple die of heroin overdose in the rear. We found out when they did an investigation that they were already hooked on it. You had the other extreme. You had people who were coming over because drugs were easy to get, and they were even trying to send marijuana home. They were coming to Vietnam to facilitate getting drugs. I didn't have any problems in the field with drugs, except for one guy who died when I was in the

rear. He was a postal clerk. He overdosed on heroine. His wife informed the investigators that he was on heroin before he joined the Army.

I did have this guy I told you about, he got wounded twice and never wanted to get evacuated. He was a hard guy to deal with, but he respected toughness. He wouldn't get up in the morning. They'd cut the strings on his hammock, and he'd fall down on top of all the ammo boxes. The next day, he got up in the morning, but he'd be swearing at you. The reason he didn't go to the hospital was he hated seeing wounded people. He was very sensitive. He thought it was a real bummer to be in the hospital. He did that once, and that's it. He was a brave guy. He was awarded two Bronze Stars.

He smoked marijuana at times. I knew that, but what happened, you can tell him until you're blue in the face. Other than killing him, you're not going to get him to stop. What do you do? One night, he was on watch, and he alerts everybody, "We've got movement." We come out, and we've got all these sophisticated night vision devices. We don't see a damn thing, and nothing's there. "What are you talking about? Nothing's out there." "Yes, there is. I see him moving." I said, "No." We knew he'd smoked something because his eyes were all dilated and all that. The sergeant said, "Were you smoking dope?" He said, "Forget it. I see movement. I'm telling you, goddammit." I called for an illumination round just for the hell of it. Sure as hell, they're out there. We couldn't see them, but he did. My thinking then was if he's smoking marijuana and he gets that kind of night vision, let him smoke the stuff. [laughter] He was not a problem. He did his job. You overlook some things if it's not affecting the people. If you saw a morale problem or you saw this is affecting the guys, then you'd have to say something. In his case, we kind of let that go. The whole platoon agreed.

[He] had a hernia. Now, this guy was a brave guy. He would get in the thick of fighting. I couldn't do without him. He had a hernia, and he went back to the hospital for a check because he was having pain and they told him he needed surgery. He refused because he said, "I'm not going to stay in the hospital. It's a bummer." I understood that. I said he can't go to the field. He wanted to go back out in the field. It's infantry. I said, "No, we'll make you a driver in an artillery unit, give you another job where you don't have to," because he refused the surgery. They couldn't force him. He said, "No, I want to in the field." I tried to get him out there. The colonel said, "It's going to get worse. He's going to be in pain." I said, "But that's him." He got shot in the leg with an AK-47. He stayed there and put a bandage around it. I said, "The bullet went right through." Another time, he got shrapnel, he had the medic dig it out. I said, "This guy will do it." He only had like four months left or less.

They put him in an artillery unit, and he immediately got into a clash with everybody. He was a driver for one of these big guns. His company commander really hated him. He calls me. He says, "They're f-ing with me. Could you come down here, Sir?" I went down, and he was telling me that they were going to give him a bad conduct discharge and throw him the hell out of the Army. I went to the captain, and the captain got nasty with me. I explained what this guy's history was, and he said, "No." He says, "He's an SOB and he's disrespectful. I'm getting him the hell out. He's getting a bad conduct discharge." I said, "People go to Canada. People don't go to Vietnam. Here's a guy that for a good part of eight months served honorably in the field

and you're just do this to him." I said, "This is ridiculous. Just let him come back to my unit. I'll take him back in the infantry." They refused to do that. They gave him a bad conduct discharge.

You had people who were court-martialed for disrespect. That bothered me, because you had people here that avoided it. I had no problem with that. If you went to Canada, that was your choice, fine, I don't care, but here's a guy that did his job and they punished him. That was worse to have a bad conduct discharge than to say you went to Canada and came back. Nobody even knows that. So, he was marked with that. I tried to find him even after the war to try and find if I can get that overturned. I tried to find him. I went through channels then, and I couldn't do anything about it. That was another disappointment. I always tried to find him to see what happened with him.

SI: Was it difficult when you lost men to go on, or did you become harder? It sounds like you were very close to your men.

RS: Yes, I was, to a point, but I didn't lose anybody. Remember, I had some who were seriously wounded, and nobody was killed because I was lucky with that. They were pretty good. I said, "There's certain things you can do to keep yourself safe. There's some skill involved there." Everybody was good. I did lose people that I knew, friends, like I said, in another platoon. What happens is and especially when I lost my best friend when I was over there is that you ignore it. We go to the mess hall, and nobody mentions the guy's name. They'll say that Lieutenant Dee was killed this morning. I said, "Okay." Everybody's quiet. You don't say a word on it. Then, you go on with your conversations, talk about this, that. You just totally ignore the fact that you heard that. That's the way it was. Then, maybe in a week or two after the shock goes, you're kind of numb to it, after a week or two, then you start maybe talking about the guy, but the first reaction is you just ignore it. I was torn up by some of these people, but you just had to suppress that because otherwise you wouldn't be able to make it.

I had to go and inform a lot, because, as S-1, I knew the casualties. They all came into me. They would give me the line numbers and all that. They'd give you by number; they don't give names over the radio. They'd tell me they had so many casualties, and they'd give me the position and line numbers. You had the list and you're going down the number and you're seeing the names next to it. That's tough.

One of the guys was a sergeant. He was good. Everybody liked him, very popular. What happened was a guy came over, who was a mechanic. He was an E16; he became a squad leader. He came in my office, and he said, "I'm a mechanic. I've always been a mechanic. I'm not infantry. Why am I in a squad in the infantry?" I said, "That's a good question." According to regulations, you can't put somebody in an infantry job unless they're trained for it. That's regulation. He can OJT [on-the-job training] as a mortarman and then go to the infantry, but you can't go directly to any job in the infantry. I checked him out in his records and it showed, "Yes, he's a mechanic all the way." I got him out of that job, sent him to the motor pool.

