Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. Thomas Spencer on the 8th of October 2001 at approximately ten o’clock. We are in the Special Collections Library in Lubbock, Texas, Texas Tech University and Jon Bernstein, Graduate Research Assistant, Oral Historian, is accompanying us. Sir, why don’t we begin with a brief discussion of your early life, and if you would tell us when and where you were born and where you grew up.

Thomas Spencer: I was born in San Diego, California, on October 2, 1934. I grew up in Chula Vista, California, which is a small town south, or half way between San Diego and the Mexican border, at which time it was a lemon town, predominantly lemon orchards and other agricultural products and I grew up in an agricultural family.

SM: Did you work in a farm environment?

TS: Yes, I worked for my father who was an agricultural contractor doing service work in lemon orchards for other people who didn’t have a large enough orchard to afford manpower to do it. I worked in lemon packinghouses, some work in vegetable fields, predominately in that area.

SM: What was it like growing up in California during that period? You would’ve been coming of, I guess, memory of adolescence in the early ‘50s, late ‘40s, early ‘50s.

TS: I graduated high school in ’52. We grew up in that period, it was I guess you’d say it was broken by the Second World War that came in ’41. San Diego being a large Naval facility, wherever you wanted [there was some] slight hysteria that with the Japanese and we had to prepare black curtains for all the windows so there would be no light showing at night. The Japanese workers that worked for us were rounded up and taken away at the time and my father
was a block warden for the civil defense or whatever it was called at that time, I don’t remember what they called it. Each evening he had to get out and make sure in the quarter mile square that he had that nobody’s lights were showing at night so the enemy bombers couldn’t attack us, if you want to call it that. They were lots of collections at the school, scrap metal collections, and all those things went on. So that was a period of time…Marines based north of San Diego were training everywhere. The military presence was very heavy in the San Diego area.

SM: Did any of your family members serve during World War II?

TS: Not during World War II, not any of the immediate family; my father was in the service during World War I.

SM: Did he talk much about that experience?

TS: No.

SM: How about later when you became a soldier yourself, would he talk with you after?

TS: No, he didn’t talk about his period in the war.

SM: During World War II and during that heightened period of tension on the west coast with the Japanese threat, how seriously did your father take that? Could you discern whether he thought it was likely or possible the Japanese would attack?

TS: He was serious about his duties as far as a blackout and everything, but I didn’t perceive that he was worried to any extent about it. That didn’t seem to worry him that they might attack, but he took his duties very seriously about trying to make sure everybody had their lights out or windows covered and everything like that.

SM: Did you ever accompany him when he went around the neighborhood?

TS: Once or twice, yeah.

SM: Did he ever find someone whose lights were showing?

TS: A couple of times, yeah, I mean it was, about every time you went out you had to go up and remind somebody to cover up their window or they had light showing, they’d left a light out in the barn or something, to turn it off.

SM: How would people respond when he approached them to make sure they…?

TS: There was no problem. Everybody was pretty much involved in complying.

SM: How about the Japanese relocation to the various camps? How did that affect your community? Were there many Japanese families that were there?
TS: We had two Japs [a couple of workers], one family, they were just two Japanese bachelors that worked in the farm with us and they had both had small houses. There were a couple of Japanese that were arrested in the San Diego area with short wave radios that were spies and so it, you know, they just left and then they came back after the war was over and they came back same houses and went back to work again.

SM: Okay, so their houses were not taken away from them, they were able to…?

TS: Oh no, they didn't own them in the first place, they were part of the ranch and they just came back and moved back into the same house and went back to work again.

SM: Did they…?

TS: They didn't seem bitter or anything about it, no. They seemed to accept that was what happened.

SM: What did your family discuss when the war ended with the dropping of the atomic bombs in Japan? Was there any discussion about that?

TS: I don't remember any discussion other then the fact that we were glad it was over and there was a lot of celebration about it being over. There was more celebration about the war in Japan being over and about the war in Europe ending, I guess because we were closer to it or whatever on the west coast.

SM: Okay. How was the economy affected as you were growing up during that period, especially for lemon farming; was it hurt by the war?

TS: No, no it didn't. It proceeded, as always, as far as I could tell there was no cutback. The aircraft plant [industry], they moved in and built a big aircraft plant in the town and employment went up. Houses were scarce; people were living anywhere and everywhere. They had price control on everything. My dad had one house that he rented and they froze the ceiling on the amount he could charge for rent on it. Everything was rationed. Not everything, but there was gas rationing and tires were rationed, food, some types of food, coffee, sugar, was all rationed. That's the main thing that I remember about that period, but as a kid it didn't really affect me other then seeing a lot of soldiers and Marines and everything.

SM: I didn't know if you did see an increase in demand for citrus fruit because of the need for that on board ships.

TS: It was pretty heavy at the start and it just continued.
SM: Okay. How much did your parents talk about the Great Depression or did they at all?

Maybe your grandparents?

TS: They never really discussed...I was born in ’34, which is the end, or towards the end of it, and I was the last of three so all, my two older brothers were born during the Depression and so I guess the Depression didn’t affect Dad. He was always working, he got [between] nine or seventeen cents an hour as far as his, somewhere in that range as wages during that period, but he always had a job. He worked for a big company that took care of the lemon orchards there in the town and so he always worked, had a job, so I don’t guess the Depression never really affected the family that much.

SM: And your mom was a homemaker?

TS: Yes, she never worked outside the house.

SM: Did any of your, you said you had an older brother?

TS: My oldest brother died when he was young, my next older brother never served in the service.

SM: So when you graduated in high school in 1952...

TS: ’52

SM: This is during the Korean War.

TS: Yeah, right at the tail end, I graduated at 17. I wasn’t old enough to go in at the time and it ended before, in essence before I got around to it, so I never went in then. I went to work as soon as I got out of high school and I just continued working. I went and volunteered for the draft in ’56, more so than anything else just to get it over [with] because they were going to draft me sooner or later, I mean, everybody was still being drafted at this time. I already had a pre-induction physical the year before, but my number hadn’t come up. I just volunteered for the draft to get in and get it over with so I could continue [with life].

SM: Was there a specific service you hoped to go into?

TS: The Army is what I was going into.

SM: Oh you knew and you wanted to go into the Army?

TS: Well I didn’t want to go into the Navy, I’d walked in chipped paint too long, I didn’t want to go on a Navy ship. The Army was just about the only thing they drafted into.

SM: Okay. What was your initial MOS when you went in?
SM: Did you know that you would be going infantry when you went in for the draft?

TS: Yeah, I enjoyed it. [That's what I assumed.]

SM: Well, why don't you go ahead and describe your introduction into the service, initially to basic training, where you went, what you did.

TS: Well I went through, I was processed in at Fort Ord at the repo [Replacement] depot at Fort Ord [Calif] and we stayed there a week, or six days, or whatever it was. [There was a large group held there] and then they put us on a troop train and we were all sent to Fort Lewis, Washington. It took us two days and a night on the train to get to Fort Lewis. When we got there we were processed through another Repo [Replacement] Depot up there and we were all assigned to the, at the time it was the 71st [Infantry] Division and we were all fillers for a division and we didn't take our basic training at a training center per se, we were filled into a division to bring it up to full strength and then we trained with that division and stayed with it. But they changed the title of the division, I don't know like the fifth week of training, they brought the colors of the 4th Infantry Division back from Germany and we were redesignated the 4th Infantry Division, and of course everybody's regiment changed at the [same] time. I took my basic training in a company and at the completion of the basic training, we took two days off and started advanced [individual] training, and we took our advanced training in the same company that we were in before. So we had in the replacement depot system, we had been already segregated out to whether we were going to be light weapons infantry or heavy weapons infantry and we just stayed in the same company. All of the cadre in that basic training and advanced training had just, not just, but had been Korean War veterans practically. All the NCOs were there and we just filled up all of the lower enlisted ranks with trainees. When we finished our advanced training we went from there straight into basic unit training and when we finished basic unit training, Christmas had come and they gave us two weeks leave. So it was different from the normal basic training center where you normally got a couple of weeks leave after advanced individual or basic combat training. We went straight through and finished basic unit training before we got any leave to go home.

SM: So you stayed as a unit the whole time, from basic training until you were permanent party with 4th ID?
TS: Yeah. I stayed in the same unit and once we finished the basic, or advanced individual training, they broke us out into platoons of what we were going to be. I was in the 81 Mortar Platoon, and then, at the time, this is back in the days when it was a triangular concept and we had 81 Millimeter Mortar Platoon, 106 Recoilless Rifle Platoon and a heavy machine gun platoon, which had the water-cooled machine guns.

SM: If you would, would you describe what you mean by the triangular organization?

TS: The triangular organization came before pentomic organization and it was three regiments, infantry regiments in a division, and there were three line battalions in a regiment, and then there was a service battalion within the regiment. In each battalion there was three line companies and one heavy weapons company, and we were [for example] A, B, C [Companies were rifle companies], [and] D [Co. was a heavy weapons co.]...I was the 2nd Battalion, [which had E, F, and G Line Companies and] Hotel Company, which was the heavy weapons company. [The third BN was made up of I, K, L Rifle Co.'s and M Co. which was heavy weapons. There was no J Co.] That concept was the old regimental...I guess they call now the regimental concept. Right after I’d been in about a year they changed it over to the pentomic concept when they went to battle groups and we were redesignated at that time. I stayed in the same building; I didn’t even change buildings. The pentomic concept there was an 81 Mortar Platoon in each rifle company and I just, so I was an 81 Mortar and I just ate in the same building and in that company. It stayed in the 4th Division. [But my unit.] we were redesignated, I started out in the 5th Regiment when I was in the 71st Division, then went to the 22nd Regiment in the 4th Division and then when they went pentomic I went into the 1st Battle Group of the 39th Infantry.

SM: Okay. What was basic training like for you?

TS: I enjoyed it. It was kind of fun in a way. I didn’t perceive it as being hard. I’d done essentially manual labor all of my life so I didn’t [have any problems], it wasn’t…and we were shooting rifles and I’d shot rifles all the time with my dad so it wasn’t… I enjoyed what I was doing and it wasn’t any [difficult things about it]...I didn’t perceive it as a big challenge at the time as far as physical or anything. That was what most the troops had trouble with, physically, the physical aspect of it, but I didn’t have any problem with that. The long…I enjoyed the other things too, map reading and learning some of the other things.

SM: How would they enforce discipline in the basic training platoon, your platoon sergeants, your drill instructors?
TS: Discipline was, in those days, probably simpler than it is now, because more people did what they were told. There was some physical aspects of discipline. Platoon sergeants had the authority then, people dug six-bys in the woods if you got in trouble, there wasn’t a lot of, I’ve noticed now, there’s a lot of Article 15s that are given to soldiers for minor infractions. In those days nobody worried about an Article 15, the platoon sergeant had them go dig a 6 by 6 hole in the ground and then fill it back in or whatever to take care of your little minor problems. If a problem got as far as company commander it was bad news. Most things were taken care of by the squad leaders and platoon sergeants. The first sergeant had a big sign on, and I don’t remember exactly what it read, but, right outside his office, ‘Walk down this hallway, do it quietly, don’t disturb me,’ or whatever [something like that], and we did that. We didn’t walk down the hallway in front of his office. [If] we had to go to the other end of the building, we went up one flight, down the hall, and came down the other end, nobody wanted to even see the first sergeant, just the attitude we had about it, because if he saw you, you’re on detail in the mess hall or whatever. It was…a duty roster was something that they ran, but there was all kinds of jobs that had to be done that the duty rosters didn’t take care of, so if he saw you [and needed someone], you were it, so you avoided the first sergeant.

SM: How about physical discipline, as far as between squad leaders and platoon sergeants; was there ever any need for physical contact?

TS: There was some I saw and it wasn’t bad, it wasn’t nobody beaten to death, might have been slapped around a little bit. There were low tolerance rates for unacceptable behavior, failure to properly take care of your hygiene, you wound up with a GI scrub brush and half a dozen people scrubbing somebody in the shower until he’s red and raw, and things like that, but it didn’t…and after a week or two it didn’t take long before people were in sync with what was supposed to be done.

SM: How about blanket parties, where they ever talked about, or did any ever happen?

TS: One individual fell down the stairs who was later determined to be a homosexual. How he fell down the stairs I don’t know; I wasn’t there.

SM: How about disciplinary action against people who fell asleep during fireguard or something like that?
TS: Platoon sergeant took care of that kind of thing. There was very little people, few people, in fact I don’t remember anybody hardly ever going to the, being taken to the company commander for discipline. It was something the platoon sergeant took care of.

SM: Now, while you were in basic, did you go through any kind of code of conduct training that you remember?

TS: I don’t remember any code of conduct [training]. We probably did, but I don’t personally remember code of conduct training. Four or five years later I remember in basic, when I was teaching basic training, code of conduct training, but I don’t remember going through it [myself] during basic training. We probably did, but I don’t remember.

SM: Were your instructors predominately Korean War veterans?

TS: Yeah, all of them were.

SM: Did they talk much about their experiences in Korea?

TS: Yes, not so much maybe their experiences, but ‘You need to learn this because of this kind of situation.’ Almost…all the senior NCOs were Second World War veterans too.

SM: How much credibility did that lend, in your eyes?

TS: A lot. I mean, he knows what he’s talking about because he’s been there.

SM: And survived.

TS: Yeah.

SM: Were there any other experiences from your time in basic training that stand out or are memorable?

TS: No, I don’t, there was no...

SM: No accidents…?

TS: No, nobody got hurt.

SM: What weapons did they train you on in basic?

TS: In basic training we trained on the M-1 rifle, is the only weapon we really trained with per se in basic, but in AIT we took on all the weapons, the .45 and the carbine, and the light machine gun and the heavy machine gun, mortar, we trained on both the 60 mortar and the 81 mortar, and the 106 recoiless, we got an introduction to all of them, to include the grease guns, sub-Thompson, everything that was in the inventory during AIT.

SM: Which of those was your favorite, especially the personal or individual weapons?
TS: Oh I’d say I preferred the [carbine, a little easier to carry – automatic capability more flexible] as far as ability to use it, the M-1 over…the carbine was not quite as accurate as it could have been at longer distances, but I didn’t mind the M-1 and its weight so, I kind of liked the M-1 as far as a weapon.

SM: How about the Tommy gun, grease gun?

TS: They were fun to shoot, but I mean, but the ability to hit something that was out there [always] wasn’t there. I figured I wanted to shoot them further away at both ends.

SM: (laughing) Yes sir. Well you mentioned that your experiences with firearms dated back to your youth when, I guess you and your dad used to hunt together.

TS: Yeah.

SM: What would you hunt and what would you use for hunting?

TS: We hunted rabbits, quail, and when I got old enough, we’d go deer hunting.

SM: Do you remember killing your first deer?

TS: Yeah.

SM: How far away was that, how far of a shot, do you remember?

TS: It was about, somewhere around 200 yards, something like that.

SM: Okay. So you were used to long-range firing, versus close-end firing with a grease gun or Tommy?

TS: Yeah.

SM: How about grenade training in basic?

TS: Yeah we took grenade training and you know standard grenade course and also we fired the rifle grenade in basic. It [basic] was also [included] the infiltration course. It was standard. In ’56 it was the same almost identical training program that they were using four or five years later, it was almost identical. It didn’t change much, I don’t even know if it’s changed much now. I haven’t looked at it; I doubt that it’s changed a lot.

SM: Do you remember what kind of grenade you threw? Was it a pineapple?

TS: Yeah, it was a pineapple. We didn’t have the baseball one.

SM: Not yet. When you went from basic to your infantry training, your advanced infantry training, what were the biggest differences in it besides the fact that you were now trying to work with the larger weapons and more weapons? How about the treatment? Did that change, how they treated you?
TS: The treatment basically boiled down to, by this time we’d been with the same set of NCOs for eight weeks and now we were with the same set of NCOs for another eight weeks, we were pretty much in sync with them and the treatment was, we didn't have to work near as hard because we all knew what was expected and what was going on and it was very relaxed. We got passes to go to town and that kind of thing, but the relationship with the NCOs is just better because you've been with them longer.

SM: How good was the relationship between the soldiers and the civilian community when you went out on pass?

TS: I thought it was pretty good, I didn't see a problem. We were pretty well accepted. I remember going to the Baptist church in Tacoma and they had the youth group and they invited all the soldiers to participate, to go out to somebody’s house for cake and coffee after church and there wasn’t a…there didn’t seem to be any animosity towards the soldiers.

SM: What kind of live fire exercises did you engage in, in the advanced infantry training?

TS: We fired just about every, like I say every weapon that we had we were, in the inventory, we were shooting at some kind of an exercise of another.

