Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with General Ted Mataxis on the 31st of March 2000 at 3:45 p.m. at the International Cultural Center. General Mataxis, would you please tell us about the oral history project you started in Cambodia.

Ted Mataxis: What I’d like to bring up is the fact that in ’99 we had a meeting here in the Vietnam Center and Cambodia was covered. Now we have a panel during which 3 different periods were covered. I covered the organization and prepared a paper on the organization of the Military Equipment Delivery Team in Cambodia in 1971 and my experiences in setting it up and operating it from Jan. 1971 through Feb. 1972. This was taken over then by Major General John Cleland, he covered The Operations of MEDTC before and after the cut off of US Air Support and the problems he had of trying to keep the Cambodian government supplied without US air support. The last segment was by Major General Ken Bowre, he covered the operations and withdrawal of MEDTC, Operation Eagle Pull. He covered the collapse of the US involvement in the war in Cambodia and the final withdrawal from the embassy. These papers are available in the Vietnam Center.

What I’d like to highlight at this time is the fact that when we gave these papers we then did not only cover them as they were printed. We expanded each one of the aspects that we noted as important by giving an oral history aspect of things that we did
not write down at the time but which were important and which influenced the orders which were issued. So I would cluster these under the umbrella of an Oral History project on Cambodia. I think that it’s very important that we look at the presentations in this way because you get a lot of extra insights by getting the people who were there; been there, done that, explain what they really think is important about the published paper. So that’s why I’d recommend that anyone who’s intending to investigate and research the Military Equipment Delivery Team from 1970, ’71 through ‘75 when it collapsed, that they go in and review the oral history tapes of this coverage and then they’ll have a much better insight.

SM: Okay General Mataxis, would you now discuss some of the activities that you conducted in the ARVN II at Corps at Pleiku while serving in Vietnam in 1964 and 1965?

TM: Just before I get into some of the activities of II Corps I’d like to cover the 2 previous years before when I served on the joint staff. The thing that was important during this period and many people have forgotten along the way. At this time with all of the intelligence coming in and the penetrations by China into Indonesia and in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, plus the revolt in Malaya, we were primarily concern about the 200+ millions of people and the massive oil deposits of in Indonesia. So that’s one of key things that infused us in this area. Now just before General Taylor left the joint staff as Chairman of the Joint Staff in 1964, he had the joint staff write a paper, which recommended to President Johnson that he call up the reserves and National Guard. The reason for this in the military’s view was that we needed the support of more trained troops and we wanted to get the American public involved in the Vietnam War. At the time, the Vietnam War was looked on as something we were doing with the military off in a distant place, which people didn’t even know about. Anytime you call up the reserves and the National Guard, the people of America become engaged because their families are involved in it. President Johnson refused to call up the reserves and Guard because he was involved more with domestic political plans. I personally believe that that’s one of the things that lead to the problems we had in Vietnam was that we considered a secondary issue rather than being given a chief role.
Now when I first came to Vietnam, I’d come in from the JCS with a background of the intelligence and special intelligence. We knew that the North Vietnamese were beginning to move in their troops toward South Vietnam, stockpiling new weapons, and so forth in the area. So when I came into Pleiku September ’64, I looked at what we had in II ARVN Corps. We were running a peacetime MAAG, (military advisory group). We were boarded in a nice compound with flowers and so forth and it was really very attractive. Well I knew that we were soon going to have security problems in the future so immediately I tried to establish security efforts. Such as barbed wire around the compound and have guards posted. Well I was told by my deputy that, “We’re being guarded by the Vietnamese; we don’t need our own security.” I said, “Hey, I’ve been there, done that twice and I won’t accept American troops exposed to being surprised- I don’t want to be blindsided.” So I had a guard roster published. I next had complaints from the sergeant major that these people were working too hard to put them on guard in the middle of the night.” I said, “Well I’m sorry. I heard you, but now do it. But they did it very reluctantly.

So I got up one night at 3 o’clock and went around to check my guard posts here. I am a Colonel in the Army checking a sergeant out in a guard post. I found the guy sound asleep at the entrance to the compound. I took his rifle, brought it back to the duty officer who was also asleep instead of being awake. I gave him the rifle and I said, “Hey, I want orders written for a general corps Court Marshall which I will send it to Saigon.”

Now I knew that it would not go through at this time, however I wanted a wake up call to our guys that we were in a dangerous position here under the threat of imminent attack. The senior JAG flew up from Saigon and said, “Hey Ted, have you lost your mind?” And I said, “No. Now you tell me what you think recommend.” He said, “Well why don’t you have a summary court?” I said, “Fine. We’ll put one in.”

But I made my point, it was dangerous. And I was proven right later because when they did launch their attack in the compound during Tet of ’65 the guard on the gate opened fire on the sappers coming in. He was killed at the gate but that alerted the people in the Compound area. Now in preparation for an attack I also had cement block buffers put in the bottom room. Before they could shoot down the aisle and hit all the
doors when they were opened them with the cement block the guys could dodge behind
them and fire back. So it paid off—“PPP” prior planning pays.

SM: Can I ask a quick question sir? I was wondering, how did you learn
of the imminent attack? You said that you worked for intelligence before…

TM: When I was on the Joint Staff they had top-secret special operations and all
the rest and the sensing was there that they were presuming to come south. However, it
was not passed on down to the fiscal with this in mind we sent out special patrols. We
started picking up the new SKS rifles from enemy patrols. So we knew something was
going to happen soon. So that’s when I got ready for an attack. I also had a little personal
notebook in my pocket where I had plans for all of our people; get weapons, field gear,
new boots, everything else so they would be ready. We also established ammunition
stock so in case things collapsed and we had to move to the airport to be evacuated, we’d
be able to act as a rifle company of clerks, jerks, and cooks. But that was getting
prepared for what you can on the local.

SM: Was this when you allowed people to choose their personal weapons?