The other sergeant who everybody liked became squad leader by default. He went back to squad leader, and he gets killed the next day by a sniper sitting on his APC. The guy saw the sergeants' stripes. The mechanic comes in, and he's thanking me. We're all sitting there, because we lost

the guy. We knew this guy. Here's the new guy thanking me, "You saved my life," but, at the same time, you lost a guy. You have so many emotions going on. Here's a guy that I just transferred out because it's the right thing to do, and you lose a friend over a guy you don't even know. Now, think about that. You had all these different feelings, but the majority of times you had to go with it because otherwise you'd go nuts. There's no rhyme or reason to it.

We had one kid. We were getting mortared. Nobody was hurt. He decides to run, and he gets hit right in the head with a mortar. Do you know the odds of hitting somebody in the head with a mortar? It probably never could happen. You could put a thousand people together in a pile, drop mortars in all day and not hit anybody with it directly. This kids gets hit in the head while running. It's just so many baffling things that make you wonder. You just let that go, forget it. Of course, you think about it even thirty years later.

SI: Did you have trouble readjusting to civilian life?

RS: The problem was getting a job. I didn't have a really hard problem, but the problem you had was you come back, I had a girlfriend too when I went over, and I come back, she had a boyfriend while I was there. I didn't know it, but she wrote to me. When I got back, she dumped me. That was the only problem, but the thing is when you come back, you have priorities that are much different than everybody else. To me, I see all the women and all that, everybody was worried about fashions, trivial things.

I said, I always use the expression, even to this day, it's all about toilet seats, because when I was in Vietnam, we didn't have toilet seats. You sat on sticks, wherever you could dig a hole, and you'd sit on sticks, or the best, you had an outhouse with a hole dug in it, cut out of a piece of wood. That was it. I said, "You don't know what it's like when you don't have all these things and you find out the most important things in life are toilet seats, dry toilet paper, hamburgers, cheeseburgers, milk shakes." Those are the things that are important, a beer, whatever the thing is that turns you on.

Everybody here was chasing after things that to me were meaningless, that didn't really matter in life. That was one of the adjustment problems. Then, I think the hardest part was not finding a job. I figured I'd come back, being a lieutenant and all that, going through what I went through and the responsibility I had, I would figure I'd at least get a job somewhere.

SI: The first job you got was with the bank.

RS: No, the first job I got, I worked for the hobby shop for a little while, again, just to make some money. The first job I got was an importer in New York City, and it was a sales job. I was selling imported merchandise, plumbing supplies. I didn't know anything about it, first of all, but also, I was not keen on selling imported stuff. By mutual agreement, I left the place. I just couldn't take it. It was no good. Then, I went to, from there, where did I go?

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

SI: This continues an interview with Robert M. Sees on November 5, 2005 with Shaun Illingworth and ...

TO: … Tom O'Toole.

RS: I worked there, and I'm trying to think if I had any other in-between jobs. I went and then worked at the savings and loans, and I worked there probably about six months or so until Christmas. What had happened was I was in the Reserves, and one of the sergeants in my unit I was pretty good friends with. His boss was an ex-Marine, a German, who was about as militaristic as you can get to the point everybody joked he was a Nazi. He had been with the National Guard. He spoke fluent German; he's from Germany. He was the guard for Hermann Goring during the Nuremberg Trials, one of the guards.

SI: Oh, really?

RS: Yes, and he loved Hermann Goring, thought he was a great guy. My friend, I was working for the savings and loan, so, my friend said that Bell Telephone was hiring salespeople, so, he was going to go talk to his boss. He showed him my decorations and experience, so, he said bring him in for an interview. I came in, and he interviewed me. He said, "You have to take a test. Unfortunately, you've got to show you have some competence." He gave me this test. You had a half an hour to do it. I was done in ten minutes, and I got it all correct, a hundred percent. He calls the personnel [department], and says, "I'm sending a guy down," because they had to make the final [decision], but, "I want him," he said. Because of my background, he wanted me to work for him. He hired me, and then I left the savings and loans, and I worked for Bell Telephone. That became AT&T eventually, and it spun off Lucent. I worked for Lucent. Then, it spun off Avaya. I stayed with them, I got thirty-five years credit with Bell Telephone, AT&T and so on. He gave me the break that I needed. It was good.

SI: At that point, did you have experience in that field?

RS: No, I had no idea. I used telephones, of course, but I had no idea what systems went behind them and all that. Bell Telephone trained you. One thing they do is they bring you in, and they train you on everything. You had nine weeks of basic training, taught you all the systems.

The interesting thing is that we had, which I get a laugh with my daughter being in Livingston College today, you go through all these, write five pages, you all through that, the compositions, you had to do English, all the papers you write, when you go work for a company, you have to unlearn all that and they retrain you. I had to go through a writing course where they train you. People don't read five pages in business world. They can't get through one page. If you don't say enough in the one page, the risk is they're not going to read the rest. They teach you that.

Especially in my job, I was dealing with foreigners. English was their second language. You don't use words that they've got to pick up a dictionary to read every five minutes to see what the hell you're talking about. We had to learn. Bell Telephone was excellent, because they changed a lot of my thinking. They taught you how to write, taught you everything you need to know for the business world.

That was an excellent company to work for, and I was happy there. I felt that I got hit with a double whammy, because I was a Vietnam veteran who had trouble getting a job and then was getting ready for promotion. Affirmative action, the consent decree was signed by the Bell System, so, then the women, minorities all had to get promoted before any of us white males. They didn't consider Vietnam veterans anything but white males. I had females coming in I was training; they were getting promoted before they even got done training. I had to go through that stage.

SI: Which parts of Bell were you in?

RS: I was in sales. Originally, Bell, New Jersey Bell, the way it was organized, I had the North Jersey, Passaic County and originally Rutherford, so, I worked in the Northern New Jersey area, and I would call on customers and sell them telephone systems. At that time, in the beginning, it was '71, it was a monopoly. People would call Bell, and actually they wanted to put telephones in. I'd go out, see where they want to locate, and coordinate with installation groups. It was a fun job. You'd get to meet a lot of people, especially if the company's putting in a big system. Then, you get at the high levels, you get to meet people, get to see how companies operate. You're on your own. You go out and do your own thing. Nobody bothers you. Then, I moved up into technical support. Later, because sales was great, I was doing fine, but some of the bosses felt I had a better grasp of the systems and the complexity of it, so, I got into support-type roles, supporting sales guys, designed systems for them, as it got more complicated.