SM: Did you actually go out on ranges where you weren’t just firing just for either proficiency or marksmanship, but instead were actually trying to simulate an actual engagement?

TS: There wasn't very much of that, most of it was qualification and learning the weapon at qualification in basic unit training, then we got into [Basic Unit Training]…by that time I was, we were into our normal unit of assignment and I was in an 81 Platoon.

SM: You’re in the 4th ID at this point?

TS: Yeah. And we…well we went to the field in basic unit training. We were firing support of one of the line battalions, line companies, which was attacking a hill or something and we were firing our 81s over their heads and we were actually firing missions in support of whatever training the line companies were doing.

SM: So you were firing live rounds over their heads into a range?

TS: Yeah.

SM: What kind of feedback during that type of an exercise would you get in terms of accuracy? Did you have an observer out there calling in the fire?

TS: We had forward observers out there calling for us, but how accurate, I don’t…
TS: Yeah, they would call in adjust the fire and… I was, at that time I was at the computer section of the platoon and we had six tubes, six 81 mortar tubes and a computer section and I worked in the computer section. I guess I do math better than anybody else or whatever and we always [worked as a platoon]… they called in a mission and we’d compute it on a plotting board and send the fire mission down the tubes and then they would fire.

SM: This is like the fire control.

TS: Yeah, fire control center, yeah, fire direction center. Later on they came out with a bigger plotting board, an M-16 plotting board, which is more accurate and artillery now uses a computer to do all this stuff. At that time we just used an M-10 plotting board and a firing tables to determine the charge and to set it.

SM: And you were, of course, changed in the MILs system in terms of firing?

TS: Yeah, the M-10 plotting board was in MILs and all our compasses were in MILs. We used the, in our observers, we used the M-2 compass as opposed to the little lensatic compass that they gave the straight infantries and things.

SM: MILs versus degrees?

TS: Yeah.

SM: Okay. How affective was all this training did you think and did it prepare you for your duties as an actual mortar man in the infantry division?

TS: The training I thought was very pretty good. My section sergeant, as far as the FDC or the fire direction center was a Second World War veteran, Korean War veteran, and he knew what he was doing backwards and forward and he was always teaching us tricks of how we could speed it up or how we could tell how to cut a corner and still come up with the right answer, he knew it in and out, and I thought we learned a lot. The platoon sergeant was also a Second World War veteran, he fought in the Philippines and in South Asia, that area. My section sergeant had been in Europe, platoon sergeant he’d been in the Philippines and the islands during the Second World War.

SM: So the leadership was very competent?

TS: Yeah, I thought it was, you know, looking back on it years later, we were, couldn’t have found much better then what we had, I don’t think.

SM: Jon, did you have any questions about training?

Jon Bernstein: Did you do any training with the M-14 at all?
TS: The M-14 rifle? Never trained with the M-14 at all, at anytime. Seems strange, doesn’t it? After I got commissioned the M-14 was adopted and during the period of time it was adopted I was on staff in a school and by the time I got back to a unit, the M-16 did come in. I did work at Fort Benning. I was an instructor at Fort Benning in a small arms committee and we were using the M-14, but at that same time we were testing the M-16. We tested the M-16 and the M-14 and the AK-47 in a test at Fort Benning one time. The AK-47 won.

SM: In what ways?

TS: The M-16 lost. It was the least desirable of all of the weapons.

SM: What criteria were used to determine that the AK-47 was the better weapon, the M-16 was the least desirable?

TS: Well, this was the time when the M-16 was still the Armalite AR-15 and it jammed, it didn’t have a charging arm on it. It jammed all the time. In fact we bent one barrel on the thing, one of the guys went running up, he had a little bipod on the front of it and slammed down into the prone position and let all his weight get on it and slightly bent the barrel on that AR-15. And shooting through brush, they [the rounds were] deflected [easily]. We were putting targets behind brush and shooting through brush and putting the targets at various distances behind the brush and seeing how much the bullets would get through, go through the brush and ultimately hit the target and behind it and at what ranges. Of course the M-14 and AK-47 are both 7.62 caliber, and they would go through the brush without deflecting and starting to tumble. We counted the number of hits on target that were shot straight through and the number that tumbled and bounced through. You could dunk the AK-47 in dirt and grime and everything else and it was loose enough that, you know, it didn’t jam up when it got two grains of sand in it or whatever. The M-16 was bad about jamming. To me, the 2.23 [caliber] is a 55 grain bullet and I’m shooting 48 grain bullets out of a .22 long rifle, so I was only shooting seven grains more, and that didn’t seem to me like that was going to be as effective. Anyway, we had a lot of doubts about it, and the test that we – one little test that I was involved in, the outcome of what we came up with, now the tests were run, all kinds of different tests were run, but the one I was involved in, the AK came out to be the better. The only reason it came out better than the M-14 was because it was a little shorter and easier to use in heavy brush areas, as opposed to the longer-barreled M-14.

SM: How about in terms of accuracy and range?
TS: Accuracy and range, the [M] 14 was better than the AK-47, but not a lot better. The AK-47 had pretty good range on it.

SM: In what year was the study done?

TS: This test was 196-...early ’63.

SM: This was at Benning?

TS: Yeah, Fort Benning, Georgia. It was a combined test that the Ranger department and the weapons department were running. The Infantry [Test Board], there was an infantry agency there, I don’t even remember the [exact] title of it now, [but it was] testing a bunch of stuff, too, and they were also testing [the M-16] and running a bunch of [other] tests. But I say, this was not the ending result of the M-16. It was the Armalite AR-15 preceded it. But anyway, that’s jumping ahead.

SM: No, that’s an interesting point.

TS: If you want to track the M-16, go further down in life. ’70, 1970 in Vietnam I was – in the last part of my second tour, I was a commandant of SERTS, which is the 101st Airborne Division’s replacement training school, and we’d get replacements in, we’d issue them an M-16, we’d take them out and let them zero the weapon and do a week’s worth of in-country training before we sent them to a unit. When I got the unit [SERTS], I found out the soldiers were having a terrible time zeroing their weapons. So, I got disturbed at that and we had a sniper school there, which was being taught by the people from the Army marksmanship training unit. So, I took all those instructors out with me to help the kids, the new kids zero their weapons, and some of these guys [expert marksmen] couldn’t even zero these M-16 weapons. So, we got ordnance in and we started checking it. We had smooth bores. We had to rebarrel something like forty percent of the M-16s we had because there were too many people going rock and roll [on full automatic] and firing too many rounds through them and [had worn out the barrels] smooth bored them to the point that their lands and grooves [were worn out] weren’t effective enough to make them accurate. So, we replaced about forty percent of the barrels that we had on our M-16s. We had to go through and siphon out the ones that were good enough to issue until we could get more rebarreled to issue to the next group of kids that came through. For I don’t know how long those [weapons] had been in country, because they were 101st Airborne Division weapons, they may have been in country [from the time the 1st Brigade came over], however long it was, but something like forty percent of our weapons had to be rebarreled because they were worn out.
SM: Was word about this sent over to the unit so that they could start checking their own
weapons that were issued to line soldiers to make sure that those...

TS: We started a process of checking everything. We did mine first. I was issuing them
out. When they came back to process out, they'd turn in their weapon and go on, and then I would
issue out a new one. But yeah, they went through the whole division, and I don't know about the
other divisions in country or not.

SM: I was going to say, every soldier that carried an M-16 would have to keep that in mind
now, that eventually the lands and grooves would be destroyed.

TS: And I don't know whether we solved that problem since then or not. These were
probably earlier models of M-16s.

JB: I was going to ask if there were M-1s with the chromed barrels?

TS: So, it was just one of those things, and that was a factor probably because too many
people were on full automatic and just bore too many bullets.

SM: What other issues did you have to address in training those newer recruits when they
came in, concerning just the M-16? Of course by that time, it had the forward assist so the
jamming issue probably had been pretty much resolved, and of course they probably modified the
weapon in other ways so it wouldn't jam up and lock up so much?

TS: [There was a] magazine problem. We never loaded 20 rounds, or tried not to load 20
rounds in a magazine because that caused jamming sometimes.

SM: The spring not being strong enough?

TS: Yes. We never had any of the 30 round magazines that I see pictures of now. They
were all 20 round magazines. The training that we tried to give them in SERTS at that time was
just a review of what they should have already had and sometimes didn't have. We let everybody
through a grenade, one more live grenade; we took them out, had them zero a weapon. We taught
them how to set claymore mines, and just a broad overview of basic information that they needed
to have before they went to the unit. It was also a process of killing some time while the personnel
people decided what unit they were going to go to. But, it served two purposes.

SM: And when you discovered that problem with the lands and grooves being destroyed
in the weapons, did you also train them to do three to five round bursts on the M-16?

TS: We tried. We were trying to teach them to get off of rock and roll all the time. I mean,
that was [a waste of ammo in most situations.].
SM: Just go to single fire semi-automatic?

TS: Yes. But that was not...I don’t think that was accepted [by many]. Too many of them
were just burning up ammo, and I understand why. It was available and it made them feel a lot
better, but it got rid of a lot of ammunition and then they had a problem with needing more
ammunition.

SM: Now when you were going through training, especially in advanced infantry, what
kind of movement techniques training did you receive as far as patrolling, things like that?

TS: AIT, we had a limited amount of patrolling training. It was more so the, I guess you’d
say, the big war concept at the time, the advanced party training and defensive line and assaults.
There was a limited amount of patrolling training that we went through at all in AIT that I remember.
When I ultimately wound up in OCS, we got quite a bit more of that.

SM: How about when you were training soldiers to go into the 101st and SERTS? Did you
have to go through some training in terms of patrolling techniques at that point as well, or was that
already taken care of before you got there?

TS: We didn’t, in SERTS we didn’t give them in essence any patrolling training other than
just to review some of the concepts of it because in the location we were, we didn’t have the
facilities to do it and we were trying to more or less orient them in the country rather than trying to
totally train them. The patrolling part, no, we didn’t do a lot of that in SERTS. Maybe we should
have, but we didn’t.

SM: While we’re on the topic of SERTS still, how about rules of engagement? Did you
guys cover rules of engagement in your training?

TS: No, that wasn’t necessarily a problem with us, but we did cover it. That was more a
problem with [advisors and units in more populated areas], we had only one battalion that really
had a problem with that. We only had one at the time I was there. We only had one battalion of
the 101st that worked in the lowlands. All the other battalions were working the edge of the A Shau
or the Rocket Valley area in the jungle. There was no problem with rules of engagement because
there was nobody there but them [us] and the enemy. But the one battalion that worked down in
the lowlands, it had to know it. We went and covered the rules of engagement, we covered
Westmoreland’s little whatever it was now, little card. Twenty-one points or ten points or whatever
it was, making friends, winning hearts, and influencing minds; about five of those things [listing] we
covered that everybody was supposed to know that was in country. The war crimes, we went over
that. Don’t cut off their ears, and those things that had cropped up over time as somebody was
involved. We had a list of things we covered with them on that.

SM: How about interactions between soldiers and the Vietnamese civilian population?
Was there any kind of a briefing given to soldiers going to the 101st concerning that issue?

TS: Yeah, that was a minor point because we didn’t, again, we only had one battalion
working the lowlands and the ones that weren’t working in the lowlands never got to see what
civilians looked like. But yes, we went through the whole list of those no-no’s things to do and not
to do with the civilians.

SM: Ok. What did the no-no’s include? Could you elaborate? Do you remember?

TS: Oh, you were to treat them with respect. I don’t remember the total aspect of all the
things. Fraternization with Vietnamese women was verboten, not that the GI would listen to that
(laughs). If drugs were available, don’t mess with the drugs and don’t get drunk and don’t fire your
weapon in the village unless you know what you’re doing. There was a list of those, and I don’t
remember what all specifically there were now. In the whole fifteen months I was in the 101st
Airborne, I was never in the village unless I was there with a MedCAP or something like that, so it
was sort of kind of a nebulous thing I think, except for that one battalion that worked in the
lowlands.

SM: Now back to your M-16 testing real quick and also your time with SERTS. How did
the improvements affect the M-16 as far as you could tell? When you saw the M-16 at first in ’63
during the testing and then when you saw it later in country and especially when you were training
soldiers to use it for the 101st, were the improvements that much where it was better than the AK-
47 at that point?

TS: The M-16 was improved. It was much better than the original one, the original
version, the Armalite AR-15. If you had given – this is personal – if you had given me a choice and
I was able to choose my own weapon, I would have chosen an AK-47 over an M-16.

SM: How about again with the M-14, would you have still chosen an AK-47 over a 14?

TS: For the jungle, I think I would have. Because of the lack of long-distance shots that
you would have got with the 14. I think I would have chosen the 14 over the AK-47 for European or
some other environment, but for jungle environments, the shorter-barreled weapon was preferred.

SM: After you went to the 4th ID and you were assigned to your mortar platoon, mortar
company, at what point did you start thinking about the Army as a career?
TS: I don’t know if I really ever started thinking about the Army as a career. I just sort of evolved, I think. I was in the 81 Mortar Company, a heavy weapons company and 81 Platoon, and then we changed to Pentomic [organization], and that was in an 81 platoon of a rifle company, and they sent me to the NCO Academy at Fort Ord and I came back and I was a squad leader and later chief of the fire direction section in that pentomic company. I had a lieutenant that came along and tried to talk me into going to West Point. I don’t why, but he liked me and he wanted me to go to West Point, but I was too old to go to West Point. So then he tried bugging me to go to OCS, and I finally applied for OCS. I guess the reason I applied for OCS, and this is crazy, looking back on it, but I figured the officers had it made. Appeared to me that they made a lot more money, or I thought they did anyway, and they didn’t do as much. You know, they weren’t there at five o’clock in the morning till seven o’clock at night. They came in at reveille and after dinner, they were gone. So, I figured they had a better life than NCOs. So you know, I’ll take the job. I just evolved. I wasn’t looking for a career because I was still going to get out. After I served the two years as an officer, if I graduated, I was going to go back to civilian life. I wasn’t really thinking of a career when it happened.

SM: And what year was that that you applied for OCS?

TS: I went to OCS in ’57.

SM: Before that, was the unit ever deployed for any reason?

TS: Was I what?

SM: Was the unit ever deployed or was your platoon ever deployed for any reason?

TS: No, we stayed at Fort Lewis or went Yakima Firing Center for exercises, but we never went anywhere else.

SM: What was the emphasis in terms of your training and preparation for those types of exercises? You know, what were you planning for? A war with the Soviets, correct?

TS: Yeah, we’d gone to the pentomic organization, and this was…we were just getting into that spread-out battlefield. It was supposed to be planning for a war with atomic weapons. One of the battalions [or perhaps] two of the battalions went down to Yucca Flats and took part in some of the testing they did down there, the guinea pigs they had out in the trenches, and they stayed down there whatever it was, months, and then they came back up to Fort Lewis. But we had I think it was two different battalions went down to Yucca Flats.

SM: But you weren’t part of that?
SM: What did you think of that?

TS: I just never even thought about it, I guess. I wasn't picked to go.

SM: Did any of the guys get sick that came back, that you knew of?

TS: No, not that I know of.

SM: Were there any other interesting experiences you had before you went to OCS and you were part of either the 4th ID or part of the pentomic organization?

TS: No, I don't think so. It was just a normal time. I was in a different part of the Pacific Northwest and I enjoyed I guess you'd say I was having fun, because I signing up for another couple of years when I went to OCS.

SM: Was morale high in the unit?

TS: Yeah, we were a good unit. We did things then that are not done now. At payday, we had a company slush fund, and everybody put a dollar in the hat for the company slush fund every payday. Everybody did it. The first sergeant or whoever took care of the money, I don't know who took care of the money, but if somebody went on emergency leave or had a family problem or something, you didn't have to go to Red Cross. I mean, the first sergeant could take care of a loan for somebody to go on emergency leave or whatever. You didn't have to go down and get a loan from the Red Cross. We had an extra television in the day room that they bought from this fund, and they were always doing little things like that out of the fund. I thought it was great. Later on it became, 'No, you can't do that. You can't steal money from these poor soldiers.' But I mean, in essence, I thought it was well done.

SM: Jon, did you have any questions about anything before we talk about OCS?

JB: Not at this point.

SM: All right, sir, why don't we go ahead and talk about your transition to OCS. Would you go ahead and describe that training? Where was OCS?