TM: Yes, at that time I didn’t care what they had. It was going to be pretty bad
and if they were more comfortable with an Uzi or an old German schmizer which we had
a lot of, sub machine guns, so forth, I let them carry those. But canteens, web gear, food,
all the rest was prepared as an emergency stock, but I never told my staff about it because
once you do that people start talking about it and they start looking over their shoulder. I
wanted them to look just in one direction.

SM: Was there a lot of…did you have much supporting fire? Artillery, air
support, or anything like that?

TM: All that stuff was Vietnamese, because we were just an advisory group
there.

SM: So were you concerned that the Vietnamese would not be able to provide
adequate support and protection?

TM: Oh, well I thought they would support with their troops, they’d try to
support the A1-Es they had in the airport, the Holloway airfield there. And then we also
had our helicopters there. But the sappers came in, and as you know, over ran that place
and nine some were killed, a bunch of choppers were blown up. But we would just do
our best to get out to that airfield hoping that then the Marines would be able to come in
and give close air support completely around the area. The trouble was, with Navy jets
that far from the area you’re liable to get a call, “I’ve got 5 minutes on target, where do
you want the shit?” Okay?

SM: Okay.

TM: Now the next thing that came up in the fall was a Montagnard tribal revolt. The Montagnard tribes were the mountain tribes of Vietnam, racially a different people which were looked down on by the Vietnamese. Well the CIA had initially organized Montagnard camps scattered through the area. By 1964 the Army took it over, the camps, with the Special Forces. Well the Montagnards had revolted in several camps and killed some Vietnamese military and held others captive. Well the Vietnamese moved in infantry battalions against the camps and the Montagnards surrendered. The Vietnamese took some 35 or 36 of their senior commanders who’d been NCOs under the French back in the 50s and were going to execute them. I talked to the Corps Commander, General Co, and told him this would be a disaster. This would raise human rights troubles at home. I said, “Now, I can resolve this for you. If you give them to me I will form an Eagle Flight Strike Force and I will furnish half of an A team to put in charge. Then anytime we get into an action somewhere and it looks like the advisors are threatened we’ll immediately launch the Eagle Flight if you will provide A1-Es to go in and give close air support when we have an ambush in the area.” He did that and it worked out very well. When someone looks into the Montagnard revolt, I think this is something they should track on through. The fact how these leaders were supposed to be executed for a revolt, were instead turned into an Eagle Flight is quite a story. We could use this Eagle Flight to support our advisors because we had no other quick reaction support. All that was available was clerks, jerks, and cooks from the Advisory Group at II Corps. They had nothing to hit back with but their personal weapons. This Eagle Flight gave us a group of the really experienced guys with Air Force support. At that time, in the fall of 1964, as an advisor I used to fly around the Corps every day and I’d bring my sergeant major in a BAR and a whole bunch of clips. If we ran into action somewhere down the road, oh, and a box of water glasses with hand grenades in, we’d fly real high and shoot with the BAR clipping the area where the enemy was. Then we’d fly over the area and
pull the pins and drop the glasses so they’d break on the ground and that was advisory fire support circa 1964.

SM: Quick question about the tribes; was there a particular tribe of Montagnards that revolted? Was it all the different tribes?

TM: No, the main ones were Rhade

SM: Okay. Were they the better fighters?

TM: They were very good. We had some cases, other cases, where a camp was surrounded completely and the guys fought like hell, so it all depends on the psychological feeling of the people in the camp at that time, “Maybe I can save my ass if I fight like hell.” They would go for it. These Special Force camps held the highlands. If we hadn’t had those, the other side would have taken the highlands over. But with the camps we held the highlands, so it was very, very, very useful for us to have these tribes under our control.

SM: This was part of the civilian irregular defense group project?

TM: Right, CIDG. In the highlands the camps were all Montagnards. Now they had some other similar camps down on the coast but they weren’t the Montagnards. But these were all Montagnards. One of the first Medal of Honor’s in Vietnam was one of the camps that was held by some of the Special Forces and so forth.

SM: Was this Colonel Donlin’s group?

TM: Yes it was Donlin’s camp. Okay, the next subject is the Ambassador’s Taylor reprimand to the Vietnamese Generals. General Taylor had made a trip to Washington and he was told by the President and the Secretaries of Defense and State there were too many coups in Vietnam. He was told to get those generals together and tell them to get off the coups and get unified. General Taylor had a great big dinner for them and gave a talk to them. A couple of days later they had a mini coup. Taylor called in the senior generals and really chewed them out. They got really unhappy and they cut all conversation with the U.S. Military. They wouldn’t accept telephone calls or anything else. Right after that happened, about a week later, General Co, the corps commander, called me to his headquarters and he said, “Look,” and he explained the background of what was happening. He said, “Both sides are firm, each one’s waiting for the other one to come around.” He said, “Now you worked for General Taylor and he knows you. We
want you to go down there and talk to him. This situation is impossible, you see what you
can develop, let us know what we can do.”

So I flew down to Saigon, I reported in first to General Abrams and General
Westmoreland and I said, “Sir, I’m down from II Corps to…” he says, “Don’t tell me
anything else, I don’t want to hear anything about it.” Now this was plausible deniability,
evidently he’d known through the agency what was going on, so he said, “You just go see
the Ambassador, and then you can go back and talk to Co. I don’t want to hear about it.”
So I went in to see the Ambassador who said, “Oh Ted, I’m glad to see you. How are
things going and the wife,” and all that on a personal basis because I lived very close to
him being his Speech in Washington. I finally said, “Sir, I’m down here to bring a
message from the corps commander. There are a group of 3 of the ARVN corps
commanders that are willing to get together with the Americans and resolve this affair.”
He said, “Ted, stop there. I am a representative of the President. I deal with the
Vietnamese government. I can not talk to dissident corps commanders, do you
understand that?” “Yes sir, you’re the Ambassador, you can’t talk to these dissidents.”
And then he said, “I understand you have my son up in the area.” I said, “Sir, this is an
impossible situation, there must be some way out of this.” He suggested that they talk to
his Deputy Alexis Johnson. When I got ready to leave and he said, “Colonel,” and I stood
at attention, “Yes sir!” He says, “I’m giving you an order. What did I tell you?” “You
said sir, that you cannot deal with dissident corps commanders,” He said, “Do you
understand me?” I said, “Loud and clear, Mr. Ambassador, loud and clear. I will carry
that message to the corps commander.” And then he said, “Goodbye,” and I took off.