Then, I decided to go get [a] MBA. I did that. I saw the handwriting on the wall with computers coming. When I was at Rutgers in the '60s, to major in computer science was something that people thought was a joke and, "Why would you get that here? Why won't you go to some trade school?" It was a joke here. I took COBOL at Rutgers and a couple computer courses, but it was nothing [compared to] what was going to happen later.

I got my MBA, which was the best thing I ever did. I was at Fairleigh Dickinson. A professor I had in marketing was from Procter & Gamble; he was a marketing director. The teacher I had for a finance course was a vice president of underwriting at Chase Manhattan Bank. I had people who were leaders, who had experience in the field, who taught all the classes, gave me the tests and graded me, and they were there for questions. I learned all about the financial markets and we did all that, the time we did an analysis and we looked at a company called Walmart and we all concluded it was a good buy at the time back in the 1970s. I found the education was great, and I liked it. I really learned something. I enjoyed going to school. I received a "3.94" average.

Then, I saw computers coming in. I decided, "I'll stay," and I went on for a master's in computer science. Then, as I told you, that one gets obsolete quick. Then, I stayed, and I had an option. When you get an MBA, it's time to leave the company, because [on] Friday afternoon, I finish my last class and I get my diploma Saturday. When I go back to work Monday, the employer doesn't see any difference between you, Monday and Friday. That piece of paper is the only difference. They know you and they see your job performance, that's all that counts. The advice that they give you, and in fact the professor from Chase wanted me to come over for an

interview, but his advice is once you get an advanced degree, leave and go somewhere else, leverage into a higher salary with your experience. I decided I liked my job, and I stayed.

Then, AT&T split. We went through all that reorganization. Then, I wound up working, because I was on the business product side, with AT&T, not New Jersey Bell, which became a network company. I went to AT&T. That's when I did all my international stuff. We'll get into that. That was phenomenal. That was the best experience of my life. I did that since 1987. I was doing international until I retired. That's when I got to Vietnam again.

SI: Was there a certain territory that you covered internationally?

RS: Yes, I was assigned to Asia. Let me give you a little bit of background. AT&T, prior to 1984, the split, the break up, when the government had the anti-trust suits and all that, AT&T was not allowed to go in to international business on the equipment side simply because they said that AT&T was too big and the government was worried about them being too big, bigger. In 1982, we had a million employees.

So, '84 comes along, and they split us up. Then, people decided, "We've got opportunities outside the U.S. Now, we can go into that market." The trouble, I will tell as an aside, they said many corporations in the early '80s and up to the '90s, had no clue about what's going on outside the U.S. and people had no idea. Most companies focused on the U.S. markets. That was only a new phenomenon for many companies.

Around 1987, I was having trouble with the job I was in. I was in the sales branch in Parsippany. I didn't like it; I was not happy. The politics was bad because I had some politicians at that time in the management force. I don't tolerate politicians.

An old boss of mine I had in New Jersey Bell went into an international group, they were just starting up actually, they had started and it failed. He asked me if I'd come in. When I left Vietnam, I never had any intention to travel. That's why I took the job at Jersey Bell. It was great. I would never leave Jersey, wonderful, never, ever would go back to Vietnam, that's for sure. I went to the international job in '87, and they said I'm going to Japan, first trip. They told me I wasn't going to travel, but that turned out not to be the case. Everything changes.

I started going to Asia and I handled Asia, and two of us eventually had all of Asia. Two guys started the business for AT&T, find distributors, set them up and manage them and get the sales going, help them, support them, and they had two guys handling Europe and two Latin American. I wanted to handle Latin America because of my wife, but my boss didn't want me to. He said, "You've got Asia." I was traveling to Asia a lot and opened up slowly from Japan, I opened up markets in Singapore, then worked with the R&D [research and development] people to get the product fit to that environment. There were little things, like you pick up the phone and dial zero here, okay, get an operator. In Japan, you dial nine. There was modifications that had to be made that nine was given the operator. These are the type of things I had to work closely with the R&D to get the product up to speed.

That's a long story, but we eventually got a real good product. I was handling it all by myself. Then, eventually, a new president came in. He said, "What the hell is this?" There's a market out there, international. He was appalled how bad we were internationally. Then, they built it all up. We had a vice president of international. It just expanded after that. I was there when we made, the first time I think in 1999, we broke a billion dollars in international, so, from zero to a billion. The first year I was there, '87-'88, we made ten million dollars.

Then, 1994, AT&T just prior to that, the Vietnamese were putting pressure because they had to call through Canada, they were paying a lot of money to call Vietnam. AT&T put a line in to connect to Vietnam, and all hell broke loose. All these POW (prisoner of war) organizations, everybody went crazy, and the Vietnamese here we supported but nobody else did.

In 1994, since I was handling Asia, they were sending all the letters to me to answer from people who were disgruntled employees and so on, not outside employees, the guys that would rip up their IDs and send them to the president, chairman. Because I was a veteran with combat record, they felt I was the right guy to answer these questions.

Now, we still hadn't lifted the embargo yet, but the U.S. gave approval for AT&T for long-distance line service, there was pressure to lift the embargo. I had a distributor in Taiwan who was also selling foreign brands in Vietnam; they had a subsidiary in Vietnam. Vietnam's corporate structures are different. You can't sell direct in Vietnam; you have to have a liaison office. Every time you sell to an agency in Vietnam, they've got to do the importing and all that so it looks like any transaction is actually between them and us but the other guy is in the middle of it. That's the rules. They were worried about people taking over and taking all their money and they don't make anything.