TS: OCS was at Fort Benning, Georgia. I started in the fall of '57 and graduated in April of '58. It was twenty-six weeks in length at the time. It was infantry OCS. I think there was at that time an artillery OCS at Fort Sill still going, but as far as I know, those were the only two OCSs that were being held in the Army at the time. We had about four classes a year or something going through OCS at Benning. It was hard in some ways and extraordinarily easy in other ways. The group that I went through with was about half and half; half old soldiers and half young soldiers like
myself. And old soldiers, I mean ones that had been in almost the maximum of ten years or so or hitting on the age limit of being too old to go. By virtue of that, I think we got some good training, because not only the training we got from the school, but the mix of peer training you got from the other people that were in the class with you I thought was great, because you learned a lot from the guy that was next to you, as much as you did sometimes from the instructors; particularly when it came to being on field problems and everything. But it was good in that respect. The class started with 150 some odd, 158 I think it was. We graduated 92, but that included set backs from other classes that came to us, being set back from where they’d come from. The class in itself turned out I think to be a very good class. We did a sort of shakedown on the class years later to determine how many did what, when, where, who, and why, and we had some highly successful people in the class. In fact, almost all of them turned out to be pretty good. A lot of them didn’t stay in, a lot of them got back out, but a good portion of them stayed in and were successful in what they did. The training had a lot of discipline in it, a lot of harassment, trying to prepare you for the stress of combat. There were some real bad times in it and some real good times in it. I enjoyed it, I guess because I didn’t get into a lot of trouble. I found the academic portion of it pretty easy, maybe because I was attuned to taking tests or something, I don’t know. I don’t know why, but academically as far as taking the written test and all those things, I was third or fourth in the class or something [like that]. And part of your academic grade was your weapons qualifications, and I’m good at that. I’d fired all the weapons, you know. Some of the guys had only been in light infantry and had none, and I qualified expert with every weapon, and that helped, and because I had no academic problems, the TAC officer who was harassing us, he never took a look at me I don’t guess until halfway through the course, probably before he ever knew that I existed. I was passing academically with number one grades and I wasn’t getting into any trouble, so. Some guys were having a little trouble academically or whatever and he was on their back. But it was good training. I considered it good training, anyway. A lot of it was repetition because I’d been to the NCO academy at Fort Ord, California, and they were teaching some of the same things that we’d learned there. So I guess because I’d been to that one previous, it flowed easier and it was easier for me than some of the guys. Some of the guys had a real hard time.

SM: What were the most challenging aspects for you? What were the hard times?

TS: The hardest part of the school as far as the training went was the exercises in the field. They would put you as a squad leader and then you would have to...you’re out in the field...
and you would have to come up with your TAC [tactical] plan to attack a hill or whatever it was.

That was probably the hardest part of it, making sure that you put to practice everything you’ve been taught. That was probably the hardest thing, because in the 81 platoon or 81 training, we [I] didn’t have [the training in] that maneuvering and rifle squads and attacking hills. We were sitting there in a position firing or we moved one section forward and it was a much simpler tactical aspect in the 81 platoon than it was as an infantry, straight infantry platoon leader. That was probably the hardest part for me because I hadn’t done it previously.

SM: How about peer evaluations? Did they exist?

TS: Yeah. Buddy reports?

SM: Yes.

TS: Yeah, buddy reports. We had to grade each other. Well, started out, we graded everybody in our squad the first two times, and then we graded everybody in two squads for the next time, and by that time, the students had shrunk enough. The fourth time, we had to grade everybody in the platoon for the last two. We had an evaluation panel at the end of the eighth week, the fourteenth week, eighteenth week, and twenty-second week, where anybody that had fallen down in academics or TAC officer’s evaluation or buddy evaluation was send before a board who reviewed him [and decide], they either sent him back to the next class following or they sent them back to his unit or they let him continue. Some got to continue. We had two people in our class that got sent back twice from our class to another class and then to another class. Both of them ultimately graduated.

SM: So they were recycled twice, but graduated?

TS: Yeah. And we started our cycle with about eight that had been sent back to us, and then during that period, we got another ten or fifteen or something [like] that got sent back to us, and we sent people back to other classes.

SM: And so you started, you mentioned that you started out with about 160?

TS: 158, I think the number was.

SM: And then you lost – you graduated with 90 plus?

TS: 92, yeah, and some of those didn’t start with us.

SM: Right. About 20, 15 or 20 if you remember correctly. So that’s quite an attrition rate. That’s just over 40% attrition.

TS: I think it was probably close to 50% of the original people we started with graduated.
SM: And do you think that most people found that the field training exercises that you described as part of the most challenging aspect, that that was the most challenging for most people?

TS: Some had less problem with that. Some of the older NCOs had less problem with that and had more problems with the academic aspects of it.

SM: Were there many combat veterans going through OCS, guys with World War II and Korean experience?

TS: None was World War II. Quite a few with Korean combat experience, and we were at the tail end of that. We were probably the last year where we would have caught any Korean War veterans because of age, because 27 ½ or something, 28 was the magic number when you had to be commissioned as a second lieutenant. I don’t remember how many there were. There were seven or eight in my platoon that were Korean War Vets. Ralph Shelton was in my platoon. He led the Special Forces team that caught Che Guevara in Bolivia. Two of my platoon, Ray Shrump was a Korean War veteran, and Ray Shrump was one of the POWs that was kept in the South [Vietnam] almost the entire period. Another one in my platoon who was not a Korean War veteran was Thompson, Floyd Thompson, who was the longest-held POW [in Vietnam]. He got shot down in an L-19, I guess it was, up near the DMZ. So, we had a good group of combat veterans from the Second World War. I mean, the Vietnam War. Ahh, Korean War! Get it right, Spencer.

SM: (Laughing) Ok. Jon, do you have any questions about OCS?

JB: No.

SM: One more question: what weapons did you qualify on in OCS?

TS: The M-1, the carbine, the BAR, the .45 pistol, the light machine gun, and that was. That was what they actually had qualified me on.

SM: Ok. Well, where did you go when you graduated from OCS?

TS: I went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

SM: And where were you assigned?

TS: I was assigned to the 1st Training Regiment, as the training officer, executive officer, whatever you want to call it [in a] training company, [giving] basic training company. I stayed in that job for seven or eight months and then I was assigned to another company as a company commander as a second lieutenant. I stayed in that job for about eight, nine months and then was
reassigned to the Regimental Training Committee and stayed in that job for about six months and
then went back to command another company as a first lieutenant.

SM: How long did you stay as company commander as a first lieutenant?
TS: Second time, eight months, something like that.

SM: How useful did you find that experience later on when you found yourself in
command position? Because of course as a platoon leader and a company commander in a line
unit, your primary responsibility is training. So being put into a training unit and in charge of a
training organization, it might not be such a bad thing.

TS: It’s not a bad thing. I mean, the biggest problem that you get as a second lieutenant
company commander is the administration. The troops and the training and everything was...that
was the easy problem. The hard problem is doing the administration, even though we covered that
in OCS, it was a very minor portion to what they covered in OCS, but then you get to a company
and you have a very major problem of morning reports and the unit fund and the supply room and
all the supply reports, and so there was a learning process in the training company, which was also
good for the future in training the troops and it was good learning to deal with people and problems,
and I found that it was a lot of work, a lot of hours. We only had two officers per company. You
always had to have an officer with the company whenever it was in training, and sometimes you
had to have two officers there, so the hours were long, but it was good duty. Other than the long
hours.

SM: And later on, when you went on to command units, how did that help you, that
experience in the training units? Did it help at all?

TS: Commanding the training company, it was good in that you learned [a lot on hardship
and management]...you had the same problems that you have in a TO&E rifle company. You’ve
got problems with soldiers that don’t obey, problems with people, problems with supply sergeants
truing to steal from you or whatever it happened to be. So, you’ve got those same kinds of
problems in the TO&E units. You learned a lot from them, because you got thrown into it, and you
had to learn to sink or swim. It was good because the actual training of the troops was pretty cut-
and-dry because it was following a training plan, whereas in a TO&E unit, you could go into the
field on exercise that wasn’t as cut-and-dry. Su, your training during the day, to me it was easy
because you knew what it was going to be and how it was going to be. The hard part was learning
the administration part, and you had time to do that.
JB: Did that help with the training regiment later on in SERTS, establishing that?

TS: Yeah, it helped me. Everything I think was a combination. I got chosen for SERTS because I had been an instructor at the infantry school and had been a company commander in basic training and later on a company commander in an advanced training unit. So that’s why my name got plucked to be the Commandant of SERTS.

SM: And you mentioned, it seems like you were speaking from experience with a less than honest supply sergeant. So how would you deal with an individual like that?

TS: Supply sergeants – and I don’t think to say a less than honest supply sergeant – the best supply sergeant maybe you can have is the greatest thief in the world. But in supply at that time, the company commander signed for all the equipment for the whole company. Then you turned around and signed it out to all the soldiers. Certain items, you know, they had legs. You say that binoculars and .45 pistols had legs on them. If you laid them down, they’d jump up and run away. But a [good] supply sergeant [are a must], you had to understand the supply sergeant and know how much you could trust him or couldn’t trust him, and how much oversight you had to give him, because when it got ready for you to move on from that company, the new company commander came in and he counted everything that was there and if it wasn’t there, somebody was going to pay for it. And you just had to determine whether it was going to be you that paid for it or the supply sergeant was going to pay for it, and the supply sergeant if he could help it, he wasn’t going to pay for it. So, he was out scrounging and borrowing or whatever he was doing to make sure he had everything he was supposed to have to be counted. It was just a matter of keeping track of the supply sergeant. In fact, I found that one of the easiest, best things you could do was make him change the locks on the supply room door and make him keep all the keys and not have any yourself, and as I told one, I said, ‘It’s here today?’ ‘Yes.’ And, ‘You’ve got the only keys, then when I leave, if it’s not there, you either stole it, lost it, or gave it away, and any one of those three, you’re going to have to pay for it.’ So I count, and it works. But a good supply sergeant has almost got to be partially a good scrounger or a good thief or something, because you lose things along the way and you’ve got to replace them somehow. His skill in replacing keeps you out of trouble.

SM: Yes sir. Well, where did you go after your second tour as company commander of the training unit?

TS: I went to Korea.
SM: Who were you assigned with there?

TS: 1st Cav Division, 1st Battle Group, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cav Division up on the DMZ. I was a platoon leader then.

SM: How was that, going from two tours as a training unit company commander going back down to a platoon leader.

TS: Well, by that time, I'd learned some things about actually being a lieutenant, and I think it helped, because I didn’t have 200 people to worry about now; I only had 40. And I had some extra duties, but I didn’t have the administration of the company or anything to worry about and it was just my little 40 people and taking them out and training them, and it was good. And I enjoyed it. Really it was sort of a soft touch in some ways, because it wasn’t hard. I mean, they had some pretty good NCOs and it was only my 40 people as opposed to the whole company and the admin and all the other worries that had to go with it.

JB: This was a mortar platoon?

TS: No, it was a rifle platoon. We were in the pentomic concept now. We had a weapons platoon, but I was [had] a rifle platoon at that time.

SM: You mentioned that you had some good NCOs. Any problem NCOs?

TS: In Korea?

SM: Yes.

TS: No. I think the biggest problem we had in Korea with NCOs was that they didn’t manage their finances well; their wife didn’t manage their finances, whatever. You get the letters of indebtedness and we try to work out those kinds of problems with NCOs that got over their heads with money and estates and family. But as far as the NCOs doing their job and performing, I never had any problems.

SM: What was it like in terms of extra details for your unit? As a platoon leader, could you reliably just make your training schedule, take your platoon out, train them, without having to worry about extra details on post or anything like that?

TS: Yes. The company made the training schedules out, and at that time in Korea, it was one of the world’s best places to be in a company as far as training goes, because you made your training schedule, the battle group approved it, and then you took the company and platoon to the field and you did it and nobody bothered you. Nobody came down from division to inspect you and you didn’t have to have a little placard out there saying where the class was and who the principal
instructor was. You went out and you trained and you got your training in and you did your thing and nobody bugged you with it. As far as post details, we rotated through. One company each day had post details and they pulled the guard duty and they pulled the details that were going to be pulled on the camp. Each battle group was in its own little compound, so they were sitting all over Korea in little compounds. Each battle group had its own camp.

SM: So there wasn’t a lot of interruption of your training?

TS: No, there wasn’t. We got good training in. In fact, as far as my experience, it was the best training period as far as training with troops that we [I] ever had. We had Korean KPs that worked n the mess hall, we had Korean houseboys that everybody paid them and it was nickels and dimes. Each hooch of enlisted men, they had a houseboy that would come in and clean the thing for them. There was no pulling troops out of training to go to the mess hall or anything like that. It was all taken care of and we got to go to the field and we got to train and do our thing, in essence.

SM: What year was that that you went to Korea?

TS: In 1960 [-1962].

SM: How long did you stay there?

TS: It was a 13-month tour and I liked it, so I extended it for six months and right towards the end of my six months, President Kennedy got scared because of the Berlin Wall and extended me [everyone in Korea] another four months.

SM: So you stayed there 23…almost two years?

TS: Yeah, almost two years. Right under two years.

SM: And did your unit of assignment or duties change at all for that two years?

TS: I was either platoon leader or executive officer in a rifle company the whole time. I changed companies twice, but other than that it was [essentially the same duty all the time].

SM: What were the more interesting experiences and lessons you learned from that Korean experience?

TS: I guess the best thing I’ve learned from it is working up training programs that would work and taking the platoon out and training them and getting to deal with foreign service, whatever you want to call it, because we had KATUSAs, Korean Augmentation to the United States Army. So, you’d have a rifle squad of 1 eleven men, but maybe two or three of them would be Koreans and you had to juggle your approach to this training to that you could deal with the
[language/background difference]...make sure they understood what the heck you wanted them to do. And we had interpreters, and that was the first time I ever worked with interpreters and foreigners or whatever. That was probably the best thing I learned out of that, is learning how to set up and operate training purely on your own because you were given a free rein to train and if you thought you needed two days on something, you could take two days on something, whereas when I was commander of basic training company, this is [not] what you did. Somehow, it was made up and you just follow the master schedule and everything. But there [in Korea], we made it up on our own. We modified it to fit our own needs.

SM: How effective was the KATUSA program while you were there?

TS: How effective was it? Manpower-wise, it helped us. I think it was a cultural plus. Combat readiness, I would question whether it was truly effective. It gave us manpower, but I don’t know, because we were never tested with it by being shot at. We had one Korean sergeant in each company, which was a liaison-type sergeant who was the interpreter and the boss that controlled KATUSAs as far was what they had to do or if they got into a disciplinary problem, he solved the disciplinary problem. We didn’t mess with is as far as our disciplinary system, we gave it to him. His disciplinary system was pure physical, might have got [on the] side of brutality at times, but it was a pure physical disciplinary system. We had a Korean liaison officer assigned to battle groups who was in charge of these sergeants in each company and made them make sure they toed their line and did their thing.

SM: Now with the Korean soldiers assigned to your platoon, were they from that part of Korea? Did they have intimate knowledge of the terrain?

TS: No, just wherever they were from.

SM: How was the relationship between the Americans and the Korean soldiers?

TS: The Korean people?

SM: The Korean soldiers that were KATUSAs.

TS: Most of the GIs got along well, yeah. I mean, sometimes there was a little conflict, but basically they got along pretty good.

SM: Now Tae Kwan Do is a very prominent part of Korean military training. Did that lead over into the American training at all?
TS: That was not in existence at the time. At that time, I'd never heard of Tae Kwan Do at the time. They had it in Vietnam, but they weren't teaching it in the KATUSAs or in Korea at that time [when I was there].

SM: How about hand-to-hand combat techniques?

TS: We did standard American hand-to-hand combat techniques, yeah.

SM: Do you have any questions about his Korean experience?

JB: Actually, there's a couple. Were there any – you said you were up on the DMZ. Were there any cross-border incidents?

TS: When I was there, there were a couple of minor instances in Pan Mon Jon. There were a couple of minor crossings of the border or people coming through the DMZ area. We had a cavalry regiment, the 9th Cavalry Regiment, a recon squadron [that] was actually responsible for patrolling inside the DMZ territory there. We were spread out along the DMZ's south side, the various battle groups. They [9th Cav] had observation posts ad we'd get tagged to go up and man one of those for a period and we watched and watched and watched our little friends on the other side do their thing, they watched us do our thing. But at that period of time, basically the DMZ was peaceful, except for a couple of minor incidents. It wasn't like it was several years later when they had some blowups there. We had a general in the 7th Infantry Division who flew his helicopter into the DMZ area or something and got relieved because he shouldn't have flown. He got lost I guess, I don't know, or whatever. His name was Costello. He was over in the other division. But, it was pretty peaceful.