On return to Pleiku, I went up and saw corps commander and he wanted to know
what went on so first I was very prudent. I said, “General Taylor heard what you had to
say and so forth and so on and he thinks it’s very loyal and patriotic of you to try and take
these actions on your own which could be misconstrued by your contemporaries,” and so
forth and so on, “But what he really recommended, the thing for you people to do, is go
and see his deputy, Hugh Alexis Johnson. In that way it removes it from a confrontation
of our two countries. Here you guys can negotiating “out the back door.” The General
Co was very happy with that and that’s what they did. They got together and the problem
was resolved. So, I recommend that anyone who’s researching this coups and
Ambassador’s reprimand should also look into General Key’s book, “How We Lost the Vietnam War,” on page 50 through 57. In here he gives his approach, how the Vietnamese Generals felt, how unhappy they were with Taylor and so forth and so on, their side of the thing controversy. Fortunately that was bypassed by Co and the other commanders who realized they couldn’t have that standoff. But I recommend that very highly to anybody who’s researching that; take a look at my oral history aspects and then read that Key’s book. That can give them a good background. Okay?

SM: Quick question about General Taylor; have you read his books on policy and the Vietnam War and things like that, I guess “The Uncertain Trumpet,” and books like that?

TM: Oh, “The Uncertain Trumpet?” No, “The Uncertain Trumpet” was before the Vietnam War.” The Uncertain Trumpet” was his fight with Eisenhower over the use of atomic weapons. But, as it says, “If the trumpet sounds an uncertain note, who will follow?” And that’s the thing, that they had this cleavage within the administration, “Yes, use tactical nuclear weapons,” and “No, don’t use tactical nuclear weapons,” there wasn’t a solid front that covered an Russians attack in Europe that we would have to go to the atomic weapons. “Yes, we should,” “No, we shouldn’t,” “Yes, we should,” that’s the uncertain trumpet. So that dispute resulted in him being fired as Army Chief of Staff.

After he was fired he went to Mexico City and worked for a company for a short time and then he came to New York and was looking for a job there. That’s when President Kennedy read his book and called him up and says, “I want you to work for me.” His office was in the executive office building. While I was still working for General Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chief’s of Staff, and I was called over to be interviewed by him to be his speech writer and Military Asst. He accepted me so when he moved into the Jes I stayed on as speech writer and Military Asst.

SM: Okay. If I remember correctly, and perhaps if I’m wrong you can correct me, one of the things that General Taylor talks about in “Uncertain Trumpet” is the need to establish order in order to create stability in some of these regions of the world that were particularly unstable and in looking at that particular argument and then Vietnam and what was going on in Vietnam, do you see any, perhaps it’s a tenuous argument because the emphasis was on…
TM: What he was trying to do is…
SM: …military force?
TM: …you’re absolutely right. He tried to establish order and there’s no question about it. He was a representative of the President, as ambassador, and his duty was to deal with the head of the Vietnamese government. If he was seen dealing with the other people below that level, that would disturb the SOP so to speak. Instead of using the chain of command if he went around it that would make the other people feel unhappy that he’s bypassing it. That’s why he had to suggest a system so that the guys could talk with each other underneath his level and then come up with a solution that would be a compromise.

SM: Was he a supporter of the large military buildup that occurred, General Taylor, and of the battalion type of activities, battalion movements versus small units?
TM: Initially he tried to be slow on going in but then when the North Vietnamese came in it left no choice. When they start in sending their entire regiments into South Vietnam, was no longer a case of going slowly. You’ve got to go in there, particularly since just before that we nearly lost II Corps, you know, except for the Province capitals and districts during Tet of ’65. We lost most of the II Corps over and we were barely hanging on. They, North Vietnamese, were trying to knock us out before we could move troops in from the states and we were trying to hang onto what we still had. So that our troops could come in. Now concentrating the Tet Offensive of ’65 in II Corps, I wrote an article for Army Magazine, October ’65, “War in the Highlands; Attack and Counterattack on Highway 19.” During this attack they launched an attack on the advisory compound, which I’ve mentioned before, which was thwarted. They also launched an attack on the Holloway Airfield and that was successful for the North Vietnamese because they came in and blew up some of our helicopters and killed, 9 or so soldiers were killed.

The next morning, Taylor flew up with George McBundy who’d flown in from Washington to evaluate the status in Vietnam for the President. When they came in to inspect Pleiku, I was taking them around to show them what had happened. When we passed one of the bunks there was the top of a skull and a lot of brain matter there, and McBundy saw that and he got dizzy and went outside and threw up. After they left there
and they informed Washington that they recommended striking north. That’s when we started bombing north. Now in conjunction with that attack in the highlands, they also attacked in Qui Nhon and they took the Northern section of Binh Dinh Province overrunning district towns. Their 2nd VC regiment, which was a standard hard corps VC regiment, was used. It wasn’t a guerilla warfare attack; they operated as companies and battalions, completely equipped with World War II type Soviet weapons. With this attack came out and the Ruff-Puffs and Regional Forces were dispersed and we had our ARVN battalions driven back to airfields which they surrounded and held on. All of II Corps outside of key areas came under the control of the VC and North Vietnamese Army units. This account goes into the operations of how we fought back and how we used all of our reserves, everything we had left in the II Corps. Saigon had to fly in a brigade of airborne troops from the Vietnamese reserves and two battalion Brigade of Marines into Binh Dinh to stabilize the situation and start turning around.