In 1994, I decided to let this Taiwan company handle Vietnam. As soon as the embargo lifted, I made plans to go over there, and they said they were ready to sell. I got the visa, and they set it all up. I said, "Oh, hell, I'm going to Hanoi." I thought, "Should I be doing that [laughter]?" I said, "Fine." I wasn't worried about it. I get on the plane, it was July, July 10th was when we signed the agreement, so, it's early July, I get on the plane, I fly to Taiwan with the intent that they're going to escort me down to Vietnam. They were worried I might have some kind of reaction.

They put me on the plane, and we fly to Hanoi. People meet us with cars, my own local staff. We go to the hotel and check in. The hotel, at that time, was crummy in Hanoi. Everybody was on bicycles. The place was absolutely decrepit, but it was nice. The water, there was no pollution, and it was a beautiful city. I went sightseeing and all of that. Then they decided we're going to have dinner that night with the key customers. I mentioned that story.

SI: That was another day by now.

RS: They set up, during the time I was there, the schedule was they were going to set up a lot of meetings with potential customers. We were going to have a formal contract signing on the tenth of July, and then we were going to go see some more customers. That was just the game plan, and I was going to actually work with their staff, play the American role. That's a very effective

strategy. The key thing with businesses is to have local presence, to have local people dealing with their own kind, and have an American come in and show you're interested, from the U.S., that you're interested in this distributor and you're interested in their business and so on. That's a very effective way to do business.

They picked me up, and they said, "We're going to a restaurant." I didn't have any idea what this was. I'm just going along. They take you, you get in the car, meet you at six, whatever. I get on this boat. We go out to the dock, and we walked on top and go up the stairs. They have all big tables set up, chairs, on the top deck of the boat, beautiful. It's a nice night. It's cool. The lake, you could see right to the bottom, it's perfectly clear. We're sitting there. A whole bunch of Vietnamese come up the stairs, and they take the other side. The guest of honor in the Asian culture always sits in the middle, so they considered me and the vice president of the National Assembly, we were both considered as key guests.

We sit down. He didn't speak any English, so, we're looking at each other. That's it. What do you say? [laughter] We just started talking through the interpreter. He asked me if I have ever been to Vietnam before. I said, "Yes, I've been here before," I said, "In 1969." [laughter] He just smiled, and then we're talking about what's my impression of Hanoi, just chit chat. I liked Hanoi and all. Then, he tells me that Vietnam is a little bit worried because they like Americans and American products, they want to do good business with us and they think we can help the country, but they said because of our attitude, now, you've got to watch the translations, too, people say, so, you've got to be careful when interpreters say something. A lot of people get offended, but you don't know what the word is they translate. He says, "Because of our attitude," he says that, "we had to hold back contracts. We were waiting and waiting," he said, "for you to lift the embargo." He said, "Now that you lifted the embargo, we've got these contracts we hope we can give you. Your timing is correct, because if you wait any longer we have to give these contracts to Japan or the Koreans or Taiwanese, but we want the American involvement." I said, "That's why I'm here." I said, "If the embargo was lifted, now we're free to do business here."

Then, he started saying he didn't ever meet any Americans before. He said, "You're the first one I've ever met." He says he didn't know how we're going to get along, and I said, "We'll get along fine." I said, "By the way, I'm your worst case." The interpreter, this is all interpreted, so, he was looking puzzled. I said, "I was here as I said in 1969-1970. I was an infantry officer, and I fought in the war." He smiles. [laughter] He said, "Well, welcome back." [laughter] He asked me if I saw anything different from the time I was here, and I said, "Yes." I said, "The people are all dressed better. It seems like they're happier, they're smiling."

One of the other guys who was sitting there, a Vietnamese, said something to everyone, and the interpreter told me what he said was, "Of course people are smiling," he said, "when the last time you were here, what did you expect when you have a rifle in your hand? Were you expecting a smile?" I said, "The people, I like the people and I've been here for only a couple of days. I think everything is great." Then, I told them that basically the reason I was here, "I came to your country because I wanted you to have a better life for your children," I said, "then peace and a good future for your country." I said, "That's why I'm back, the same reason. He says, "We wanted the same things," but I said, "We had a different point of view on how to accomplish that." I said, "But when I was here last time, I had generals and politicians telling me what I had

to do in Vietnam." I said, "Now, you and I will decide what we do in Vietnam, not the politicians or the generals." We talked like that a lot. I'm trying to think of some other quotes. Anyway, he said, "The Vietnamese people are very generous people and they're happy people and they want to have a good future." He said that they don't have compulsory military anymore. They don't want to fight. They don't want the kids in the military. He said they always liked Americans. They had a connection with America.

There's a lot of Vietnamese who are very successful businessmen in America. He says, "It's great that we can meet." I said, "I will do everything in my power to try and help." I said, "Well, I'm going to be selling products, but I want to try to do everything I can to help your country because my products will help build the infrastructure, which is different. We're not trying to sell you products, we're trying to help build the infrastructure here, give you better communications." He was telling me the Vietnamese people always think of the present and the future. They never look back in the past. That's one of their cultural issues. I don't remember how that thing related, but basically he said to me, "Let's put the past behind us and let's look to the future together and work together." I said, "Fine." So, we grabbed hands, stood up, and everybody was cheering. Now, we were eating in between, and everybody is cheering. They thought this was great.

Then, they invited me to a National Assembly meeting, which they were having the next month, and he said I was the first American ever invited to attend one. He was the top guy. It was a meeting when the Communists come in from China and all that stuff. I would have liked to go. I was invited, so, I asked for a formal invitation. You've got to be careful when you say things. I asked off line to my interpreter if I can get something in writing inviting me because then it's something to say I was the first American ever invited to come back to their National Assembly. I thought that was an honor. He said he can't do that. It's not proper because it's not an official invitation, so to speak, so that might rub people the wrong way. It would raise questions with Chinese officials. You have to learn the culture here. I said, "That is fine."