JB: With say a cross-border incident like that, what were the rules of engagement?

TS: The rules of engagement were, as far as we were concerned, non-existent. We were supposed to capture anybody that came south, if we could. But, I don't remember anybody ever delineating, you couldn't shoot, you wouldn't shoot, or anything. But, my battle group was behind them [the DMZ] and I'm sure that the squadron that was patrolling out there had some rules of engagement, but w didn't. I mean, if we caught somebody coming through, we caught them. We didn't run around with live ammunition to any extent at all. We went on alert during the Berlin crisis and issued live ammunition [for the first time] to all soldiers and went out to our main battle positions, everybody went to them. We'd gone on alert you know, once a month for 17 to 18 months and then all of a sudden we went on alert one day and they issued live ammunition and all the troops went, 'What the hell's going on?' It was sort of a shock. We were basically at that time
in peaceful status. I went up to Pan Mun Jom a couple of times just as a visitor to look around and 
see the compounds and they took tours up there, and it was a tourist site. It was, at that time, 
quiet.

SM: Was there anything else from your time in Korea that served you well later on when 
you found yourself in Vietnam, whether it was working with other foreign nationals in the military 
because of course as you found yourself working in an advisory capacity, maybe that was helpful?

TS: Probably the training, and then one of my company commanders was one of those 
that was selected to go TDY to Vietnam at that time. They issued him civilian clothes, or gave him 
money to buy civilian clothes, issued him a civilian passport, and sent him to Vietnam as one of 
those advisors we were going to have down there that exceeded the agreement that we made with 
Geneva that we wouldn’t have more advisors than X, so they were sending then TDY from Korea 
rather than the States so it wouldn’t be as apparent that we were violating the Geneva Accords.
Like I said, they were all getting civilian passports and everything. He told me about his experience 
and what he was doing when he was there when he came back, and it was kind of bizarre to me at 
the time. Essentially he was down there just in the training capacity, as an advisor in training.

SM: How much do you remember him telling you? What did he tell you?

TS: He was telling me about the experiences he had had working in the training center 
down there and going out with units in training. In fact, they were all [in] civilian clothes. They all 
had a weapon and they all used to come into town [and would be] sitting in the hotel room [lobby] 
waiting for whatever transportation they had. There was all these civilians sitting around the hotel 
room [lobby] with rifles and carbines and whatever weapons they had. He said it was just hilarious, 
the atmosphere at that time, almost a cowboys and Indians type thing that was going on down 
there.

SM: What weapons was your unit issued? What personal weapons, in terms of rifles?

TS: In Korea?

SM: In Korea.

TS: We still had the M-1. It was the standard weapon. As an officer, I carried a carbine 
and the light machine gun. It was pentomic organization. We didn’t have the heavy machine guns 
anymore, the water-cooled. They had light machine guns, BARs, M-1s, 81 mortars. We didn’t 
have any 60 mortars anymore.

SM: Still no M-14s?
TS: No M-14s.

SM: Was there anything else that you remember from your Korean experience that you want to discuss? We covered it pretty well?

TS: Yeah, that covers it pretty well. It was good training. We had the leftovers from everything as far as equipment goes. We still had the M-47 tank. We didn’t have the new armored personnel carrier, the M-113. We didn’t have them. We still had the M-75 armored personnel carrier. We spent a lot of our time in the field. We did a lot of training and maneuvers.

SM: How much would you use the personnel carriers?

TS: Personnel carriers? We got to use them about half the time as far as movement, them as opposed to trucks, about half the time.

SM: How about forced marching?

TS: We were about a mile and a half from our main battle positions, our camp was. So, as far as getting [out] on alert and getting to our position, we always walked to our position. If our battle group was chosen to go as the reserve unit, [or] for another, forced to the front line, we got the APCs for the move. We did some forced marching on maneuvers and stuff, but that’s all. As far as needing them for our mission, we didn’t do any forced marching.

SM: Well, when your company commander went over to Vietnam, what did you at the time understand was the U.S. mission and what we were trying to accomplish there?

TS: I didn’t even know why he was going. I mean, as far as being in Vietnam, he was just another MAAG assignment as far as I knew. He was just going down there on a MAAG assignment. There’d been a couple of BOQs that got booby-trapped or bombed, blown up or something in Vietnam previous to that. At this time in ’62, there was very little being said about what we were doing in Vietnam. Some advisors were going and MAAG assignments and that was all I knew. I didn’t know we were involved to any extent.

SM: When you left Korea, where did you go?

TS: I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, assigned to the weapons department as an instructor.

SM: Ok. This is...

TS: ’62.

SM: ’62. And how long did you stay there?
TS: I stayed at Benning until '64, one year in the weapons department and one year going
to the advanced course.

SM: Ok. When you were with the weapons department, you mentioned of course that that
was when you conducted the test with the M-16. What other types of things did you do with them?

TS: In the weapons department, I was an instructor on the technique of fire committee,
which was teaching rifle squads how to employ fire to engage various types of targets.

SM: What types of units, just light infantry or with mortars and other heavy weapons?

TS: No, strictly rifle squads.

SM: Strictly rifle squads?

TS: And by that time, the rifle squad had an M-14. That was the first time I worked with
the M-14. They had them at that time, but I was not personally firing them. They had the M-14. At
that time, we first integrated the M-79 grenade launcher into the rifle squads. They were still toying
around with the M-14 with a full automatic and they hadn't really come to that decision whether
they were going to do that. So, we had a rifle squad with the [nine] M-14s and two M-79 grenade
launchers.

SM: Were you training principally to engage personnel and soft-skinned targets?

TS: Yes.

SM: Ok. So not anti-tank or anti-armor?

TS: No. The weapons committee or weapons department was broke down into various
committees, the small arms committee and then of course you have the anti-tank committee and
the machine gun committee and so forth, and each one was to – we were primarily teaching
student officers. All the ROTC graduates, all the West Point officers, they came down there and
they got their whatever it was [Infantry Officers Basic Training Course, IOBC], fourteen weeks or
something of training at Benning before they went on to their first assignment. Then of course they
got all the OCS candidates that would go through, so it was predominantly the student officers or
OCS candidates is what we taught classes to.

SM: This included training against Soviet vehicles, soft-skinned vehicles, things like that,
or was it just enemy formations?

TS: What I was teaching was just strictly enemy infantry formations. [We were not
teaching tactics, just weapons.]

JB: Sir, did you use the M-60 as a squad-level weapon at that time?
TS: M what?

JB: M-60.

TS: The M-60 was still in testing at that time, if I remember. No, we hadn’t integrated the
M-60 [into squads] yet. It was still in testing. [Machine guns were taught by a different committee.]

SM: Were you aware of any of the debates and issues surrounding the M-14 going to fully
automatic versus just semi-automatic?

TS: Yeah, that was one of those things that was going on in the weapons department.

Like I said, I was in the technique of fire in the rifle squad [team]. That’s all I did, was [teach] the
technique of fire of the rifle squad. We had another committee over there that was doing M-14
basic marksmanship, another committee that did the machine gun, another committee that taught
the .45 pistol. We were pretty segmented, you know, when you got in your little tunnel vision type,
is what it really boiled down to.

SM: Did you hear any of the pros and cons of what they were discussing as far as
whether they should transition or not?

TS: Yeah, I mean the biggest thing, and the same thing that came out in the M-16 [tests]
was the amount of ammunition that it would take to support soldiers who had the selectivity [for
auto fire, they were afraid they would] run out of all that ammunition. There was a big debate
internally in the department about, between the old senior officers about testing this and testing
that. It boiled down to a lot of what I thought was opinions of individual people that were on one
side of an issue or on the other side of the issue [and not necessarily based on sound facts].

SM: Was there anything else that occurred while you were there working with the
weapons department?

TS: Well, at this time we were starting to get into Vietnam. Late ’62, early ’63, we were
starting to get a lot of feedback from Vietnam at the department, and that’s why we were getting in
the AK-47s. The infantry agency [or test board] was testing the AK-47 extensively. They had a
whole team down there that was just testing it to see how well it worked and everything and there
were people coming back, gradually coming back at that time from Vietnam. So, you started to
learn more about what was going on there. The truth was coming to the surface about Laos and
the [Special Forces] teams that we had in Laos at that time. It was classified [as the] White Star
mobile training teams and we were in Laos with a bunch of Special Forces teams. People were
getting more interested in that aspect of life. It looked like it was going to be the war or whatever or
the combat, and you could hear the expression that was often said, ‘It ain’t much of a war, but it’s
the only war we’ve got.’ It was a move on that everybody that was career-oriented wanted to make
sure he got himself over to Vietnam, if you want to call it [to get] his ticket punched [before it
ended], and there was a lot of that activity going on among them, the people that were there at the
school.

SM: Do you remember any specific techniques that were altered or introduced as a result
of information coming back from Vietnam while you were there in the weapons program?
TS: No, not on my team, we [did not] essentially adapt anything, change anything from
what we were doing. We were still fighting the war in Europe with the 11-man rifle squad, on my
team anyway.

SM: Focusing on the potential for war with the Soviet Union?
TS: Yeah, that’s what it was at the time when I was teaching.
SM: No mention of counter-insurgency, counter-guerilla?
TS: It was, like I say, it was coming back to school and the school was beginning to evolve
and adapt into that. I saw a lot of that the next year, the second year I was at Benning, when I
went to the advanced course, because [in] the advanced course I went to, there were quite a few
people that had come back from Vietnam as [having been] advisors. On of them had been in a
Special Forces team in Laos that was in our class, and we got into this counter-insurgency mode at
that [the school at this] time. We had a mandatory reading list in the advanced course that
included books that we were required to read as outside reading and preparing ourselves for
service in Vietnam, if you want to call it that. Bernard Fall’s book *Street Without Joy*. Several of
those were on the list that we were required to read so that could update ourselves on what was
going on in Vietnam. During the advanced course, we had guest speakers that would come in and
talk about these various aspects of things that were going on in Vietnam. They didn’t lose sight of
the Russian threat or whatever you want to call it. But, we did get [a lot of emphasis on Vietnam].
In fact, Bernard Fall was one of the guest speakers that we had come in and we spent four hours
[listening to him]. He talked for about an hour and a half and then answered questions and then
discussed things for about four hours in the theater with our class. He was quite enlightening. Of
course, this classmate that we had that had been over there, a couple more helicopter pilots and
several of them had been advisors with various training centers or out in the field with various units,
so we got a pretty good feedback about what was going on there. At the same time, the 11th Air
Assault Division was on post doing their final testing before they were sent to Vietnam, and when they sent them to Vietnam they reflagged them as the 1st Cav Division Air Mobile. So, they were training at Benning at the same time, so we had a lot of this preparation for Southeast Asia going on. One of the committees had built a Vietnamese village thing out in one of the training areas to utilize for training and so forth. So, in '63, early [late] '63 on, it began to take a much higher profile as far as Vietnam went. Like I say, it got to the point that everybody [was saying], 'It's not much of a war, but it's the only war we've got. You've got to get your ticket punched, you've got to get your combat time.' That mood was prevalent there at Benning at that time.

SM: Do you remember anything specific from Bernard Fall’s lecture and the session you had with him, anything that struck you as very useful, helpful in understanding the situation?

TS: Well, I think the thing that I got from Bernard Fall that was the worst or the best was that he told us that we were going down a crooked path and we were getting into a quagmire that we weren’t ready for. We weren’t properly thinking in the right direction. At that time, it was [how] quick and easy it was going to be, you know, and of course he had been over there during the time of Diem Bien Phu and everything and he’d walked these trails and, 'This is not a six-month job. You don’t need to worry about rushing over there to get there because you aren’t going to finish this in two years. You’re not going to get it done.' To me, I got from him that we were going into a long, prolonged effort and that it would take us many years to accomplish and we had to go on with it. Yet, at the same time, I was getting the feedback from the senior military that we’ll get in there and do this and get it over with. The two didn’t track together. That stuck with me that one of the experts on the country was telling us things that were sort of contrary to what the given policy was or the party line was from the military. That’s the main thing that I remember of Bernard Fall’s... Of course we studied the British activity in Malaysia and how long it had taken them and how the infrastructure efforts that they had put forth there to accomplish their success. It didn’t seem to track with what we were doing.

SM: Did you have any other correspondents or foreign military personnel come in? For instance, Thompson? Did he come in from the British side and explain the Malaysian policy and counter-insurgency talks?

TS: Thompson wasn’t there. We did have a British officer. His name doesn’t crack with me now.

SM: But he had Malaysian experience?
TS: Yeah, and they talked about what they'd done in Malaysia. Like I say, the advanced course that I went through, graduated in '64, and it was almost [all conventional warfare], teaching the battle in Europe and at this time, we were going through the transition from the pentomic back to, not a triangular concept, but back to the battalion concept of maneuver battalion and so forth. We were going through that concept at the advanced course. At the same time, they were trying to integrate as much of the Vietnam problems that we were coming up with as they could. As I say, the 1st Cav Division went over right about the time we graduated, so that's '64, so that was when we upped the ante. It took off, I guess.

SM: After that briefing with Bernard Fall, were you more or less skeptical of one source or another, Fall versus the leadership, the military leadership that was telling you it was going to be over quick?

TS: At the time, I guess I had an open mind about it. But, in flashing back on it or whatever, they were very adamant that all the young captains at the advanced course were learning [about Vietnam]. We had this reading list and we had to learn this and [that] whatever, and yet when I got to Vietnam on the first tour, I found that of all the [high ranking] people there, it seemed like none of them had ever read these books or listened to these people or [anything], whatever they were.... They were in some of the zones where I thought I was, and I guess that's when I began to get kind of skeptical of the fact versus policy. But until then, I was just, well, everybody's got a different opinion of what's going on, you know. I'm not there, so I haven't seen it, so I don't know [for sure].

SM: What did you do after you graduated from the advanced course?

TS: I got assigned to France. I didn't get to punch my ticket. I got assigned to France to a logistical command.

SM: How long did you stay there?

TS: Twenty-two months.

SM: So '64 to '66?

TS: Yeah. I don't know why. They needed somebody, I guess, and I was a reserve officer and I wasn't high enough on the pecking order to go to Vietnam, I don't know why I got it. I put in for Vietnam, like everybody else in the class did, but not everybody could get it. A bunch of us got Germany, three of us got France, and I don't know where everybody went. Some of them went to Vietnam and so forth. It turned out that France was a good pre-assignment for Vietnam.
SM: How so?

TS: Because I learned some French when I was there, which helped me later when I went. The first tour I got over there, it helped me. I got to France and I was on staff at the logistics command and I didn’t know anything about logistics and I didn’t know anything about a staff. Because up to this time, I’d never been outside of the company or at the school. So, it was good experience as far as learning staff work and that aspect of it. We were required to learn French, not learn it but I mean, they sent us to classes on French language because we dealt with the French Army and they wanted us to be linguists or whatever, but I was never a linguist, but I did learn enough French to get by and have minor conversations with somebody. I couldn’t philosophize or anything with them, but you learned some French.

SM: What was the atmosphere in France concerning the U.S. involvement in Vietnam? Did you pick up on anything?

TS: I never picked up on anything about French feelings of what we were doing in Vietnam. The French at the time were under Charles DeGualle and Grand Charles… They were in the process of wanting us to get out and we were in the process of wanting to get out. We had a gold flow problem at the time. We were trying to extricate ourselves from France because of the gold flow problem and Charles wanted to kick us out because he didn’t want any Americans there because for whatever reason, he wasn’t happy with Americans. The French were in the nationalistic period where they were not totally embracing of Americans by that time. The second war was long over and whatever, they just changed the diplomatic language from French to English and all pilots had to speak English because of air traffic control. It was that feeling of Americans weren’t the greatest thing in the world. If you didn’t speak a little French, you didn’t get too far with the French at the time. They were kind of nationalistic. I have found since then in the last two or three years when I went back over there, they’ve changed a lot. At that time, they were pretty nationalistic about what they thought.

SM: And in terms of the logistics staff work you did, how much had they in Europe, in terms of logistics, how much had they integrated the helicopter into the scheme of things, where of course in Vietnam it because the workhorse, the logistics workhorse? Was that already integrated as part of European command?

TS: The helicopter wasn’t that thoroughly integrated. We’d used the helicopter when I was in Korea, but on a minor scale. The helicopter wasn’t fully integrated in Europe. They were in
the process when I got there of changing from individual tech services, that is, the engineer agency
controlled all engineer supply. The ordnance agency controlled all ordnance supply. We were
integrating that into one thing [agency], where the supply and management agency controlled
supplies of all the tech services. That was a major computer integration problem fiasco, whatever
you want to call it. When you took all these small computers and they dumped it all into one big
computer, and then garbage in, garbage out. There was a lot of problems we had with stock
control because we took these small computers and dumped them all onto one big computer
without really doing a wall-to-wall inventory when we did it and it didn’t really match up with reality
sometimes.