Now for the fighting on Highway 19, fortunately, II Corps headquarters had all the operation orders back from the French times. The G2 of corps who had been there during that period and I used to sit study them in the evenings. He was working with the Montagnard scouts at that time and he’s here at this convention today, I’ve just talked to him. At the time we flew along, landed, and looked at the monuments that the French had put up where they had had their Group Mobile wiped along Highway 19. The VC and North Vietnamese were doing the same thing. They were attacking along the highways and isolated outposts, either running over them or surrounding them, waiting for the reserves to come out on trucks. In 1965 instead of using trucks we came out with helicopters and that’s the one thing that upset their whole lives and ambush strategy. We flew over the ambush and came in, and when we used our last reserves, a Ranger battalion going into the An Ky airfield, we got them on the road and started down the road to reinforce the outposts.

I’d flown in to see the destruction at the port. They blew in the barracks at the airfield and attacked the four stars hotel which collapsed. This was where our helicopter pilots and so forth were. As I was flying on my way back to the Ranger BN I heard the advisor on the horn really screaming and yelling that this battalion was being attacked. This was a surprise because up to this time we’d only used companies in the area and
they would chase the VC away. Here was a whole battalion in trouble up to their eyeballs, so I landed and saw him and talked to the battalion commander. You could tell what was happening, the firing along the flanks, as they were cutting around the flanks. He wanted to withdraw but he was afraid if he withdrew he’d get relieved by the corps commander. I said, “Hey, your ass is in trouble, pull out. You know how to do that, leave a company, go back and withdraw through…” “Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah,” so he did that and withdrew toward An Khe. I flew back to corps headquarters and then since we were out of more reserves we called for the Saigon Airborne Brigade to come into An Khe. At that time, until we called for those reserves, every Province headquarters throughout the whole II Corps area which was 51% of Vietnam and every district was surrounded and we had to supply them by air. II Corps was no longer a mobile organization. We had no more troops to use and we would have collapsed if we had not been able to bring in these reserves. The airborne and the Marines were the last reserves left in Vietnam. This was the account covered in the “War in the Highlands.”

Now I’m working on presenting an oral history tape on this for next year’s Vietnam Center conference, because even my friends in the military, when I say Tet of ’65, they say, “No, Ted, you mean the Tet of ’68,” I say, “No, I mean the Tet of ’65,” So this is my final effort to get the Tet of ’65 covered so people will know there were 2 Tets. Now this Tet was more dangerous than Tet of ’65 when we had 500,000 troops in, because there was no danger of us losing then. Here in 1965, the danger was they would have cut Vietnam in two. Vietnam would have been divided into two isolated sections and we’d have lost all our advisors with the 2 divisions, which would have been wiped out. So that’s what I think that Tet ‘65 was more dangerous than the Tet of ’68.

SM: And this was not a surprise, as far as…

TM: We knew they were coming, we didn’t know when, something like the June bride. But, we had done something that made the Special Forces very unhappy, we took some Special Force camps, this is mentioned in this article here, and moved them down along Highway 19. Now I know that that’s the misuse of Special Force camps because they’re supposed to be out in the area and covering trails and so forth. However we were up to our eyeballs and had no one else to defend the road. Also putting those Special Force camps there we managed to regroup about 3 battalions that had been scattered out
for security along Highway 19 and moved then into mobile combat battalions which gave
us some extra reserves, instead of just leaving them to be surrounded and lost along
Highway 19 so we had to do it. It’s one of those things. It’s like in the Civil War where
they used VMI; they ran out of reserves, or the German’s (in WWII) who used the 14
year olds…the Hitler Jugend. When you’re up to your eyeballs in snapping alligators,
you do whatever you have to do. So that’s…and we recovered the area we lost during
Tet Offensive ‘65.

Now the next thing I’d like to cover is a manuscript I wrote on the highlands.
After finishing the attacks along Highway 19, we were getting ready for the coming
attack during the summer of 1965. We knew that the NVA was moving south. Now the
NVA did launch a series of attacks in the highlands during the summer rainy season and
the manuscript has a coverage of a map that covers all of the different attacks. They did
the same thing they did to the French as the 1950’s. They’d attack down at the south
portion of II Corps, then attack in the north, then attack in the south and east and west.
They kept bouncing all around in different places hoping to draw out our reserves and
trucks on the ground so they could ambush them. Well we had prepared for this and we
even used Regional Forces to assist in different districts. We flew them in and we used
the Regional Forces to take over local reforms from regular Army troops who had been
garrisoning the town. They were mobile and went out to fight against the enemy. Then
when we received our ARVN airborne troops we could start counter attacking by whole
brigades in these areas and resuming areas we had lost.

The first NVA attack was an entire regiment, which attacked Duc Co on the
Cambodian border. They surrounded it completely and when we tried to go in with a
relief, the column was ambushed. We had no more reserves. The General reserve had
been used, used up, all of Saigon’s and that’s the last thing they had, so I went down to
see Westmoreland and asked him for the 173rd brigade to be moved to Pleiku to garrison
Pleiku, not to fight, just to go up there and hold Pleiku like they were holding the air field
down in Saigon. They wouldn’t have to fight.

We then got all the troops we had defending Pleiku and launched a relief of Duc
Co. We had our ranger battalion, the Marines, we had airborne, and launched this attack
along to relieve Duc Co. I was flying in a light airplane over the relief column, and we
had also laid on with the Navy to have their ships ready, I mean, their airplanes ready to
go. The key in the projected fighting was to use the Army fighter, the A1-Es, the Army
jets and everything else that we had, plus the Navy to give close air support. When this
relief column spread out going down along the road, the North Vietnamese launched an
attack from a wood about 500 yards from the road. They were attacking in World War II
style; by platoon rushes hitting the ground, platoon rushes coming in and they overran the
ARVN column, split it in two. At that time the Navy started coming in and I heard the
old refrain, “This is blue leader 6, 5 minutes on target, where do you want the shit?” And
our FAC who was there, fired his smoke rockets to show them the targets they were
attacking. They came in with napalm, which just drenched the area and then started to
bomb everything else, chaos! Just practically just destroyed the 2 battalions. So the next
day we were able to make it into the camp. They learned a lesson; they never did this
again. They learned a lesson; don’t attack with platoon rushes when the other guy’s got
Air Force. The other day when I was looking at some material on Vietnam I found a
picture that I’d forgotten about and it’s a classic. It’s General Westmoreland during the
relief of Duc Co, General Westmoreland’s standing there, I’m standing in the middle, and
there’s a great big major, a hulking guy, the Bear, Schwartzkopf. Here he was as a major.
This incident is written up in his book, on the battle of Duc Co. I have this as unpublished
manuscript that I hope to give at the Center for Military History’s meeting in 2002 and I
think that will be the last effort on the Vietnamese War where they finally are clear up
everything on Vietnam. It’s been covered for a long time and they intend to move on.