I got to meet everybody. Then, we had parties, and the same guys would come, let your hair down, so, we talked about all kinds of issues and got to be friends. We talked about how he's got to be careful. Vietnam wants to get away from Communism. He said their success is for people to make money the best way they can in Vietnam. They said, "Then, you can't do that with the Communist rules." They bog everybody down, and he said, "It's paranoid" and all that. We talked about, for example, POWs. After a while, you get into that, where you could talk freely. That was a compliment that you can talk like this.

We're sitting eating another time. He said to me that he doesn't understand American points of view here. He says, in Vietnam, he says, "Okay, we had a war." He says, "You have dead people, you have crippled people and you had missing people, all three." He says, "Why are the Americans so worried about the missing people?" I explained that it's important to us, to families, to have the bodies back to know what happened to them. He said they have a hundred thousand of their own people missing that they know are dead. If they're not dead, they would have come back.

The other thing he asked me, he says, "You were here. If you were here and you were in the woods and you were a POW and escaped and you were running around in the woods." He was talking about the Japanese in World War II who stayed for fifty years on islands in the caves. He said, "Would an American soldier hide out in the woods for twenty-five years?" It was twenty-five years since the end of the war. I said, "No, they would try to make contact somewhere, assuming that the war ain't going to last twenty-five years." He was saying that they don't understand, number one, why our emphasis is on the missing, because that's a cultural difference since Vietnamese don't put an emphasis on that. You're trying to deal with that cultural issue. Number two, he says, "Where would we put them? If we had people that are still alive, what will we do with them? What advantage would we have keeping them?" He said he couldn't understand that. So I said yes, but he said that they're going to work hard now to try and account for as many as they can and they're doing that. They're looking.

Now, we had this contract signing. I was telling you earlier we had all the news agencies, Hanoi television was there and all that. I was just a peon. I never had been exposed to a press conference. We had a press conference.

I went out after it was over, and I was talking to this old gentleman. He was the one that arranged it. They hired him as a consultant, a nice old gentleman. That's when I said to the interpreter, he didn't speak English, I said, 'Tell him I'm very impressed at how he got all these people here and made such a nice affair." He said, "You know he's a famous person here. He was a hero at Dien Bien Phu. He was a general. He's a hero, a national hero." He says, "So, everybody knows him. If he says something, they do it." I looked at him, and I said, "Thung Hui." He starts smiling. He's laughing. The interpreter's just saying, "What? What did you tell him?" He's talking in Vietnamese. He said, "You said a Vietnamese word. He understood it, and none of us ever heard it before. How can that be? You don't speak Vietnamese." I said, "No." He explained to him in Vietnamese what that was, and he tells me he was a general in Vietnamese.

Then, he learns English. He said he wanted to be friends with me, so, we became friends. Every time I went there, I saw him. He shows me pictures of his grandkids. I was there maybe two months later, he took me to a museum, and we walked around talking about Vietnamese history and about the war. We got to be very, very close friends. I told him I'd like to go back to Dien Bien Phu with him and have him show me the battlefield, but we never did that.

Every time I came, he took me back to meet his friends. We were out and sitting on the lake in a little food stand where we were having coconut juice. I was sitting on a little stool. My legs were cramped; it was for small people. Then, he takes me to this cultural show, and there's all these tourists sitting. You have to picture of this, the Vietnamese cultural thing. You had the old instruments they're playing, one string instrument and all ancient traditional instruments, and you had the dancers. They're singing and dancing. They had the native costumes on. He comes in and stops the whole show. See, he's famous. I mean, they know him, so, he stops it. He's telling them stuff in Vietnamese. They asked two people, there was about forty people in the audience, he asked front row people that they go to the back for just a few minutes and they said okay. I sat down, and the girls come, there was three girls, and they were singing to me. Then, one took the hat off at the end and put it on my head. He's taking pictures. I have pictures of all this. He's

taking pictures, and he's having a good time laughing. He said to me that the name of that song is "You're my friend, please stay, don't leave Vietnam." I looked at him. I said, "Twenty-five years ago, you wouldn't have sang that to me." [laughter] We had that kind of relationship.

Then, we got talking about, would Americans torture people? They're trying to figure out why they did. I went to Hoa Lo Prison, and we went to see it. He took me on a tour of that before they demolished it. Now, they've just got a small section they made a museum out of it. We were talking about torture. That's the kind of relationship we had. He spoke Chinese, French, Russian, he spoke Japanese and he spoke Vietnamese and English, so, he was well versed. He was telling me, like I said, that he spent forty years of his life fighting. I met his wife and his grandchildren and all, so, I gave his granddaughter an English dictionary, English to Vietnamese dictionary, I got from my last trip. She was practicing English with me. His son was married to the prime minister's daughter. All these people are related, they all have connections.

Then, in the summer of 1994 or 1995, the San Francisco mayor decided to have a joint city-to-city type thing, but he made it Ho Chi Minh City, Saigon, and San Francisco, because the Vietnamese even agreed that it might not sell very well in California to have a relationship with Hanoi because the Vietnamese people were upset. The Chamber of Commerce arranged this big show, and the Vietnamese were coming in with all their products at the wharf in San Francisco. They were going to have a day, and I was supposed to be a speaker. They asked me if I would speak only because I was one of the few people that had any kind of experience doing business in Vietnam successfully. It was only a short period. It was still the same year, '94. I went to San Francisco, and I met the mayor and his staff. We got to be friends. Then, the Vietnamese all set up their wares.

There were big protests, all the California Vietnamese calling them all VC and all. These young girls were coming. A twenty-four-year-old girl wants to show the shoes that they make and all, and she was so upset. I said, "Just relax." She said, "They're my own countrymen. Why do they call me VC? What is that?" She said, "Why are they so upset with me?" I said, "Don't worry about it." [laughter] I went to talk to these people at the picket line. They had cops all over on horses. They were totally unreasonable. I said, "Why?" They said, "You shouldn't be doing business." I said, "But that's the way to get back to there. That's the way to change things." I said, "If I go there as an American, you go back there, they'll welcome you back. They're proud, they're bragging about the Vietnamese guy who was number one in the graduating class at the Air Force Academy. They claim he's their own. They don't look at these people as their enemies." I was trying to explain things (forget the past).