SM: What kind of computers are we talking about?

TS: We had the big IBM 360s that we had and the ones before they called ‘Moby Dick’ I
think it was that the individual stock control agencies had. At the same time, we were trying to
phase out of France, because France was the supply logistics for the front lines fighting the
Russians, and all our logistics came through France. We were closing out our depots in France.
One time, we planned to close out a depo, Samur Depo, which was a signal depo and it was pretty
much self-contained in warehouses because of signal equipment [had to be] climate controlled and
everything, and the printout said, ‘This is what we’ve got at the depo,’ and we had a staff meeting
and figure, ‘Ok, it’s going to take two medium truck companies forty-two days of line haul to empty
the depo and get it moved into a signal depo in Germany.’ So, we went to work and forty-two days
later, they hadn’t even got inside the building yet. They were still hauling crates of stuff that were
stored outside the building that weren’t even on the printout of what was there. So, I mean, it was
kind of bad. There were lots of problems with it. At the same time, they were trying to build up the
logistical base in Vietnam so they were stealing people out of France faster than you could think
about it. It was a rat race.

SM: Was any of the material sent to Vietnam?

TS: Yeah, we sent a lot of the material to Vietnam. We emptied one ammunition depo to
send the stuff to Vietnam because it was the older M-1 ammunition and stuff like that that was still
stored there. We were shipping it. Of course by that time, our troops had the M-14 in Europe, so
all of that type of ammunition we were trying to back ship because we were closing the depo
anyway and we were shipping it to Vietnam.

SM: Anything else besides ammo?
TS: I don't know. Ammo is the one that I remember. I worked in the personnel staff of the
logistics command and I dealt mostly with people, but I was in the meetings where they were
planning everything. We had gold flow plans, which was saving money. We saved money in
Europe by getting people out of Europe. We had all kinds of plans going simultaneously and
sometimes you'd get an order to execute one in this plans and we'd already executed it out of that
[in some other] plan. They said, 'Well, you've got to do something. We need another hundred
people out of France, pick them up from someplace else.' You couldn't believe the turmoil that was
going around in France at the time because they were trying to, like I say, build up Vietnam
logistics base, move everything from France into Germany, and get everybody else out of France
all at the same time, so it was a mess.

SM: What were the important lessons you took away from that experience?

TS: The Army doesn't talk to itself. I mean, we had I know four different major things that
were going on at that time, which were all classified, top-secret, that were doing things in France,
and all these four plans were developed by different agencies or whatever. Nobody in any of these
four agencies had ever looked to see what the other three had done. One of them was the
McNamara plan and the McNamara plan, we did something on it and it was also included in the
other three, and then somebody would come along and say, 'Well, do it in this one,' 'Well, we did it
over here.' Nobody seemed to know what all was going on. To me, it was understanding that the
big planners don't talk to each other very well. I guess that's it.

SM: Speaking of classification, classified information being disseminated, you mentioned
in the advanced course you had a classmate that was one of the Special Forces guys in Laos?

TS: Yes.

DM: Did he talk much about those experiences, because at that point, those would still be
classified?

TS: Yeah, we talked about them all, in class even. Though they were classified, a good
lot of our classes were classified and we discussed what we were doing and by that time, perhaps
Laos…in fact, when Laos had come out, I don't remember when it came out, but it was classified
for quite a few years, what all we did over there, but I don't remember when it was declassified.
But, there was a lot of those classes that went on that were classified at the time, trying to get
experienced as to what was going on. At that time, we still were teaching nuclear weapons
deployment or employment and we had a two-week block of instructions on employing nuclear
weapons and whatever.

SM: Did that involve the Davy Crockett?

TS: Yeah.

SM: What did you guys think of that?

TS: Well, Davy Crockett was the command's nightmare because it had all the nuclear
safeguards and everything you had to do with it, procedures where you had to test everybody and
keep records and it was just a nightmare of management problems for a commander, and the
weapon itself, it was really questionable. An eight-inch artillery, nuclear artillery round was just as
readily available as a Davy Crockett and an infantry commander wouldn't have to mess with it. In
our opinion, most of our opinions, I don't know, maybe some of the guys had other opinions, most
of our opinions were it wasn't worth messing with. It was more agony that it was ever going to be
worth.

SM: I don't know if this is accurate. I thought there were also some concerns about the
range of the weapon, the blast radius, and the ability of the team to get out in time. Was that ever
discussed?

TS: Yes, that was. If you shot it a little bit short, were you going to be in the zone? Can
we take a break for a minute?

SM: Absolutely.

TS: I'm about to go to the john.

SM: All right, we're continuing the interview after lunch now. It's about two o'clock on the
8th of October. Well sir, why don't we go ahead and finish discussing the Davy Crockett issue that
we started to discuss before lunch? What kind of concerns were there besides what we already
talked about, especially with regard to things like the range, the blast radius, the real utility of this
specific piece of equipment?

TS: The utility of it was that it didn't provide anything other than a battalion commander
having his own nuclear weapons capability and it was real limited and you had to get the delivery
source forward and there was a lot of concern about who was going to authorize utilization and
when you could use it, if you could use it. You mentioned the blast radius dictated that it should be
very far forward, and that was considered by a lot of people not a good place for it to be. It wasn't
much better or as good as an eight-inch nuclear round, which the infantry commander, battalion
commander did not have to concern himself with because it was in the artillery, in the rear. So, it
wasn’t one of those weapons that was looked on with a lot of warm fuzzies, I guess you’d say in
the infantry because it had its inherent problems and we don’t know whether it was going to be that
good. Of course nobody had ever shot one of them, either.

SM: Was there much concern? You mentioned that because of the blast radius and other
issues it would have to be far forward. Well, if they go too far forward, they’re very close to the
enemy and what if this falls into the enemy’s hands and is going to be shot back at you?

TS: I don’t think that bothered people as much as the awkwardness of the delivery
system, bringing it up that close to the front lines. If the front lines were fluid or whatever, you
would lose the weapon, but I don’t know if we were...if we were interested in losing the weapon to
the enemy that well, it was hard enough for us to figure out how to shoot the thing, let alone the
enemy.

SM: Right, and of course being an atomic weapon basically it’s an area weapon, and was
there any concern or discussion about the fact that in the area in which the weapon would be
deployed, which would probably be Europe as this would be part of the war against the Russians…

TS: That was about the only place we would really use it.

SM: Yeah, the European frontier is riddled with towns and villages and civilians. Was
there much talk over concerns over civilian casualties if something like this were employed in a
tactical environment?

TS: No. It was the same concert that you had shooting an eight-inch round or using air
dropped nuclear weapons. If we were ever going to use it, the situation [had] deteriorated to the
point that it had to be used. That was the intents we all had. When we got around to shooting that
thing, we were deep in the hole.

SM: It’s kind of one of the last ditch weapons?

TS: Yeah. In Korea, we had right behind my battle group, we had a position that had a
240-millimeter cannon, the one that was on two trucks and took forever to get it in position and it
fired way beyond the DMZ. It was sitting there, and it was a nuclear cannon and that was its only
purpose. But in all, we considered everywhere I was in the Army that when you were shooting
nuclear weapons, you were shooting them as the last ditch in defense as opposed to selectively
going out there and firing it. Now originally we’d come up with all these little smaller nuclear
weapons and tactical nuclear weapons so the commander could utilize them, but as time went on,
it became apparent to almost everybody that no commander had the authority to shoot nuclear
weapons without somebody on high blessing the fact that they didn’t want retaliation and so on and
so on. I think that was another thing that we [went] through all of this agony to have a Davy
Crockett with little hope of ever being able to utilize it.

SM: Because of mutually assured destruction and the fact that they wouldn’t be able to be
deployed effectively?

TS: Yes, you didn’t have flexibility because you had to keep going up through channels to
get permission to use it, which a lot of our plans were that way. In Europe, they had the non-
combat NEO [plan or] whatever it was, non-combatant evacuation plan, get all the dependents out
of Europe in case the Russians come across. But the Army didn’t have the authority [to implement
it], the military didn’t have the authority to issue the order because if you were going to get your
dependents out, the Army couldn’t issue the order because the Russians perceived issuing that
order as us making the first act of going to war and that would probably trigger some of their
activities. So, the authority to order the non-combatant evacuation was withdrawn from the military
and was lodged in the State Department. So, those of us that knew it {dependents never knew that
and most of the military didn’t know it}, but those that did know it considered that civilians were
going to die in place if the Russians came, because we were going to evacuate early because that
was considered by the Russians an overt aggressive act on our part.

SM: Well, it would certainly be a flag, a red flag.

TS: Yeah, that we were planning to do something.

SM: There’s only one reason to evacuate. Given that obviously there’s concern that we’re
going to have potentially civilian casualties if anything does actually happen, at the same time was
it discussed amongst you and the other officers that knew about this that, well, there’s some
legitimacy in that? I mean, if…

TS: It wasn’t discussed because it was at that time a closely held top secret. Everybody
practiced and knew evacuation orders. When I was in France, we had positions where we had the
gasoline storage and everything all the way across France so that they could go all the way across
France into Spain, which was neutral, or the Atlantic border on France to evacuate all [everyone].
We had stores of food and stores of gasoline for the vehicles and everything. The plan was there
and everything, but the ability to execute it was not in the hands of the military, it was in the hands
of politicians. Whether the politicians were going to allow it or not allow it, we always thought they
weren’t allowed, those of us who read the plan and understood the authority to execute it. They
weren’t going to execute it because they didn’t want to trigger that political problem.

SM: Ok. Did you have any questions, Jon, about his time in France or any of these Cold
War issues?

JB: No.

SM: Where did you go after you left France?

TS: I had orders to Fort Ord, California to be a company commander at the training center
at Fort Ord. It was a stabilized one-year tour because they were trying to stabilize the training base
because of the buildup in Vietnam. They wanted senior captains in company command positions
for all the training centers. So, I got there in May of ’66 and got orders for Vietnam in November of
’66. So, my stabilized one-year tour lasted until May [only 7 months] and actually I left in January.

SM: What did you think when you got your orders?

TS: To Ord or Vietnam?

SM: To Vietnam.

TS: I thought that one-year stabilized tour had gone rather rapidly.

SM: (Laughing) Were you happy that you were going to Vietnam?

TS: Yes, it was ok. It’s one of those things, you got to punch your ticket or whatever. You
train for ten years and if you’re going to do something you might as well get on and get in the
game.

SM: Yes, sir. Were you married at this point?

TS: I got married on July 1st of ’66.

SM: Ok, so you were married just half a year?

TS: Yeah, half a year.

SM: What did your new wife think about your orders to Vietnam?

TS: She actually was in the Air Force when we got married and she knew I was going. It
was just a matter of whether I was going in January or if I was going the next May, because I [only]
had a one-year stabilized tour. We figured that perhaps we’d have a year at most because the
infantry officers were going around in circles going back and forth between Vietnam and the United
States, so it wasn’t expected that it was going to be a very long, a year at the most. Their
stabilized policies didn’t stabilize too well.
SM: Well for the time that you were the company commander of that training camp, was there anything new, anything special about that?

TS: At that time, I was a company commander of Advanced [Individual Training Company].

SM: I'm sorry, advanced?

TS: Advanced Individual Training. At Fort Jackson, I'd been a company commander in basic training, so there was a difference in aspect there. The motivation was much higher for people learning their trade at Ord during this period because everybody that finished there was going further west, or going to the Far East, whichever way you want to say it. So there was a lot more motivation among the young soldiers to learn something, and the training had changed to the point where we had a mock Vietnamese village in part of the training. Of course at that point we were up to the M-14 rifle and we were doing a lot more Southeast Asian indoctrination of everybody and a lot more night training that I had remembered being in AIT before. The battalion commander was very strict and made a lot of emphasis on making sure that we did the night training and did it well. But, other than that, it was running a training company. Like most training centers, they had committees that did the majority of the instruction and we were the cadre that took care of them in the barracks, took care of their administration and got them to the training sites and so on. But, we also did remedial training on everything that was important or everything that was going to be covered in their end-of-course proficiency testing that they did. We reviewed all those things with them again and back in the company area after they’d had the training in the field before they went to get the proficiency test. So, we made sure that we graduated everybody and nobody failed and they were well skilled at the things that they needed to be skilled in.

SM: Do you remember what was involved in the Vietnam indoctrination portion of the training at that point?

TS: At that point, there was a lot of training on how to identify or watch for booby traps or types of booby traps that had been experienced, how to sweep through a village with mutual support and more combat in cities training, which was not taught normally. It was normally taught at AIT before but was combat in cities that took the place of basic unit training, yet we were emphasizing a modified combat cities or combat in the village, whatever you wanted to call it, in AIT at this time. That was the major thing that it changed over to.

SM: How about issues about rules of engagement, things like that?
TS: The code of conduct was being taught, rules of engagement was not an issue there, no.
SM: Was there anything else that was new or different about Advanced Infantry Training the second time around for you?
TS: No, those are the only things that I can distinctly remember that were different.
SM: Let’s go ahead and end the CD. This will end CD number one of the interview with Mr. Spencer.
SM: This is CD number two of the interview with Mr. Tom Spencer of the 8th of October. Well sir, why don’t we go ahead and talk about your trip to Vietnam, and actually, did you receive any kind of briefings before you left and did you know exactly what you’d be doing before you left? When did you find out you’d be an advisor?
TS: I was assigned to MACV as an advisor as opposed to USARV, which was the American forces. I got sent originally to Fort Bragg for the MATA course (sector [/unit] advisors course), Military Advisors Course. They ran that. It was run by the Special Forces people at Fort Bragg and we had, I don’t remember now, six or eight weeks there, which they gave us an indoctrination on Vietnam and then being an advisor, they had two weeks. During that period, we got a couple hours a day of basic Vietnamese language. They reviewed with us all of the weapons that the Vietnamese Army had, many of which were no longer in American armed forces. The sub-machine gun, the grease gun, had all by this time in ’68, ’67 had dropped out of the American arsenal. So, we got a class on all of those, and predominately for younger officers who hadn’t served back far enough that they would have remembered any of those weapons. We reviewed all these weapons that were now being given to the Vietnamese Army to use. They were no longer in our arsenals. We had classes on booby traps and the general partake of that. From there, I got assigned to Biggs Air Force Base, Fort Bliss, Texas, where I got the rest of the language school training. It was another six weeks, six or eight weeks of all day, all we had was Vietnamese language training. They had Vietnamese instructors that taught the language and then we had a lab in the afternoon where we went in and listened to tapes and each night, we had a vocabulary to learn before we studied for the next day’s session with that class. Vietnamese language I found very difficult because it’s a tonal language, and the inflection in the voices. Sometimes it was beyond telling the difference between which was which for me. I had to listen awful darn close. Sometimes I didn’t catch subtle differences between words spelled the same and the only
difference in the meaning was the inflection in your voice when you pronounced a word. It was one of the most difficult schools I've ever been to because like I say, I found that part of it very difficult. I had a unique way of studying; I used to go to a bar and I'd order a drink and I'd set them up next to the glass. I'd go through all the cards and then I could take my drink and get the drink refilled and then go through them. So, I worked my way through the cards. All the way through, I wouldn't touch the drink. That was an incentive, I guess, or whatever. But, it was difficult, and a lot of us found it very difficult because of the tonal part of the language.

SM: Now when you were going through the sector advisors course or through that additional Vietnamese language course, how much emphasis was placed on Vietnamese culture, cultural dos and don'ts, things like that?

TS: At Bragg, the instructors that were teaching us the language at Fort Bragg for two weeks, two hours a day for two weeks, they also taught, 'These are customs,' and so forth of the Vietnamese people or whatever. When we got into the language school, those types of information came out in class as the instructor was teaching us parts of the words, but it was not given a block of instructional culture or anything given in the language. It was integrated at Bragg to some degree, but not very heavy.

SM: How about Vietnamese history?

TS: Vietnamese history was if you didn't know it, you didn't get it at the school. The only reason that I knew Vietnamese history at that point in life is because of the required reading we'd got at Fort Benning and we'd all been [reading up on Vietnam] because we were building up to this point in life. You were reading these things professionally on your own because the Army was not giving you Vietnamese history.

SM: How about the political writings of specific people, whether it be Ho Chi Minh, Ngo Nguyen Giap, the major political and military leaders in North Vietnam? Did they get emphasized a lot?