Now something else, which I think would be very interesting to professional
soldiers; I call it the changing of the guard. In the fall of ’65 after Dac Co settled down
for a while. Then the enemy launched a series of attacks again. They attacked Plei Me
and the attack on Plei Me was very similar to what they did at Duc Co. Gen Vinh Loc had
asked General Westmoreland to have a Brigade from the First Cav at Pleiku as the 173rd
during the Doc Cu so II Corps would have troops available for relief of Plei Me This
time I went to the 1st Air Cav and got their artillery to support our attack in so we had
very heavy artillery and air support. We had estimated where the attack was going to be
on the column again and we just blanketed it with air strikes. They never did attempt
another time. The enemy hit the column but they didn’t have enough troops left to follow
up. So the ARVN troops stayed there overnight went into Plei Me. After Plei Me was
retaken the 1st Air Cav went into the Ia Drang Valley. They were following the enemy
withdrawing from Plei Me. So that was it! The 1st Air Cav was in country, and they were
off running. At this time IFFV had moved in and General Larson was in charge, so here
we had the American’s running an American war and the Vietnamese running their own,
there hadn’t been much chance for coordination, so General Westmoreland had a meeting
that he called for the Vietnamese and the Americans. His plan, his planning to control
combined operations by Republic of Vietnam and the United States forces. This photo I
have here is General Westmoreland, Lieutenant General Larson, General Vin Loc, and
me and some other staff officers from MACV. He decided to make the US IFFV
commander of the Senior Advisor to the corps commander. This really made the
Vietnamese nose out of joint because they felt this was putting them in a secondary role,
we were taking things over, something like, “Step aside, little brown brother. We know
how to run all these things.”

Well I argued very vigorously against this and I said, “Look, in Korea we kept the
MAAG Advisors separate. You wanted to work with them and you had an American
sitting in the hip pocket of the Korean commander talking to each other, understanding
each other, and working really close together. Here you’ll break this close relationship
up and you’ll have the guy sitting down in IFFV telling the fellow on the hill what he
wants him to do, basically, and having a colonel there to make sure these things are
done.” I said, “I think this is wrong. This will break up the close coordination you
need.” The ARVN corps commander has 2 hats. He has one hat in charge of the
divisions and troops. The other hat, he is in charge of the province chiefs who rule over
the people, where the people are, the province chiefs and the district chiefs. This is very
important. Protecting these people, that’s what it’s all about. Going off and chasing the
enemy in the woods won’t do it. I think we should stay as we are. Westmoreland was
really pissed off at me and he says, “Ted, you’re getting more like the Vietnamese,” he
said, “Instead of sounding like an American officer.” You can even talk to General Vin
Loc or any of the others who were at the time; they knew that I was going to get really
whacked on the head. Well I’d already made up my mind to go down and move in with
an American unit 101 so I just wanted to say what I thought. The Vietnamese were very
happy with me and they even gave me a very highly Vietnamese decoration, one of the
first the Americans had gotten during the war.

And later that helped, when I came back as chief of the Cambodian mission, when
I was able to go in to General Vien and sit down with him discussing problems. He gave
me 10,000 shotguns for any village defenders. We had a close personal rapport, the only
kind you can get when you’ve had guys who’ve fought together and trusted each other’s
lives on something. But, so that was the end and we shifted over to the combined
operations. I think it was wrong at that time, I really do, because we lost track of fighting
to protect the people. It’s the people’s stupid, like we say, so that basically is it.

And then in January 1966, in January I joined the 1st brigade 101 as Deputy
Commander. Going down there I had a SOP that I drew up for our unit so whenever we
moved into a district or into a province I’d go in to see the province chief and they’d
known me for 18 months and they knew I’d worked with the general and I’d tell them,
“Hey, I need so many Popular Forces, platoons, to go out with my artillery,” so I didn’t
have to protect them. “I need some Regional Force units to go out here where they can
protect this road junction where we’re sending a couple of battalions out here.” It worked
like ham and eggs; we just worked together like that. I’d put a liaison officer with an SOP
checklist for integration of U.S. military operations and indigenous resources, civilian
and military and it worked very well for us because as an independent brigade we were
very short of troops at that time. Now this account is just a thumbnail sketch of the
things, which I think were important incidents during this period. Later on people who
decide to research these items can contact me if they want to go into great detail or if you
want to read what we have here and have a chance to read it thoroughly and then come up
with more specific questions on each one of these things I raise, I’m ready. I think we
said on Sunday or something we’d like to do that.

SM: Yes sir. I would like to ask you a quick question about the issue of moral
courage and one of the criticisms that has been levied against a number of military
officers and even politicians is they should have…when they thought that things were
wrong, they should have stood up and said so, like you did with General Westmoreland,
and I was wondering if you…
TM: Well unfortunately, I got mad and I could have phrased it more properly. I’ve got a very bad temper. When I get mad I get pissed and I should have been more genteel, that’s true. But no, the one I blame more than anyone is McNamara, Secretary of Defense. He says now he knew this wouldn’t work and all the rest of that stuff and he did it. And I’ll tell you something else that he did which I think is just horrible; we ran short of bombs for the Navy fighters. He told the President he was going to have so many strikes, and they had to send strikes in with half loads on so he could say the strikes were there. To me this is morally corrupt and I have nothing but contempt for that son of a bitch, really. Moral courage, it’s very, very hard to have moral courage when your career may go down the tube. I’ve been relieved twice in my command, in my 32 years, twice, flat ass relieved. “You’re relieved. The first case in WWII. You’re now executive officer, I’m putting in a new battalion commander.” Fortunately the war was still going on and I was able to become a battalion commander again, I had another case later. Now I don’t say that’s the way to go and I don’t pride myself for having done it, but I was so mad and when I get mad I lose track of what I should be saying properly and what I should do for my career and all that and I think this certain point where you just…I don’t know if I could do it in cold blood. You know what I mean, just come in there and say, “Morally I’ve got moral courage to do this so I’m going to refuse.” I’d start arguing and I’d get in deeper, and deeper, and deeper, and pretty soon I’m at the point where I say, “Oh shit, forget it, let’s go with it.” I’d just disagree completely and say, “If you don’t like it, you can relieve me.” The guy says, “Thank you, I will.” So everybody’s got to figure it out for themselves.