They said they were corrupt, their government. I'm thinking, I didn't say it, but I'm thinking, "What about Thieu? Please, what about all your generals? That's why you lost the damn war." [Editor's Note: Nguyen Van Thieu served as the president of South Vietnam from 1967 to 1975.] There were some Marines with me and Special Forces guys, all veterans. The veterans, by the way, are the ones that are doing their thing to help in Vietnam, not the people that protested. We were doing everything we can to help the people and the country. I said, "You've got to remember that half the country was on our side, so, don't cut the whole country off because of the fact you don't like the north."

Anyway, I go in and the lawyers are in there, and they had all American companies and this whole session. There was people talking about doing business, signing contracts. It was going very bad. Everybody's telling about corruption. The leader of the thing went to the mayor, and they asked me if I can go on earlier and talk positive about doing business there. [laughter] I got up. What everybody else was doing, especially the lawyers, was I'll give you a talk and then you can ask questions at the end. In my case, they said you can ask questions anytime, so, they changed the whole structure of it. They were asking me, one of the lawyers, "When you sign a contract, do you put in this, that and the other?" I said, "Excuse me." I said, "I'm not a lawyer." I said, "But it seems to me that if I have a distributor in Vietnam and I've got to put all the stuff in writing and I don't trust the guy and you've got to sign this and I've got to sign and we're going to argue about conditions and who does what," I said, "maybe I need another distributor. Maybe we shouldn't be working together in the first place." I said, "My distributor and I shake hands. We have a contract that's nothing but procedures, how do you do things, for explanation." I said, "It covers some foreign corrupt practices and all that." Everybody's clapping. Finally, you break through the nonsense.

Somebody said, "I'm a lawyer." Lawyers, the biggest thing that screws up business is lawyers, because they make it too complicated, which is true. I relate it in Japan. I used to go in 1988, I'd sign a contract with the Japanese and I would negotiate with them. As soon as the lawyers, later on, we expanded and had international lawyers, they went to negotiate contracts. Then, the Japanese had to bring their lawyers in, and that was totally the way they didn't like to do business, that, "You bring your lawyers in, and we've got to bring ours." Then, they suspect that you're going to try to pull something over them. When you bring a lawyer in, all of a sudden the Asians back off, "What are you up to? What are you trying to make me sign here?" Then, it takes months to get the thing done.

So, anyway, I spoke, and everything went real good. Mayor Jordan, Jordan was the mayor, Frank Jordan. I went back, I had a session, I don't know if Le Ly Hayslip was the one that did it. She was the subject of the Oliver Stone movie he made about her life. She was a peasant in Vietnam. [Editor's Note: *Heaven & Earth* is a 1993 movie directed by Oliver Stone.]

TO: *Heaven & Earth*.

RS: *Heaven & Earth*, yes. I met her; I liked her. Then, Ron Kovic, I met. [Editor's Note: Ron Kovic is the subject of Oliver Stone's 1989 movie *Born on the Fourth of July*.] They were all involved in this type of stuff, but they were more looking to get involved. She had a hospital near Da Nang. So, we're looking for that. On some of my trips, something interesting is, I was in Da Nang, and I saw Hue. I went all over the country. My friends and associates took me on trips, side trips.

A lady who was a secretary, her daughter was eight years old, and then she kind of adopted me as her father. She liked me. Her father was killed in a helicopter crash in 1986. He was in the Vietnamese Army. This set me off too, because he was a helicopter pilot, he dropped her off in Da Nang. He was flying back. Somebody else was flying the helicopter. He bummed a ride. The helicopter crashed between Da Nang, it's a two hour flight, and Saigon, somewhere. They did not find the helicopter crash site. She went around in a motorcycle trying to find her

husband. She lost her husband, who was missing. Here, you've got peacetime, and they had search and rescue. They couldn't find the downed pilot that went down in the jungle. Some peasants found them eight months later, the bodies. She took me around to see where she taught school, and it was great.

Originally, she was supposed to take me to Hue on sightseeing, but then she told me her father was sick and he lived in Da Nang. I said, "I don't have to sightsee. I mean, if you've got a chance to go see your father, let's go see your father." I went to her house. The father was a captain in the North Vietnamese Army. We shared tea together. They serve you tea; that's the custom. We got to be close to her family. We went to Da Nang; it was fun. They had a night club. In Vietnam, if you want to dance, on the up-and-up, you can rent a lady for six dollars an hour. She said they were going to rent me a lady to dance the tango. I said, "No." I said, "I'll dance with you if it's all right." We were dancing.

Then, Mr. Hua was one of the sales managers for the company selling AT&T. We're sitting down having dinner, and then I find he was a VC in Da Nang. He fought against the Marines. Now, you didn't know this. You're just with these people, and you don't know what their background was. He told me he was a VC. Then, he told me the war stunk. It was terrible. He didn't want to go out there and fight Americans.

We had all these stories going on, millions of them, which shows how the people are, who had no use for Jane Fonda or any of the protesters. They all figured they were traitors. Again, like I said, they couldn't understand why we'd be fighting their own people. The young people can't understand it. They like us, and they see we're nice people. How would I be over there killing them? They told me that I had good karma, and they said that they thought that I had been a Buddhist monk my last three previous lives. That's why they felt I didn't do anything wrong in Vietnam while I was there because my karma was good; that's what the Buddhists felt. They had religious freedom, and all the U.S. government told us was not true. I went to so many Buddhist temples with them. I even taught the little girl how to pray in Buddhist temples and all that. [Editor's Note: Mr. Sees is referring to Jane Fonda's anti-war activism. In 1972, Fonda made a controversial visit to Hanoi on behalf of the North Vietnamese, and as a result, many Americans viewed her as a traitor.]