TS: The military writings of China we had gotten a hold of.

SM: Mao Tse Tsung's writings?

TS: Yes, and the readings on his war with the Nationalists and his guerilla philosophy in fighting a guerilla war we had to study. But as far as Ho Chi Minh, we learned in military school practically nothing about Ho Chi Minh. It was only in the readings you did on your own. Uncle Ho
was the leader of the North and being a Nationalist more so than a Communist and a lot of those
things, that wasn’t the military ideal.

SM: Is this your interpretation now or is that what you also thought at the time, that Ho Chi
Minh was more of a Nationalist than a Communist?

TS: I considered him more of a national figure then and I got that more intense feeling
than after I got in country and talking with one of my counterparts when I got to ‘Nam and he had a
lot of respect for Ho Chi Minh because of freeing Vietnam from the colonial powers of France, and
then later on what I’d read up to that point and later readings that I’d made. I had come to the
conclusion that Uncle Ho in fact thought more of Vietnam than he did of trying to align himself with
the rest of the Communist world. I questioned why we were worrying about Ho Chi Minh being a
Communist and we weren’t worried about why Marshall Tito was a Communist. We were backing
Marshall Tito because he was a Communist, but he was sort of anti-Stalin and Ho Chi Minh didn’t
seem to be in anybody’s camp except Ho Chi Minh’s, yet we weren’t willing to quasi-back him or
whatever, and that was a question that always ran through my mind, not in the military but political
foreign policy.

SM: Before you went to Vietnam, what did you understand about the nature of the conflict
in that country? What did you think was happening?

TS: Before I went, it was my impression that we were going over there ostensibly to
combat an insurgency of the North led an insurgency against the popular elected government, I
guess you’d say. We were trying to say for the Domino Theory and save Southeast Asia from the
Domino Theory that was going to happen and keep democracy in place in Saigon, but I went into
Vietnam in ’67 and I guess I lost that naiveté in a rather rapid time after I got there.

SM: How did your opinion change and why?

TS: I guess my opinion primarily changed because we kept talking about democracy in
South Vietnam and yet in dealing with the locals that I dealt with in the area where I was stationed,
the concept of Communism or democracy was an unknown concept to anybody practically that
was a civilian. The farmer in the field, knowing Communism as opposed to democracy, it was an
unknown concept. He wanted [only] one tax collection, really. The government of South Vietnam
would come through and collect the taxes legally during the daytime and the Viet Cong would
come through illegally and collect the taxes at night, and his concept was, ‘I want to get rid of one
tax collector. It doesn’t matter which to me because neither one of them are doing anything to me
as a farmer in the rice paddy,' but neither one of them was doing anything for him. So what
difference does it make who he paid taxes to? Just get rid one of them. Of course, there was the
overthrow on the assassination of Diem came about and continued turmoil in the Saigon
government. It appeared to me that we had never honestly elected any government in South
Vietnam that the people really wanted, and I thought if you had asked the people – this is my
personal opinion – if you’d have got the people together in South Vietnam in ’67 and ’68 and asked
them who they wanted for president, they would have said Ho Chi Minh. That’s just my opinion,
[from] what limited feelings I had in dealing with the people that I had. In fact, Captain Ahn, I’m
sure he would have voted for Ho Chi Minh if we’d been on a ballot against Diem or one of those I
would have thought, not because he was a Communist but because he was a leader that he
respected. But, that’s only the feelings I got in working, and I didn’t find a lot of support
philosophically or morally from the military for the government in Saigon in reality. I mean, they
were part of the military and that was their future and that’s where their pay came from. But
philosophically being whether they were Communists or the Democratic government in Saigon, I’m
not sure that they really cared that much.

SM: You’re talking about the ARVN at this point, and the Ruff-Puffs, Ruff-Puff forces?
TS: Yeah, Regional Force people, yeah.
SM: Regional Force People. The captain that you worked with that was your counterpart,
I’m sorry, Captain…
TS: Captain Ahn. A-H-N
SM: A-HN, ok, Captain Ahn, was he the gentleman who you were speaking with
previously? You knew a Vietnamese officer who fought against the Japanese during World War II,
and the French?
TS: Yes.
SM: Would you talk a little bit about his experiences and what led to his experiences and
what led to his essentially defection from the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong to the South Vietnamese
side?
TS: He was an older man. I have no idea how old he was. He was obviously an old man.
He was the captain. He was the administrative officer. He told me about initially he had fought
against the Japanese and then he had fought against the French, and at one time or another he
was sort of against the South Vietnamese government in its initial stages real early on when they
drew the line between the North and the South. Then he wanted a more stable life with what I got
out of the conversations that I had [with him was] that he was tired of living in the jungle and he
wanted to live a normal life and stay in one place and so he'd gone over to the other side. He
didn't have a lot of political convictions either way. He wanted a stable lifestyle for he and his
family. The government offered a more stable lifestyle than the anti-government did. He had been
with the locals since then. He was laid-back, maybe you'd want to say, but his ideas were in a lot
of ways, 'You can't rush into this thing. We're going to fight this war tomorrow and the next day.
Let's not get in a hurry. I'm here to fight forever. You're here, save the world today, but when you
go home I'm still going to be here. I've got to fight this battle so that I can survive the thing to the
end.' He was a good officer as far as doing duties and everything. As I say, he was the
administrative officer. He had a good hand on all the things that he was supposed to be in charge
of. But, as far as trying to advise him it was sort of, 'What do I know about his administration in the
first place,' because it was a different system of personnel and supply and everything that we did.
But if he had a problem that he thought I might help him with, he would come to me and if I saw
something that I thought might improve this thing, we'd sit down over a meal and we'd chitchat
about it. Sometimes we did something about it and sometimes we didn't do anything about it. If he
didn't, he didn't. That's just the way it was. Then later on I became the deputy senior advisor of
the team and then I began to work with the major [deputy commander] and working with Major
Linh, that was another experience. There was a beautiful village north – I shouldn't say north – it
was up the Mekong River from where we were. It was a beautiful little village. It was picturesque.
One day I told Major Linh that I was going to go up to this village and take some pictures and walk
around and see how things were and he forbade me to go. 'You cannot go!' And I thought right
off, 'I'll take a couple of my men, Americans, and I'll take a squad of Vietnamese soldiers with me
and it'll be no problem.' And he said, 'No, you cannot go. It's prohibited. I will not let you go.' The
next day I learned that the Viet Cong tax collectors had been in town all day collecting taxes. He
wouldn't let me go. Whether he knew they were there or didn't know they were there, I never
knew, but I assumed because he never stopped me from going somewhere before that or after
that. He knew that if I went there that there would be a problem. When we traveled down from our
location down to the province capitol for meetings with the province chief or anything, 90% of the
time we'd travel as [in convoy with] two, ¾ ton truckloads of soldiers and we'd travel in the jeep and
we always had his security with him. Other times, we'd get in the jeep and he just had his driver
and the two of us and he’d drive down there with no security. So, there was no…I became of the
opinion that Major Linh knew absolutely for sure when he could travel and it was safe and when he
couldn’t travel and it was not safe. But yet, in knowing that, you would think that he would have
taken the steps, knowing that the tax collectors were in this little village, he would have taken a
company of soldiers of three companies and gone up and done something about it. But, he wasn’t
rocking the boat. He had, ‘If they don’t bother me, I won’t bother them,’ kind of attitude. ‘But, if I
have to go and I know they’re out, I’m going to take security with me. If they’re not out, then I don’t
need to worry about security. I’ll just go in the jeep by myself.’ I got to the point of saying I didn’t
know whether we were all on the same sheet of music about whether the Viet Cong were all that
bad, and everybody wanted to get rid of the Viet Cong and everybody was in favor of the
government or what they were in favor of. But, it was very evident to me that the knowledge of
Vietnamese, they were in of knowledge with the Viet Cong that I wasn’t and when it was safe for
me to travel and not safe, they would tell me and so forth. We did do some traveling that was not
related to them and we just went on our own. We got ambushed a couple of times, and sometimes
we didn’t. So, it was always a throw of the dive, but I was sure that they knew more than ever
floated across the intelligence reports. They had their sources.

SM: There of course has been recognition since the war, and probably occurred during
the war, and if you know firsthand perhaps you can elaborate, but there was some infiltration of the
South Vietnamese military by the Viet Cong and by the North Vietnamese, to include the officer’s
corps. What do you think is the possibility that this Major Linh was actually sympathetic?

TS: He could have been sympathetic. I didn’t have long discussions with him about
philosophy or about the past or anything like that like I did with Captain Ahn. He was a busy man
and we got together for official things and those types of activities. But, I never really got to know
him well as I did Captain Ahn. We sat down and talked, but I never did get that close to him. I
don’t know whether he was infiltrated or where his sympathies were, I don’t know.

SM: Did Captain Ahn speak openly about all this, not just with you but with as far as his
transition?

TS: I don’t know how openly he spoke with others.

SM: Did it surprise you when he first told you he was both Viet Minh and Viet Cong before
he became ARVN?
TS: I don't think it did. I think he just… I guess it surprised me, but it didn't shock me. I guess it surprised me, but he’d been fighting so long. That was how long he’d been involved in a war, and that got the conversations started. It surprised me I guess that he’d been on the other side. I guess most of the country was on the other side at one time when Ho Chi Minh was fighting the French. It wasn’t bad. I didn’t consider it bad. I didn’t consider him disloyal. I think he was very loyal to where he was at this point in his life, and I don’t think he really changed in what he wanted. He wanted Vietnam to be Vietnam, free of colonial powers or whatever.

SM: But he didn’t view the American activities as neo-colonialist or American colonialism?

TS: Well, at that time I don't think he would have. He might have, but we were a source at that time of funds and goodies, and I think the Vietnamese used advisors in a lot of cases as their source of supply as opposed to source of advice because in looking back on it, we were coming in with young captains in (from) the United States with or without [combat experience and] one or two [years experience and they were] over their head at times and trying to advise somebody on combat operations that had been in combat operations for Lord knows how many years. So, this is the blind leading the blind, which was, I thought, a very difficult thing that the Americans were trying to do. We could give them a lot of advice, but our advice was stashed away in the American set of values, too, as opposed to a semi-oriental set of values, and it's not the same.

SM: From your perspective, what were the biggest differences there that affected American activities in Southeast Asia?

TS: Americans were too gung-ho. Americans wanted to get the thing over with in a hurry. Americans wanted to – I’m speaking from an advisor’s standpoint – Americans wanted to believe that everything that they recommended was going to happen. Americans tended to believe that when they saw an order that had been issued by the government in Saigon that it was going to be adhered to, and little or no relationship to the troop. The Vietnamese Armies had extremely qualified people, and they had some extremely unqualified people which is the same as the American Army. I mean, I’m not saying we had a handle on everybody being good, but they had some extremely good people in their officer’s corps, and then they had some that got their officer’s commissions though political or social connections or whatever. But, the majority of the old timers were extremely well [qualified] for them, [at least] the ones that I had met. I would say that they were as well qualified or more qualified than their advisors in the field that they were dealing with. Our biggest asset to them was the ability to get them helicopters and supplies and stuff that they
couldn’t get through their own system. I didn’t have any problems with the Vietnamese unit that
was well led, fighting and doing a good job. If it wasn’t well led, then it probably wasn’t going to do
too good a job.

SM: We kind of got ahead of ourselves. We haven’t even gotten into Vietnam yet, so let’s
take a step back for a second. I led you astray there. If you would, go ahead and describe first of all when you left for Vietnam and what your first impressions where when you got there.

TS: When I finished language school and went to Vietnam, I landed in Long Binh, spent
three or four days there while they issued us uniforms, and then they trucked us into Saigon to
Koelper compound, [a hotel] where they kept people while MACV decided what advisory team you
were going to ultimately go to. My first impression of Saigon, and I had been all over, or just about all
over the Far East – I’d been to Manila and Bangkok and Rangoon and Singapore and Kuala Lumpur over there before – Saigon was undoubtedly the dirtiest town I’d been in as far as
sanitation, garbage on the streets, and to me it appeared that there was no operating government
that was controlling and cleaning and managing day-to-day governmental business in the city. It
didn’t look like there was anything going on. The place had that appearance of fortified siege
mentality. They had barbed wire around the compound, MPs on the gate, everybody looking.
They were afraid somebody was going to get them at night, and so there was a lot of, I guess you’d say, apprehension about the security of everything that was going on. I sat around there for a day or two, went out there to MACV headquarters and got interviewed because I had been in a
company commander of two different training outfits and I’d been an instructor at the infantry
school at Benning. I was assigned to the training directorate, which was part of J3, MACV J3.
After that, I got interviewed there and they assigned me to a training center. The training center
was Tan An Training Center in the delta, IV Corps, right on the Mekong River, Kien Phong
province. It was a good [assignment]. I liked the assignment because it was a mixed assignment;
that is, the training center was there, but the province had carved out a geographical area around
the training center, which would have been a district in the province or a sub-sector in a province.
So, we [also] had responsibility for the same things as a district advisor did, in addition to having
the training center. Then we [also] had a battalion of RF soldiers that were used for operations that
were controlled, that we controlled or not controlled [by the center] that operated out of there. It
was a mixed operation and a mixed advisory team even though the advisory team itself was a
training center advisory team. We had three [accidents]. When I got there, I was a captain and I
just worked with the training center. Then [when] I got promoted to major and then I went to deputy
senior advisor and then I worked with the training center and the sector and the security advisor. I
got involved in all aspects of what was going on. To me, that was an ideal situation, because I got
to see a little of everything that was going on and got involved in a little of everything.

SM: Were you armed from the very beginning when you got to Vietnam? Were you
issued a .45?

TS: We were issued the carbine.

SM: The carbine.

TS: Those of us who were going to field, and I picked up a .45 somewhere. I don't even
remember where I got it now, but it wasn't on the property books anywhere. It was my personal
.45 in addition to the carbine. Our advisory team was billeted in what had once been a French
compound, and you couldn't ask for better conditions. We had hooches with ceiling fans and
screen wire, louvers to keep the rain out, and we had one building that had a kitchen in it because
we had about fifteen advisors all together, so we were a large team and had a nice facility. We had
our own mess association. We went to Saigon and bought food at the commissary and trucked it
down and when we stayed in camp, we cooked our own food most of the time. About a third of the
time, I ate with my counterpart over at the Vietnamese camp, or when we went out on operations,
we ate with them. But, here we were in the same mode as the Vietnamese were. We were
scrounging and the advisor in Vietnam was a second-rate citizen in the military. If you were
assigned to MACV headquarters, you were ok. If you were a U.S. unit, you were ok. But if you
were in advisory [in the field], you were second-rate military or something and they had lists of
equipment that each advisor got to have. You got a carbine, you got a sleeping bag, you've got
this, you've got this, but nowhere in there was sheets and pillow cases, no pillows, no mattress,
because you weren't supposed to have those out there. You were supposed to sleep with your
counterpart, sleep on the ground or sleep in the hammock or whatever you did. I remember one
time we wanted to get some sheets, so I went to Saigon to get some sheets, because at that time I
was a deputy senior advisor trying to get sheets and pillowcases for the Americans. And we
weren't authorized any, so we couldn't have any. So I was going, 'Who do you work for? I want to
talk to your boss because this is stupid.' It got up and I finally found a full colonel in MACV
headquarters off on it [on approval] for me to get 24 sets of sheets and pillowcases. 24
pillowcases and 48 sheets. So, then I had this requisition approved and I took it over to the depot,
and the sergeant at the depot said, 'Go back there to the [warehouse]. We don't issue things by individual [quantities]. We only have cases.' So he changed them each to case, so I went back to the truck, and when I left there I had 24 cases of sheets and – 24 cases of pillowcases and 48 cases of sheets, and that's what I was going to get. But when I got back there to the warehouse to load them, the little Spec-4 that was going to load the truck said, 'Hell, I ain't going to break a pallet of sheets for you. Take the whole pallet.' And he [then] put the whole pallet on the truck for me, so we left with the whole pallet. And I didn't say a word, I just left. But I had spent half the day going, 'Who's your boss? Who's your boss?' to get approval, because advisors in the field were not supposed to have sheets and pillowcases, even though we were in a permanent fixed facility [and they had so many they gave me pallet]. So what I did as I was driving back down to the Kien Phong province. I went through Can Tho and the IV Corps Advisory Team, IV Headquarters Advisory Team, and I'm talking to he property book officer there, and they've got mattresses and pillows and everybody just sleeping on the mattresses and pillows. They didn't have any sheets. They were in the field, too, so I gave them almost all, half or two-thirds of what I had, I guess. I left them with him and he signed them over from me and put them on his property book. I finally had to dump some more off at [our] province advisory team and we finally wound up with what we needed at the end. But it's an example of the mentality of the supply system in Saigon worked on. There was no relationship to need or whatever. It was down here, if you weren't authorized, you couldn't have it. You could put requisitions in all day long and you couldn't get it. You had to go fight your way through [the system, even if] they had warehouses full of the stuff, and it [wasn't needed], it didn't matter how many it took.