SM: Yes sir.

TM: But the thing that I worry about in today’s Army is no defects. That is wrong. There are no such things as no defects! All you’re doing is forcing a young officer to say, “Hey, I’ve got a car payment, a house payment, and a baby and a wife,” he justifies to himself that this problem is not that important. It’s the job of the senior officer to let his junior officers make a mistake, then call him in and chew his ass out and tell him what was wrong, and send him down the road again. Then when he makes the second one for the same thing, then he’s relieved. But that’s part of career building. If you make them uncertain and worried, it doesn’t work.
SM: I was wondering, though, if you have ever come across other examples where your fellow officers exhibited something similar where they just had gotten themselves in too far in an argument and finally just stood up and said...

TM: That’s the way the good Lord put our male bodies together. When the testicles start rumbling, you no longer think. You put your head down and charge, and that’s the way it is, and that’s what they’re trying to take away from us now with this “no defects” consideration for others. We had a female lieutenant general talking to all Sgt majors in the Army with her message—Consideration for Officers is the most important thing. I’ve talked to some of those and, “Hey, whatever happened to your job to break things and kill people?” Win on the battlefield. I think we’re going in the wrong direction. However, I must say that I realize I’m 82 years old now, fought in 3 wars, which was a long time ago. There’s a different group of young people coming into the service and maybe that’s what they have to do today. I don’t know, but I wish our leaders would think about this a little more carefully, I really do.

SM: One of the reasons I bring up the issue of moral courage is, and going back to something we discussed previously, the CAT Marine program, and I was wondering if you had ever had an opportunity to talk to some of the Marine personnel and later on and...

TM: No, I never have with the Marines. They ran a separate war over there, so to speak.

SM: Right. When General Westmoreland finally brought pressure to bear on the Marine Corps, to kind of abandon that...

TM: Yeah.

SM: …and, because they weren’t pulling their weight in the battalion sweeps and things of that nature. They weren’t mounting the body counts; they weren’t taking the casualties and things of that nature…

TM: Yeah, that’s right, that’s right.

SM: …and I was wondering if you had ever heard of any incidents where someone stood up and said, “Well, that’s not where the war is going to be won,” as you’ve already pointed out. It’s not the big battalion sweeps, it’s in the villages.
TM: Well I think the thing was that Westmoreland came directly into the Marine, the senior Marine there and said, “Hey, here’s the way it’s going to be.”
SM: Which was General Walt, is that correct?
TM: Yeah, yeah.
SM: Lou Walt.
TM: And when it came down from the Marine commander saying, you know, “Hey guys, this is what the Army’s saying and this is what we’ve got to do,” and then that’s it. That’s it, because it’s filtered through the senior Marine chain of command rather than having it, you know, direct from the Commander [(1) See TABB-Gen. Trainor’s comments about CAT program and Ben Westmoreland’s attrition strategy.] I recommend reading Colby’s book which is very good and there’s a new recent book out, too, about, I’ve forgotten what the name is, the fellow has talked here, he was in the Army, a West Pointer, was in the Army and was also in the CIA and so forth talking about…it was written in ’99 I think or ’98, I’ve forgotten the name of the book but it goes over the same ground that Colby covered, that we were getting things back under control because Tet of ’68 was a disaster for the VC. Just complete disaster, but they managed to sell it in the States as a victory and that’s the thing that turned us around going down the tube, you know. So that was too bad. But then the population control started working when Comber, I think it was, came back in. He started putting priority on the people and they were doing well, but then by that time we started withdrawing and we couldn’t turn around and go back in. Nixon had promised to quit, but said we’d come in with air and everything in case the NVA attacked. But then he got caught up in his personal political problems and he was too busy defending himself to give support to the South Vietnamese. Congress had to cut the budget and we just threw them off of the wagon. Now I feel very guilty of what we did to the South Vietnamese. That’s something I worry about today, about the young Vietnamese in the states saying they have to go back to Vietnam and convince the people back there that they had human rights and all the rest of the trappings of democracy. I think at this stage you don’t want to build them up so they’re going to revolt against the government. We did that to Hungary in the ‘50s, remember? Encouraged them and they went out and got butchered. I think they’d be better going back and working and trying to get individuals and convince them there’s
more money in our way. I believe the practical approach is better than filling these guys up with human rights and other idealistic ideas. Russia’s starting to get their people into Commerce and the rest, but going there to try and say, “Oh, this is all wrong, the important factor is human rights! You’ve got to change your approach.” I don’t think one government can sell another government on idealism that easily. So I feel sorry for people when they alert the public troops to man the barricades and destroyed by strong government attacks. This just sets things back. It’s like in Russia in 1905, the troubles they had there. The government went in with troops and that killed things for a few years. Okay, is this about it?

SM: Yes sir, I…let me see here…okay, this ends the first interview with General Ted Mataxis.
SM: This is Steve Maxner conducting second oral history interview with General Ted Mataxis on the 2nd of April, year 2000 at 11:15 at the 4 Points Hotel. General Mataxis, you mentioned just moments ago the problems with, I guess it would be maiming, and the concerns about being maimed and hurt in Vietnam in 1972 and as far as…or was that earlier?

TM: Well this is, yeah, well this was 1964 or '66 the first time, and then the second time in 1970-'72.