I was going to one of the museums. See, Hanoi does it very nice, but Ho Chi Minh City, Saigon, still has some bitterness towards the war. I think a lot of it has to do with our allies rather than the enemy. I was in Hanoi, and we went to this museum. It got to me because one room was the mothers' room and they showed all the women and the families. This woman lost eight kids. Her eight sons were killed in the war. This one lost seven. They're showing all this. I started to get tears in my eyes, because it really affected me, when a woman loses seven kids, eight kids.

With that, they went nuts, my escorts, the people who were with me, and they said they were so sorry. Then, one guy said, "Don't feel bad." He said, "You weren't the one that sent eight kids in the same family to fight you. You didn't do that." He says, "The damn government did. It had nothing to do with you." They told me not even to worry. That story got all around that I was very sensitive, and the guy that took me there was under a little pressure, "Why did you take him there in the first place?" They had respect for me, but think about this. I'm a former enemy, and

they're worried about my feelings in their country, how I feel about them. They told me, "It wasn't your fault. You had nothing to do with this."

Then, I took tours of the palace, the Reunification Palace. They showed me where Thieu had his bar, dance hall. Then, we go into one room, and I was explaining a lot to people about the technology too and the maps. They had the maps from the end of the war. They took me, and I said, "What is this room?" He says, "A movie theater," and I said, "Movie theater?" They showed me the cameras. Somebody in the group says, "See what you were fighting in the jungle to protect when you're out there." [laughter] I laughed. They thought it was funny.

My company did a charity thing in Vietnam a few years ago. What happened was there's a school for the deaf and unable to speak, and the kids put on an act for us. We gave them a big donation. We have all our distributors from all over Asia, had a meeting there, and I got awards from the company to acknowledge all I did for Vietnam both back then and now. It was quite good. They gave me an award in the Hilton Opera Hotel, Hanoi when I retired in 2001.

I took people from the distributor group on a bus, went on a tour, and I took them to my battlefield, showed them all around. Just previous to that, I went down to the tunnels at Cu Chi, that's where I was, not in that particular area, but in that same area when I was telling you about all of the fights in the woods. That's where their war museum is going to be. They have the tunnels where they used to hide. You can actually go down in the tunnel bunkers, crawl through it. They have a whole lecture and all that, TV programs. I took the distributors there, and what happened was they were talking to all the people and then they took them on a tour. I was giving the counterpoint. The Vietnamese guy was there, he was talking about all the things to hide in the smoke from cooking in tunnels. I said, "Yes, but we put smoke bombs down. We could see the smoke coming out." He said, "They never found these tunnels." I said, "Yes, we did. We bombed them. We had tunnel machines, and bombs that dropped on it." Another time, the people were from Australia and Denmark. They thought it's fascinating. They were getting a real good show. We went down into one of the bunkers, and the staff was all wearing, they were young kids, wearing VC uniforms. I thought that was great. I tell them, I said, "Years ago, they were dirty," but I gave credit to the fact that their ancestors fought so hard and they should be proud.

They wanted me to meet somebody. I go down in the bunker, and lo and behold, there's this old woman. She's got the VC suit on, black pajamas and a scarf. They never wore scarves. I never saw them until later, but that was part of their uniform. They were talking to her in Vietnamese, and they told her I was there in 1969. I asked her where she was. She says the same place. A female unit was located in Cu Chi, and we engaged them one day. Our interpreters told us they found long hair from the women after my November 1969 battle. We were talking for a while, and then she sat down. She gave me papaya and poured tea, and she hugged me. Everybody's taking pictures. Everybody thought that was great. All these kids were standing there in the VC outfits, and I'm with a former VC. All the tourists are taking pictures of us, and the people said, "We're so glad that you two survived and that's great". It was a great experience.

I became really very knowledgeable of business in Vietnam. We sold to the power company. I took them to Washington. I also had a tour with the Ministry of Education. We went down to Washington and tried to get them some funding. I helped fund the trip.

They were treated pretty bad by Congress. The congressional aide said that they were the wrong people to win the war, "We're not too happy with that." This is during Clinton's Administration, so, I didn't understand the problem. They were kind of hostile, so, I got mad. I got up, and I told the guys, "Look, I fought in the war. You guys obviously didn't." I said, "I was there and I went through this pain and suffering and the U.S. abandons these people and leaves them alone." He made the comment Vietnam's not important. I said, "That's exactly what people said in 1952 when Ho Chi Minh started asking for help." I said, "Everybody said 'Where's Vietnam?'" Nobody could even find it on a map. I said, "Well, yes, you're going to learn that Vietnam is going to be a powerhouse economically someday, I'm hoping." I told them, "The government sent me there. I come back. I've got no support, no aid. People harassed me." I said, "Now, twenty-five years later, I'm back in that country, you're doing the exact same thing to them." I said, "When's it going to stop?" They were telling me to calm down, the Vietnamese, "Relax."

In a meeting in the Senate, they were talking about, "Well, you don't have freedom of religion." The Vietnamese visitor says, "Can you say prayers in your schools here?" They were doing that, that kind of stuff. Then, they said, "Well, you don't let people leave the country." He said, "No, we will gladly let people leave the country, but there's an economic problem. These people are all poor and they want to leave the country because they want to get better lives somewhere else." He says, "Where are they going to go? Nobody wants them." He says, "Hong Kong rejects them. Malaysia rejects them." He said, "I'll tell you what," he said, "if you're so concerned about Vietnamese people leaving the country, you send me the money for their airfares and we'll fly them to your country, no problem." They were doing this. They made monkeys out of them, but their points of view were different, the way that they explained things, I said, "This is how people get into arguments," like freedom of religion, because they persecute the Cao Dai religion because Cao Dai is anti-government. They tried to rebel. They talk about, "You persecuted religion." He says, "What about David Koresh?" They knew their stuff. "David Koresh in Texas, what happened with him?" [Editor's Note: In 1993, the FBI laid siege to a compound near Waco, Texas belonging to the religious sect Branch Davidians, led by David Koresh. The siege ended on April 19, when a fire swept through the compound and killed seventy-five people.] They always had these answers, and I was impressed by these guys.