SM: Did you find that with other pieces of equipment or other types of equipment?

TS: Yeah, we weren't authorized [regular U.S. equipment]. We were advising the Vietnamese, so we were armed with the same weapons they were, the ammunition was, the same weapons they were, etc. They were using PRC-10 radios; we had a PRC-10 radio. So, we scrounged a PRC-25 so we'd have better communications [with province]. We had two little [old model] jeeps was all we had, and somewhere along the line we needed more transportation than jeeps, so we got a couple of pickups. They were gray in color and had U.S. Navy written on them (laughs), and we borrowed those from someplace. We had them the rest of the time I was there. That was the kind of thing that went on. The supply system was wonderful, but it worked on a scrounge basis.
SM: It seemed like Saigon became a bottleneck. I mean, all this stuff came in, but once it got to Saigon, bam, it hit a wall.

TS: The team had a generator and the generator quit. We wanted a 15-kilowatt, kW generator, and I sent my senior sergeant to Saigon to find one and he couldn’t. Nobody would give [issue] him one, or whatever. He finally wound up dealing with sergeants somewhere, and he came back with two 45 kW generators, which were beyond the concept [requirements] of what we would ever need. So, we hooked them up and we let the [excess] electricity go over to the Vietnamese camp and we were powering the Vietnamese camp in addition to ourselves. Because we couldn’t get what we needed legally though channels, we got what we didn’t need, which exceeded what we needed, through the back door. The whole year as an advisor, that seemed to be the system that the supply ran. Everything that you needed was available but you just couldn’t get it legally through a system. You could get anything beyond what you needed illegally, but what you needed legally, you couldn’t get. It was the craziest system that way.

SM: When you first arrived, what were you told would be your duties as an advisor there at the training center?

TS: When I first got down to the training center, my senior advisor told me that I was going to be the administrative/logistical advisor to the training center and that I was to go meet with Captain Anh and see what I could do for him. That was about the extent of what I was told to do as far as an advisor, but because I was the administrative/logistical advisor, he also made me the admin officer of this team, so I did all the admin work for the advisory team. I did the morning reports and any report that had to go to higher headquarters. I did them and prepared them for him to sign and so forth. So, I didn’t have a clue what my counterpart needed. I didn’t even have a clue what he did. There wasn’t a document in there anywhere that was translated that said what the mission of the training center was or anything. So I just went over and introduced myself to him, and we chatted a little bit about the birds and the bees or whatever, and I told him that if there he needed something that I could help him with, let me know, and I would come back in a couple of days and I’d talk with him again or something. And I went away after I introduced myself, and then I tried to find out as much as I could about what they were doing, you know how many people they had, what their sources of supplies were, and everything else. And I used my interpreter for that, trying to ask questions without going in and bothering the captain who had his hands full with everything. So I guess the first month and a half that I was advisor, my whole time was spent
researching what was going on. My predecessor, as far as I can see, I don’t know what he did. I wasn’t there, so I don’t know what he did. But, there was no record, no books, no resources to go to when I got there. So, I started putting together a binder that, you know, they get their rice from a source here and they do this, and the supply officer gets six piasters a day to buy rice for each troop he’s got listed as being present for duty, he gets six P a day, and so therefore he can buy so much rice. So I started building up a dossier or whatever you want to call it on what the supply and administrative activities of this place was, and that’s what I spent the first month and a half [doing] in essence, what I did as advisor, trying to figure out what the hell I was doing or what the hell there was to be done.

SM: Who was being trained? This was Regional Force Training Center?

TS: Regional Force Training Center. Each Regional Force company that was in IV Corps came in there, and they’d come in there and they’d spend their period and they’d train them and then they’d go back out to their district that they came from and another would come in from another district.

SM: How many people would come through at a given time?

TS: An average company ranged around 110, maybe something like that, and we had upwards of 25 companies there at a time sometimes, at max capability. So they had normally around 2,000 troops probably, 2,000 to 2,500 troops at a time were there in training. It was a [continuous cycle; the] company would come back a year or two years later. It would come back again, and the training cycle was [repeated] to take it from sort of a basic training all the way up to a basic unit training, and it was all compressed into one kind of a training cycle. [The repetition was due to changeover of personnel in the companies.]

SM: How long would the training cycle last?

TS: They were there about ten weeks, if I remember right, but I’m not sure that’s quite right. I don’t really remember. We’d take them through zeroing weapons and basic weapons training and basic squad training and defensive and a little of everything. And during the last two weeks, they would go out and do maneuvers and run patrols out in the district that was around the training the center that was our area of responsibility to keep free of the Cong and whatever. So, that’s why we had a district of our own; because that’s where they did their final operations and stuff for their training.

SM: Any live fire exercises for them?
TS: Yeah.
SM: More than just proficiency and marksmanship?
TS: Yeah, they did some assault, fire and maneuver type things; not a lot, but a little bit.
SM: And who provided security for the training center itself?
TS: The training center, this permanent battalion that was there for security.
SM: An ARVN battalion?
TS: No, it was an RF battalion.
SM: Oh, it was a Regional Force battalion?
TS: Everything there was Regional Force.
SM: Even the permanent party that ran the school?
TS: Except the commandant and the deputy. Everybody else was Regional Force. The
commandant and the deputy, Major Dong and Major Linh. They were the only regular Army or
ARVN that were there. The rest of them were RF. Captain Anh was an RF and all the rest of
them were RFs.
SM: Now did the RF soldiers receive any kind of compensation for their service, or was
this...now they were going back and serving in the area in which they came from, the villages and
whatnot and the hamlets in which they came from. Did they receive any kind of wage or anything?
TS: Yeah, they were full time duty.
SM: They were?
TS: Now they PF, the Popular Force was the guy that had the little outpost, and he
manned the outpost at night and he did his...I don't know whether they got paid or not, but he
manned the outpost and night and during the day he plowed the fields or whatever else he did. But
the RF, Regional Forces, were like maybe our National Guard, you could say. And each province
had a given number of RF companies that were used for operations within their province. Now in
some cases, I know the RF company were in effect only utilized as a palace guard to protect the
province chief or the district chief, or whatever. That couldn't be helped, I guess. That was their
choice. The district chief would have, or not have, he might have an RF company or two or
whatever in his district to utilize for the security beyond what the PFs were doing.
SM: What were the other members of your advisory team focusing their energies on?
TS: Well, we had a senior advisor, deputy senior advisor, and administrative/logistical
advisor who was also the team admin officer, whatever you want to call it. We had a Psy Ops
advisor who worked part time in the training center and he worked part time in our district. And
he’s the one that went out with all the medCAPs and he was working, building the school that we
built and stuff like that. And then we had a weapons advisor and an assistant weapons advisor.
The weapons advisor was an officer and the assistant was an NCO. The Psy Ops officer had a
medic working with him. Our team medic worked with the Psy Ops officer because he did the
medCAPs and stuff like that. We had a tactics advisor that was an officer. He had an NCO that
worked with him that were trying to improve the tactical training, and the weapons guy was trying to
improve the weapons training. We had two other advisors. One was a mechanical advisor who
gave advice to them on their vehicle repair and the maintenance and anything that was
mechanical. He was a motor sergeant. He kept our vehicles running. In essence, he damn near
kept everybody’s vehicles running, but he was trained with a couple of other kids to be a mechanic
and stuff like that. And we had a guy [sergeant] that was supposed to be advising them on their
mess hall. He was a cook. He was a cook (laughs). That was his job; he was to advise them on
their cooking activities and that kind of thing and assist the admin/log advisor on logistical kind of
things. But basically, he wound up to be our [team] cook, and he wasn’t too good at cooking.
Anyway, that was an aside for that. Then we had a security advisor and his assistant who were
responsible to operate with the battalion that had to secure the area, and they operated like any
other battalion advisory team [would] or whatever. Of course if they needed a medic or a radio
operator or something, we’d send them somebody anytime they went out. Then we had this
advisory team for the [RF] battalion that was attached down there in the area and it had two
officers and three NCOs that ran with a battalion that worked for the province that worked in the
area down there [several months]. But that was the essence of [what we had except for an admin
clerk who had no advisory duties]. And every now and then somebody would come down from
province and spend a couple of days with us, the agricultural advisor and the home economics
advisor. We had all kinds of advisors over there. They were civilians. The ag advisor was a
civilian and he was teaching them better farming [methods], and I don’t know if he ever saw how
[or found a better way] to hook up a buffalo [to a plow] or not. I wondered about what we were
doing. We had a home economics advisor, and she was to teach them how to use sewing
machines, which they didn’t have, and whatever else she did. I don’t know. But the province team
had a bunch of these AIDs [USAID] people and they’d come down and spend three or four days
with us at a time and go out in the villages. I’m not exactly sure what they all did, because it was
beyond me how we were doing this. And we’d get these loads of clothing in from the Catholic
Relief Society to distribute to the poor, so we’d go out to do that with the Psy Ops people, and of
course the good people from Boston would send all of their overcoats to us that they didn’t need.
The clothing we got was unbelievable. A lot of it was for northern climates. And I’m not trying to
knock the organizations that sent us the stuff, but we were getting clothing in that was for…should
have been sent to some northern climate rather than a southern climate, but a lot of it was good.
Some of it was just not good. We got sacks of corn, corn flour, and of course that’s this home
economics advisor, I guess where she came in. She was going to teach them how to cook with
corn flour as opposed to cooking rice. You know, we’re talking about a different time of foodstuff.
A lot of the things that we got in through those programs to me were suspect in their usability. I’m
not saying they didn’t get used. Maybe the corn flour fed the pigs better than something else,
whatever, but it seemed that we…from a big picture, we weren’t really coordinating as well as we
could be, and I was the end of the supply chain. You know, when it got to me it was given away to
somebody. A lot of it was not as useful as it could have been because of whatever it was.

SM: At the training center, what were they most short of? What could they have used the
most that was hard for them to get and hard for you to get for them?

TM: Well the thing they probably could have used more of than anything else was meat or
fish. Even though the Mekong River was running right by there, I mean…fish and meat products to
supplement the rice diet was probably the hardest thing for them to come by, as far as the
supplies. Every now and then, we had to jingle the cages to get more ammunition for training, but
it came fairly well. Most of the supplies for the training came fairly well. At that point, I thought
overall, supplies provided to the troops was probably adequate, other than there was a decided
lacking in fish and meat supplements, or protein supplements, to their diet.

SM: Now was the training center next to a village?

TS: Yeah, there was a village next to it, yes. Tan An village was next to it.

SM: I'm sorry, which one?


SM: And was it a good relationship between the village and the training center?

TS: Yeah. There was no animosity that I could find. The village chief was…I dealt with
him on several occasions. In fact, the training center provided a lot of 'out the back gate' type of
things for him, too. I don’t know. It’s kind of hard to say in that aspect. But I didn’t see any
problems. We got along good with them. We got along good with the Catholic Priest that that had
the little church. We [helped] build a school for them, for that village, and we were building a
school and doing those kind of activities for them. We didn’t have that much Viet Cong activity.
Practically none until TET of ’68, right directly in our area. But then again, we always had a couple
of companies going through their final stages of training and patrolling mode, so we had more
active troops in the field in our area than most anybody could ever ask for until TET of ’68.
SM: When they would go out on their final field exercises, would they ever make contact?
TS: Yes, they did on occasion, yes. They set up ambushes and now and then, somebody
would stumble into one, which goes back to the other – the question you asked about Major Linh,
was he totally sympathetic to them, was he providing them information? If he was, then he didn’t
tell them about the ambushes, because every now and then we’d trip an ambush and catch people.
So I don’t think he was.
SM: He was using information coming in, but he wasn’t sending any out?
TS: I don’t think he was. I think he was getting it, but he wasn’t providing it back out.
SM: Would the patrols that made contact, was it just supply personnel that they would
catch or would they actually catch armed Viet Cong in the field?
TS: Some of both, and sometimes we made bad mistakes. One time, we had a SLAR,
Side Looking Airborne Radar, come over, and they picked up a whole bunch of sampans on the
canal, Thap Muoi Canal, and it was in our area and they radioed us and told us that they had
these, and the question was what to do about all these sampans that were moving at three o’clock
in the morning, which was after curfew and nobody’s supposed to be out. So, I went and got Major
Dong and asked him what to do, and he said, ‘VC, it means VC, we must get them.’ And so we
checked around. We had a spooky running around, the old C-47, so we sicced it on this canal and
they dropped some flares and they located the sampans, and Major Dong had given the authority
to blow them to Hades, and spooky blew them to Hades. And they went out the next day to pick up
all the dead Cong and they found out it was a wedding party moving down from one village to the
next, and we’d eliminated the whole family, the groom and his brothers and sisters and cousins
and uncles and the whole flipping [family]. But they were moving after curfew in a restricted area in
a free fire zone, so Major Dong gave the order to hose them, and spooky hosed them. That was
one of those things that I think happened quite frequently, that people had to do what they had to
do, and sometimes they did it during curfews and whatever and they took calculated chances, and
of course that was the governmental side that eliminated half a marriage. The wife's half was in
the village that they were going to. She and her family survived. That's one of those things where
you win the hearts and minds of people, and should we have done it? I don't know. But, it was a
judgment call and I won't say he was wrong or right, but it was just one of those things. But, that's
what happens when an ambush is triggered at night. There was a curfew and when somebody
was running down that trail at three in the morning, the ambush had a pretty good idea that he
wasn't a local farmer coming back from harvesting rice.

SM: Were there any other specific incidents like that?

TS: That's the only big one that I can remember where we really did the wrong people in.

SM: How about some good examples of larger formations where you did catch Viet Cong
out on an ambush?

TS: We didn't catch...in our sector, we didn't catch any large formations of Viet Cong or
anything.

SM: How about NVA?

TS: We had no NVA.

SM: No NVA? Ok.

TS: The province team was a Special Forces team, and Special Forces operated most of
the province except two districts, ours and the next one, which were right along the Mekong River.
Special Forces was always running around, doing strange things. They had airboats and they did
get themselves into a big fight with their airboats and got ambushed going up a canal in their
airboats and did a frontal attack, but it was a losing attack. Got a bunch of people all shot up.
They had a bunch of Nungs from Cambodia that they were working with. But in our district, it was
the tax collectors and the messengers and the little people that were running back and forth until
TET '68.

SM: Well, why don't you go ahead and talk about what happened? What happened there
at TET of '68 where you were?

TS: Well, it was reasonably peaceful until it happened. They surrounded the province
capital and took half the province capital, or two thirds of it. They had the province team pinned
down inside their camp. They had our place surrounded. They never made a frontal attack onus,
probably because we had too many soldiers inside to make it...it was unreasonable event, and I
don't understand why the Vietnamese did not use the soldiers we had in the camp, other than the
fact that they were all in training. But we had several companies that were at the end of their training and so forth, but they didn’t use the soldiers that we had, and that amazed me. I mean, there was no [reason not to, that I know]. We had a resource of a couple of thousand soldiers, but they were not used. In lieu thereof they flew in a Ranger battalion and it was a turkey shoot in a ways because the Ranger battalion got chopped up pretty bad coming in, because the Viet Cong were in there by the droves, and it lasted for…the Ranger battalion was there for three or four days before they uprooted and got rid of the Viet Cong that were surrounding the province town. I got up in a helicopter one time on about the second or third day of TET, for the offensive. You could see all the province towns by just the smoke coming up. Chau Doc was the next province town up the river from us. You could see it, [the smoke rising from it], you could see all the province towns. You could just pick them out because there was just smoke coming up out of the flat delta. You could see where they were because that’s where [most of] the fighting was and the main attack, was almost all province towns. And it was…we couldn’t get out. The roads were cut on both sides of us. We couldn’t get out or in and there was fighting going on. Like I say, we had a resource but the Vietnamese government never wanted to use it. Who made the decision, I don’t know, but we could have used that resource. It might have got chopped up quite a bit then. Maybe it was a good choice not to use it, I don’t know.

SM: What was the province capital?

TS: It was Cao Lanh.

SM: It was Cao Lanh?

TS: Cao Lanh, yeah.

SM: Did you get any kind of warning that this might happen prior to the actual Offensive starting?

TS: No. [Nothing specific.]

SM: Did anybody say, ‘Hey listen, something might happen.’