SM: Okay. In those experiences when you were in Vietnam, did you and your officers talk about that potential and that fear? Was there a bigger fear of being maimed and hurt and having a limb severed versus being killed? Because that’s one of the things discussed about the Vietnam War.

TM: I would say in Vietnam you take it year by year. When the first American troops came in '65 the motivation was high. Young soldiers and officers were looking forward to getting a CIB and they were committed to what they were doing, and then they looked on things, “Well yes, we may get shot and all that,” but you accept all those things. They’re the things you hope you don’t harp on. You hope you get a nice wound and go home, but they had that, but there wasn’t that intense pressure at the time. Later when we went in, back in '70, we had the problems of fragging of officers, very strong racial problems, no support at home, and in fact soldiers going home and having stones or eggs being thrown at them or being cursed. So that support envelope around you sort of disappeared, and by that time the VC had gotten in…not the VC, but the NVA, the enemy, used as their major weapon against us. Mines covered the fear at that time of being maimed and so forth. As ADC OPS of the 23rd division, the 2 ADCs shared the job of going down and giving Purple Hearts to the wounded and to me that was the worst thing I’ve ever done any time from World War II, Korea, or ‘Nam. Going down to the wounded, I remember seeing the young son of a very close friend of mine. I greeted him
when he came into the Division, so happy; he’s in there like his dad. Next time I saw him in the hospital he’d lost both legs and an arm to a mine. It was those injuries that cause the real fear. I think. This was much greater fear than being in an engagement shot at or having a round come in, mortar round or something like that. Because I think that was sort of taken by most people as that’s what we soldier’s do. But the idea of going out and getting maimed with the mines was, I think, the greatest fear that they had. I knew it was mine.

SM: Your activities later in Vietnam, I guess it’s your second 2 year tour, could you first begin by giving me a brief description of what you were doing and then in terms of major engagements, discuss those, what you were doing in Vietnam.

TM: By the time I came back in June 1970, I came in from Iran where I’d been chief of the Army section of the MAAG in Iran for 2 years. I came directly to Vietnam and my wife went home to the states. I reported in to Saigon and the general who’s commanding the 23rd division was leaving. As a result I didn’t even get a briefing at Saigon of what’s going on, they said, “You’ll find out when you get up to the division.” So I went straight up the division, relieved General Malloy. He went home and I was acting division commander during the summer until a new commander arrived. It was wrong the way they sent me in because later when we got into the problem with herbicides and Agent Orange and things, well I’d been there in the period where I used to just duck under a tree when the, I think it was Farm Gate or whatever it was when they flew by via vis a plane spraying Agent Orange and so forth on the trees to clear the trees along the road, well this was ’64 -’66. We stood under the trees so we wouldn’t get the oily spots on our uniform. There was no indication at that time that that was one of the things that they had to cut, stop using it. When I went directly into the Division I gave orders to use up the defoliants as had done when I left there last time in 1966 and a shit storm arose. The IG came up from General Abram’s office to investigate and I sat him down and I said, “Say, friend, I want you to take this directly to General Abrams. I came in; you didn’t brief me in Saigon. You sent me up here to the division,” because I’d already been in Vietnam for 2 years and you felt I knew what was going on. So they didn’t brief me on the current changes in operations. “For example, the attitude towards Agent Orange and so forth. So when no one informs me, how am I supposed to know
what has changed since I left. I’m supposed to know everything from the first time
around, how was I supposed to know what has changed?” He wrote that down and sent a
brief to Abrams on it and Abrams said, “Forget about it,” because that was an error on
their part.

The key was they want him to go home and so the solution was to send me.

Seems to me they should have got me by the hand and said, “Now look, the things that
make people excited now are these, here are our no-nos,” you know, the basic
fundamentals. “And also here’s what we’d like you to do.” But by 1970, as I mentioned
before, the morale was horrible. I was interviewed later after I went into Cambodia for a
book. I’ve forgotten what the author’s name is, but as I was talking to him and he said,
“What’s the difference between your first tour in and this tour?” I said, “The first tour, in
the mid 1960’s, the morale was high. People were coming to Vietnam, the first ones in
there, and it was great! When I came back in 1970 I couldn’t believe this was an
American Army.” I slept in the CP in division headquarters, division commander with
my gas mask beside me because of damn anti war soldiers would wait till the wind got at
a certain direction and they would pop tear gas grenades which would float over the CP. I
slept with my gas mast beside me so I could put my mask on. The worst fragging
problem of their own NCOs and officers. The other thing that I’d mentioned, that even
the officers were under pressure. Young Lee would go out for a patrol, moving from
point 1, 2, 3, all night long. They would report in, “I’m point 1, going to point 2, going to
point 3,” etc. And at dawn an enemy would overrun their position and disclose that was
the first one they went to. Lying, they lied about moving. Young lieutenants coming in,
they were some times too gung-ho, so they were threatened by their soldiers. They were
told they would be fragged if they gave orders to move. You’ve seen in the records, I’m
sure; that the semi-mutiny so to speak when the soldiers would refuse to do something
until some senior guy came down and made sure everything was straightened out. It was
sad, and after I retired I got a call from General Westmoreland that they just read in a
book where I said that America initially went in with the best Army we had. They were
trained and ready, that was the goal of us who were in World War II and Korea. We made
sure that we didn’t come into Vietnam like we did in Korea. You know, no physical PT
training and all that. We made sure we went in ready, and in. So that was great. When
we went back in the ‘70s, when the army was getting ready to go home, it was the worst
Army I’d ever seen. I couldn’t believe we were that bad, it was on the verge of
completely collapsing. [(2) TABA-Patriots-example of bad discipline]

Westmoreland called me up, “What do you mean by saying that the Army, worst
Army you’d ever seen?” I said, “Well General Westmoreland, you and I have talked
about this on my retirement interview. Remember what we said about the fraggings, how
horrible the morale was.” I said, “It was,” and he says, “Well yeah, I guess it was,” you
know, but that’s the way it was—it’s sad.