These are the top educators, the minister of education and sixteen rectors, which is the head of the schools. What they were trying to do is they had no ability to transfer credits between schools. The sponsor, a U.S. education group, took them around to different universities to see how they did things. Vietnamese colleges were all archaic. There's no real high tech in any schools. Then, they basically took a trip, and we showed them everything. Then, they tried to get some kind of money from Congress, but nobody would give them any. The guy was the Minister of Education. The thing is they came here. Let's say if you're [George W.] Bush or you're [Dick] Cheney, you're a big shot. A Vietnamese premier is nothing to these people. They're not treated with the same respect, because it's a small country. I said, "But the thing is you remember Ho Chi Minh. Everybody treated him the same way and look what happened."

This general I know knew Ho Chi Minh, because he talked a lot about him. He said that Americans characterized him totally incorrect. He was a very kind, decent man. If you took a tour of his house, he has no walls. People could walk around, you could see him in there. Anybody who wanted to talk to him can go in. He said that people came from the south during the war and came to the hotel, and they requested meeting with him. They were just VC fighters. He actually came to the hotel and walked in their room, he says they're heroes to him, why should they come to his place? He came to them.

All these stories, I can sit here for hours. I would say that Vietnam is the worst place I've ever been in my life. It's also the best place I've ever been in my life, depending on the time frame. I enjoy the country. I love going there, and you have a lot of fun at night. Karaoke is a big thing over there. It gets tough. We were going around making sales, go to dinner, go to karaoke, and at midnight, you quit. That's your day, all the time, karaoke, and everybody drinks. They're big drinkers. Vietnam Airways has all our equipment, the railroad, power companies, steamship lines, government, the military is all American equipment, all ours. The whole network we put in. There's not a thing in Vietnam that doesn't have American equipment, no agencies. We've got ninety percent of the market, the trouble is there's no place to go from there.

SI: Do you have any questions before we go?

TO: No.

RS: I'm just trying to think was there anything else I did with them.

SI: Is there anything overall that we skipped over?

RS: What I was trying to portray was my involvement in the war and the fact that I can come back to Vietnam. I've got to say I'm happy for the fact that most people don't have an opportunity to do that. Nobody goes to a country, destroys it and then can come back and make an impact on the same place. I went to, for example, to the military headquarters, we sold to the military, all the bases, I go and I had a meeting with the generals. They have a general in charge of communications. He was a colonel, and he got promoted because of his successful implementation of AT&T. We had a meeting scheduled. I would show up at the building, hand in my business card to the guard. He's standing there with the same uniform they had in the 1960s, AK-47. He makes a phone call and then comes back and renders a big salute. Every time I'm walking around at the headquarters, the military people, they're all saluting and all that. I got to fight one period and go back and get saluted in another, same people.

At the same time, I told them, they know this, I don't regret anything I did in 1969 and '70, and 58,000 American soldiers died. I don't know the numbers, we hear a million people died in the Vietnam War on their side. They tell me strictly from the north 86,000 died, that they lost 86,000 troops were casualties. They don't distinguish missing and all that. They're dead as far as they're concerned. I have no regrets, as far as the veterans and the guys I knew that died there, I was hoping that when I went back and did business and we made peace with that country and became friends, that's what we tried to accomplish and we did accomplish. It took a long time, but I think we got there.

As I always said, the thing I learned is that people, I think I talked to you about this offline, what I didn't know is that the general had his sister living in Los Angeles, he was a devout Communist soldier. The friend I had whose father was a captain in the North Vietnamese Army, his sister married an American soldier and she's living in Pennsylvania. What I had learned over there is everybody hedged their bets. If the north had lost, they would all come here and live in the United States. That is the game plan. They would be the refugees. If the South lost, then they came. That's the way they worked it out. One of the guys, for example, his father was a minister of justice, he sent him to Paris to be educated during the French time. He decided not to go back. He met an American woman, married her, and at the time, he was wanted as a criminal. Now, he's welcomed back. Premier [Nguyen Cao] Ky went back.

They want to mend relationships with everybody. I think that's the positive thing. I don't look at the war as all are lost, dead and all that, I look at the fact that it's positive. Today, we're trying to get where we should have been and what we all wanted to achieve.

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

Transcribed by Domingo Duarte and Steve Campbell
Transcribed and reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 5/9/18
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 5/10/18

Addendum:

Time did not permit the addition of one story, which I believe is of interest to Rutgers. While on a river excursion northwest of Hanoi with my senior business associates and their important customers, I met Mr. Hung Le Pham from Hanoi, who was earning an MBA in California. I was impressed by him and invited him to come visit when he got to the East Coast. I eventually hired him to work in my group in New Jersey Headquarters supporting South East Asia. During one of his business trips to Vietnam, he married and returned with his new wife to New Jersey. She was a medical doctor in Hanoi, as was her father, and decided to get her U.S. certification so she would be licensed in the United States. She was accepted to Rutgers Medical School and received straight "As," which got her full scholarship to an exclusive medical school in Kentucky where only five students were offered this type of scholarship. It was here that she became a fertility specialist. She received numerous offers upon graduation, working at Morristown Memorial, Columbia Presbyterian, which paid for her permanent residency, and finally settling in a Las Vegas clinic with her family. Her long-term goal is to set up fertility clinics in Vietnam, where this is a serious medical issue. When my wife and I traveled to Hanoi in 2002, both of their families had a gala dinner party in our honor. For me the fact that I graduated Rutgers ROTC and served in the Vietnam War and the fact that my service helped a family attend Rutgers and become successful is incredible to me and their family. This was a complete circle back to Rutgers.

In 1997, I realized how much had changed as I was having lunch with three of my business associates, Mr. Pham from Hanoi, Mr. Lu from Shanghai, and Mr. Kanovalov, who had been a Soviet Intelligence Officer, from Moscow. We all remarked how we had all been enemies a few years before and now we worked for the same company with the same goals.

Recently, Mr. Pham was on vacation with his family in Hanoi and met my old business associates and friends. They sent me an email expressing how much fun and great times we had together in Vietnam. I found this very amusing.