TS: This is TET; again, you’ve got to be prepared. But there’s a higher probability of attack? No, we didn’t hear anything [any solid warning]. I don’t know what day it was [during the Offensive] and I don’t remember, but listening to the Armed Forces Network, I heard Westmoreland’s speech that we dealt them a stunning blow or whatever it was [something like that]. We were still surrounded at the time; we couldn’t go anywhere and neither could anybody get in and out of Cao Lanh. Dealt who a stunning blow here? They’re mortaring us every night
and then during the day and we dealt a stunning blow to the enemy. It was sort of one of those
credibility things. Sure we had, I guess, but it just didn’t seem like it when they rose up and
attacked so many places. To me, it wasn’t a stunning defeat or a blow to the enemy at that time.
Finally it subsided and they went away. But up until that time, we were picking up old World War II
Mausers from the Viet Cong, an M-1 or carbine or some French rifle. A lot of French rifles. But at
TET, the only thing we picked up was AK-47s. So, they had come down and resupplied and got rid
of all their old ash and trash weapons and converted over to AK-47s.

SM: Do you remember about how many were captured?
TS: No, I don’t. There weren’t that many captured. Most of them were killed.
SM: No, I mean how many weapons were captured?
TS: Oh, I don’t know.
SM: How many weapons before that?
TS: Weapons we were picking up before that?
SM: How many? How frequently? Like once a week?
TS: Oh, every time we knocked off [a VC]. I’d say in our district we’d get a couple a week
or something like that.
SM: A couple weapons a week.
TS: And sometimes we’d get somebody with it [a weapon] and sometimes we wouldn’t get
somebody with it [a weapon, just a messenger or supply person].
SM: How often would you capture somebody?
TS: We didn’t capture [hardly any] people.
SM: I would imagine the Regional Forces probably weren’t real big on taking prisoners?
TS: No, they weren’t springing ambushes for that. When they’d spring an ambush [it was
to eliminate the VC].
SM: They’d spring it to kill them?
TS: Yes, they’d shoot up the world and hope the world didn’t shoot back. Of course
sometimes the Regional Forces got ambushed, too.
SM: How often did that happen? Do you remember?
TS: Three times that I can remember.
SM: Was that before or after TET?
TS: Before TET.
SM: Before TET?

TS: They blew the road between where we were and Cao Lanh a couple of times. The road was wide enough for two jeeps to pass and they blew a hole in it [big enough to lose a 2 ½ ton truck], blew the whole road up completely. So they had enough demolitions to make a big hole in the ground. Where they got it, whether it was a bomb or what it was [I don't know], but they had supplies.

SM: And how frequently before TET had you been mortared or rocketed?

TS: Twice, mortars. And that's all.

SM: Mortared a lot during TET; what happened afterwards?

TS: After TET, about a month after TET, I left and was reassigned to Saigon, which would have been March, I guess. Right after TET, immediately following TET, it was quiet. I was in Saigon when the second mini-TET occurred. [When] I went to Saigon, I was assigned to the training directorate in J3. I was living in BOQ Number Two, which is right at the front gate of the JCS compound, when the second mini-TET occurred. And the biggest thing I remember about that, in the line of [Army] stupidity is that we hadn't even armed all of the Americans [in Saigon] by that time.

SM: What Americans were unarmed?

TS: Actually [almost] everybody living in the BOQ [# 2] because they worked in MACV Headquarters, and MACV Headquarters was in the rear area, [didn't have a weapon], I mean whatever. But they wanted to take my carbine away from me when I came back to the BOQ at night to give it to somebody else that was going on guard, and I'd say, 'My carbine stays with me. If you've got to have the carbine on guard, I'll go on guard all night, but the carbine stays with me. I don't give my weapon away to somebody else and lay up there in a room without anything. That's not going to happen. 'You go get your own weapon; this is mine.' And that's the attitude that I had. But most of the people in the BOQ did not have a weapon. And this was at the mini-TET that came on down the road. There was a big construction project going on over at MACV Headquarters. They were building a great big bunker over there for the general officers or whatever, steel and sand and a huge construction project to put a rocket bunker in the MACV headquarters. They didn't have one before, I guess. Because they were building this big one. That was the most striking thing that I think as far as stupidity goes. We hadn't yet decided that we were in a war I
guess after we’d gone through the first TET. But after that [the mini-TET], they all started getting
issuing weapons [to everyone].

SM: How long did you stay at MACV Headquarters?

TS: Until my tour was up in late May.

SM: Now during your time back at the training center, what were the losses like during
TET?

TS: We didn’t have any, per se [among advisors].

SM: You didn’t have any losses?

TS: I don’t remember how many the Vietnamese lost, but we didn’t lose any advisors.

SM: Did you lose any advisors at all during your whole time there?

TS: We lost one captain.

SM: What happened?

TS: He got killed inside the compound by a series of unfortunate events. We had a
Korean officer working with us which was teaching Tae Kwon Do over in the training center and the
Korean captain identified the American captain as VC to an enlisted man. It was at night, and the
Korean captain came by and said, ‘VC! VC!’ and pointed to him and told the sergeant that it was
VC, and the sergeant proceeded to shoot the man. Of course, the man happened to be an Army
captain of our own who was out at the edge of the compound doing pushups for physical training in
the middle of the night. Nobody knew he was there. It was just one of those…you talk about crazy
things. He just joined the team a week before or something from a stateside assignment, and he
was pretty woefully out of physical condition, and he was trying to get back into shape and it was at
night because it was cooler at night. You don’t want to be doing PT during the heat of the day and
everything, when you’re supposed to be working, too. He’d gone out there on, there was a grassy
lawn-type area over near the fence, and he’d gone out there at night and he was doing sit-ups and
pushups to get himself in shape and hadn’t told anybody that he was there. Nobody knew he was
there, and this Korean, he was right near the fence, and on the other side of the fence was No
Man’s Land, or whatever you want to call it, outside. And this Korean captain had seen him and
couldn’t communicate in English. Well, he could speak a little English, but not very much. But the
first American he came to was this sergeant and pointed him out, ‘VC, VC!’ and the American
sergeant took him at his word and thought that it was VC or somebody had crawled through the
fence and he shot him up, and that was the only loss that we had in our team while I was there.
SM: Oh goodness. Did anything happen as far as the Korean NCO?

TS: Korean officer?

SM: Korean officer.

TS: The only thing that happened was he tried to commit suicide because felt disgrace upon himself. We stopped him from that. We had to take the .45 away from him because he was going to do himself in because he had made a mistake. And it was nobody’s fault. It was just one of those [things]. If I had seen the same thing, I might have yelled, ‘Who in the hell is it?’ Or something. But I would have probably been one step away from shooting him myself, because there wasn’t supposed to be anybody there at this time of night, and whatever it was wasn’t normal. It was just one of those instances. All the rules and regulations you could have had in the world couldn’t have prevented that whole thing. But it was just…everything goes back to, what’s the rules of engagement? Do you call, ‘Halt! Who’s there?’ three times, or if somebody’s that close to you that shouldn’t be there, and you look back on it and say, ‘The guy should have yelled ‘Halt!’ twice because it was inside our perimeter, but he didn’t, and because he was identified to him as being VC by an officer who didn’t have a weapon and he had a weapon and he took some action. So no disciplinary action was ever taken against the sergeant. He was transferred.

SM: Did you ever see him again?

TS: I never saw him again. And he was not a young [recruit], he was an old sergeant, and old master sergeant, so it was just some young buck that [overreacted].

SM: Do you have any questions about this, Jon?

JB: No.

SM: Back to your time there at MACV headquarters when you got transferred, what was the atmosphere like there in the aftermath of TET?

TS: I’d say the atmosphere was strained. It’s like everybody’s griping, ‘What went wrong? What have we done wrong?’ And then of course the statements were that before that, we’d seen the light at the end of the tunnel, and of course the news people said, ‘The light at the end of the tunnel was Ho Chi Minh driving the train,’ and these kinds of things, and then the military’s trying to scratch their head and figure out, ‘What have we done wrong that we didn’t see this coming and some people say we saw it coming?’ I don’t know. I’ve read all kinds of things about it. There was a lot of people trying to figure out what went wrong or what they didn’t see. There was a lot of anxiety among people that were working there. The job that I got assigned to was checking on unit
training of ARVN units, regular Army units. And we were just then beginning to integrate the M-16 rifle into the ARVNs, and the major that I replaced was a West Pointer. I don’t remember his name now. But he worked up this plan for integrating the M-16 rifle into the South Vietnamese forces, replacing all of their old M-1s with M-16s. He had a beautiful plan and he had a great big huge PERT diagram on the was in multi colors, and it was a thing to behold. I looked at it and he was telling me about it and I only got one day with him and he was gone. It took me about two days to really figure out what he had on where this PERT diagram was taking me. But that was my project. I was supposed to follow up on that and make sure that the training took place to integrate the M-16 rifle. And my boss got on me and said, ‘What are you doing about this?’ And I said, ‘I don’t have a clue yet, Colonel.’ He said, ‘Well, go find out how we’re going on.’ I went over to see my little counterpart. He was a Vietnamese captain, regular Army, good little man. We chitchatted for 20 minutes or something and he had one of those charts up behind his desk, and I said [thought], ‘Man, we’re really into this. We’ve got this down pat!’ So we talked about his family and where he was from and did the things like they taught you in advisory school; get some rapport before you jump down their throats. So, I come back and my colonel says, ‘What’d you find out?’ I said, ‘Nothing.’ ‘What’d you ask him?’ I said, ‘Nothing.’ He said, ‘Why not?’ I said, ‘I don’t know him yet and he doesn’t know me; he’s not going to tell me anything until he understands me a little bit. I can’t go over and give him the third degree. So it took me two or three days of talking to him, and finally I got around to asking about the chart. He looked up at it and said, ‘You know this chart?’ And I said, ‘Yeah, Major So-and-so made it up. He worked on it. Did you work with Major So-and-so on it?’ He said, ‘No. I don’t know the major. I never met him.’ I said, ‘Oh, ok. Well. That’s the plan for the training and integrating the M-16 into your Army.’ [He asked], ‘Do you know how it works?’ And I said, ‘Yeah, pretty well.’ I said, ‘Right here is where you are today,’ showing him on this PERT diagram, just flowing through it. And I said, ‘The M-16s are…’ and he said, ‘No, no, we are doing this today.’ And he told me what he was doing today and I looked at the chart and I said, ‘Whoops.’ I said, ‘You have a plan that you’re following?’ ‘Oh yes, we have a plan.’ I said, ‘Do you have a copy that I could read so that I could help you perhaps if something comes up and you have problems with Americans? I could help work out what you need.’ He said, ‘Yes, I have a plan. It’s classified. You can have the plan.’ So I get the plan and I take it back and give it to the interpreter. I said, ‘Translate this puppy for me. I need it right away.’ And it has nothing to do with the PERT diagram. You know, it’s completely different. The end result is the same, but it gets there no
where near the same way. So I go and tell my boss. I said – after about two to get it translated. I
said to my boss, I said, ‘We’re not following the PERT diagram.’ He said, ‘What do you mean
we’re not following it? General Westmoreland and General Kim agreed to that!’ And I said, ‘Well,
they failed to talk to the peons that run the program, because we ain’t following it.’ ‘How do you
know?’ I said, ‘Well, I got ahold of their plan, I got it translated,’ and I said, ‘Here’s the translation
of what we’re doing.’ He said, ‘Well this is all wrong!’ And I said, ‘No, no, no.’ I said, ‘The PERT
diagram is all wrong. This is what they’re doing.’ And I said, ‘This will work. It may not work quite
as well as that idea, but this is what their plan is; this is what all their people know about, so this is
what we’re going to do. We can throw that first diagram away; it’s worthless.’ But, it was…two big
generals blessed this wonderful PERT diagram, and it’s a multi-colored, printed up, but nobody
talked to the guys that were going to have to execute it and see what their plan was or discussed it
with them. We drew up a plan up at higher headquarters and gave it to the Vietnamese and said,
‘There it is, do it!’ And they didn’t understand it so they wrote their own and they were going their
own way, yet we thought they were going this way. But that was kind of the concept, going back to
what I mentioned earlier, that I read Bernard Fall’s book and I read these things, but I don’t think
any of the colonels were reading what was going on and understood the difference between
running an Army and advising an Army. Because the big wheels tended to think that if somebody
issued an order, it was going to get done. But they issued an order in Saigon and you’re dealing
with a Vietnamese Army, which was political. It went down to the corps commander and if he liked
it, ok, and if he didn’t like it then he might modify it or he might just throw it away. And then it went
down to a division commander who led his division, and if he liked it, he modified it or whatever,
and he sent it down to some regimental commanders who did something, and he sent it down to
the battalion commander, who was ultimately going to execute it. And that battalion commander,
the Vietnamese battalion commander would look at it, and if he didn’t like it, he said, ‘The hell with
it.’ Because he knew that nobody from Saigon was ever going to come check on it. Nobody from
Saigon was ever going to come down to his place in the field and check it because you might get
shot. You might be lucky if somebody from division came down. But nobody from corps or higher
was ever going to mess with training, because training was – I mean, that was passé. We’ve got
other things to do besides train. We failed to understand that, that we thought when an Army unit
came back from the field, came back into the field with the base camp, that it cleaned its weapons
and went back out in training. No, it came back, and half the little soldiers went home to take care
of their wives and their families, who lived in the hooches around the periphery of where this base
camp was. There was no Ft. Hood [base support] that was taking care of their families and family
housing and stuff while they were in the field like we were. We were in the field in Vietnam and
somebody in Ft. Hood was taking care of our family housing for us. When they came back, they
had to put a new roof on their own house or...so there were other things that they did other than
come back and train before they went back out in the field. We listed it of that aspect. A lot of our
senior people did, anyway, because the people that were out there dealing with the battalions in
the field. They understood. But the people in Saigon, the Americans in Saigon didn't have that
understanding of what the Vietnamese soldier was doing. He was having to live and support his
family and take care of his family and everything at the same time he was fighting a war in the field.

SM: Was there much discussion about these types of issues among the advisors?

TS: We would talk about them and sometimes you could get to talking with your superiors
about it. But there was a tendency for senior officers to want results, and sometimes when you
start to talk to them about things like this, it was like you were the bearer of bad news, and they
didn't want to hear the bad news. They wanted to hear the good news, and the good news is you
were going to get this 'in-place training' done. When this battalion came back into the field, they
were going to do this training and you were going to get it done because you were the advisor
responsible. But you didn't command the troops; you just tried to advise that guy to do this training
when he came back, but he also knew he had to keep the morale of his troops up, and they were
going to take care of their family for a couple of days, and therefore your training time is gone. And
a lot of our senior people didn't seem to want to listen, especially if they'd never been an advisor
themselves and didn't understand the problems. They almost all seemed to [think], 'You're the
advisor, you're responsible, you command it, you get it done,' and it don't work that way. The
lieutenant colonel that I was working for on the M-16 integration, he was a nice guy, and I took a
long time [trying to orient him] – there were three of us that were working there for him – and we
finally I think got him to understand that things weren't happening just because somebody in
Saigon said they were going to happen. But it took a long time. About the time I was leaving, he
was finally beginning to understand some of the problems, because he'd never been out [in the
field] and tried to talk somebody into doing something that they didn't want to do in the first place.

SM: Now for the record, would you describe what a PERT diagram is? A PERT diagram,
TS: That’s a concept that you learn in graduate school somewhere, I think. Anyway, it’s a
diagram that has critical points in it. And this one had the arrival of the M-16 through the supply
channel, and it had the training of the cadre, and that we’re going to teach the utilization of the
weapon, and it had the issue of the weapon and how all these things came together and the critical
points where you had to have the training teams trained before you issued the weapons to the
troops, otherwise the troops had the weapons and no training in them, and you had to have the
training time after you got the weapons before you deployed the units. It was a bunch of critical
points through this diagram. A bunch of them at the front end of it were the arrival of weapons in
country and the arrival of the ammunition in country and the dispersing of the ammunition to
various supply depots and so forth in advance so that everything was in place when you wanted to
get [started on the issue of weapons].

SM: It’s like a timetable?
TS: Timetable, yeah.
SM: Is it an acronym or an abbreviation for something?
TS: It is, it’s an acronym, but I’ve lost it.
SM: How do you spell it?
TS: P-E-R-T.
SM: That’s what I thought.
TS: Business graduate schools teach the thing and I’ve been to a business graduate
school and I don’t remember what it stands for now.
SM: They must also teach –
TS: Critical path, you know, with the choke points in it.
SM: Let’s take a break for a minute.