It reminded me, as a historian, of reading about the Austro-Hungarian Army in
World War I, where they had the Croats and the Serbs and other minorities. These
different racial groups had ethnic troubles in the Austro-Hungarian Army during WWI.
It wasn’t a tight group of guys like we normally have had in the American Army. In 1970
ours was not a tight group of guys as we had in the past. It was horrible at that time, and
then when you add to that, you don’t have your warm fuzzy feeling of the support of your
friends and neighbors and the American public and that also lead to tremendous
problems.

SM: Now you mentioned in our first interview the use of judicial punishment to
try to create order. You noted that you put up a soldier for general court marshal charges
for falling asleep on duty.

TM: That was my first tour.

SM: Yes sir, but people weren’t capable of doing the same thing in the ‘70s
enforcing discipline through the uniform code of military justice?

TM: The problem was too deep. If you started sending 10 or 15 percent of your
people down for general court it would be very difficult. When I first came in 1964 I
knew that when I reported in it was a MAAG like you’d have in Spain or South America,
our security was provided by the Vietnamese, ARVN. I insisted in putting up concertina
wire around us and having our own US guards. I got a lot of static from the officers and
even the sergeant major came in to see me. He said they were working hard, they didn’t
have time to get up in the middle of the night and do guard duty. I said, “Hey guys, this
is an order, this isn’t a discussion.” So I went around to check on that and I found one
guy sound asleep. I took his M-1 from him, went back to the night duty officer who was
dozing, gave him the rifle. I called my deputy in the morning and said, “Put in a general
court marshal.” I knew this wouldn’t go anywhere in Saigon but I wanted to shake the
people up because they were on the, as I say, the South American MAAG type relaxed
duty. It went back to Saigon. Then one of the colonels came up from the Jag’s office and
talked to me and said, “Do you realize we can’t do this, the trouble it’s causing,” I said,
“Good. What do you suggest?” He said, “Make up your mind, article 15 or whatever you
want along the way or a Special Court, article 15’s the best. But it got the word across.
And as a result of that, when they did launch their attack in Tet of ’65 the one group that
came in to hit our compound. They had 2 groups going into Pleiku in February ‘65. One
went to the airfield where I think there were 9 killed and 80 something wounded, and
several choppers blown up. The other one, group, which came to hit us at the main gate,
when they were coming in the soldier on guard opened fire and he was killed but it
repulsed them. The people were armed and manned our defenses. We had put up between
the rooms blocks of concrete so we had walls so they couldn’t come into the compound
and just shoot down the hallway when people opened the doors. During the 1960’s, I
used the judicial system to shake up the guys. But by 1970 with the fraggings and all the
rest of the problems, we just couldn’t send that large a number to jail. If you did you’d
get more resistance and exacerbate the problem. We were right on the edge of mutiny.
We have platoon and companies that refused to carry out orders until the company or
battalion commander came down kicking people in the ass and making them go.
Threatening them really, “If you don’t do this you’ll end up at Long Bin in jail,” so it
was, in 1970, completely different. That’s the way the war changed.

SM: So what’s the remedy when the rule of law won’t work in the military?

TM: Well, the remedy, our remedy was that we withdraw. The public was so
much against the war that we pulled out of Vietnam. President Nixon disengaged us and
we started in going down from 500,000 all the way down. When I came back Cambodia
in 1971 this was a great threat. The enemy had 3 divisions, in that Eagle Beak area,
NVA. The danger was we fell below 100,000 troops. If they launched those 3 divisions
towards Saigon, they could have broken through in conjunction with all the other attacks
in the rest of the country. Just think of all the American POWs and casualties we’d have.
When I was briefed by General Abrams in Jan 1970 to go into Cambodia he said that was
a major danger, when we fell below 100,000. That’s why we were getting 200 million
dollars to me as a MEDT chief. He told me, “You’re a MAAG chief but we have to call it
MEDT, Military Equipment Delivery Team because of the State department.” You
know, we covered it up, the danger was there. That’s one of the things that the President
and the Joint Chiefs have to watch is that when they get into trouble and lose public
support and the morale gets so bad that you have the danger of ending up like Vietnam
which was on the verge of having real serious mutinies like the French during WWI.
Morale was so bad they had mutinies and they executed certain people, “To encourage
the others,” was the phrase. Well we wouldn’t do this but I, what do you do when this
happens? And then at the end of a war you go to a peace table and start talking about
ending the war.

SM: So in your estimation, the problem morale in the military was a major factor
in the decision to withdrawal?

TM: Yeah. Well, first was a major factor of losing public support. When you
lost the public support the shock went out to the military resulting in the loss of direction.
In Korea, when I became a regimental commander of the 17th Regiment we had the same
problem. They were having peace talks and at the peace talks they were trying to get an
agreement to disengage. The Chinese launched a series of attacks on Pork Chop and the
rest on the outposts. And after Pork Chop April 1953 I took over the regiment. We had a
small attack on an outpost and I sent one platoon up to reinforce it. I was called back to
brief the 8th Army Commander General Taylor I gave him my briefing, you know, the
dog and pony show. But then he said, “I am putting out an order down the chain of
command that the regimental commander will not be able to use more than one platoon
on his order without checking with the division commander before a company is
committed.” He said the reason for that; our danger now was that, the Chinese were
trying to bleed us. And if we did like we did on in the fall at Triangle Hill, when we fed
in a battalion a day with heavy casualties. A battalion a day, they’d have to be replaced
with and we couldn’t afford it at that time. You’ll have to take whatever happens on the
outpost until you get an ok from the Division Commander. He said, “This is not a good
order for me to give. I think it’s terrible I have to give it, but the overriding consideration
is hold the casualties down.” This was more important than fighting to the last man for
that hill. So this is, where the political impact comes through to the Army commander
and impacts on the last guy down in the line. So you do what you’ve got to do. Not
because it’s the thing you want to do as a military commander but the overriding
consideration is the number of casualties. So you can see how the political demands
impact on the military. I’m sure if you start from the Civil War on the attitude, towards
death and the impact of political caution there is a similarity of pressures along the way.

SM: So what was driving the decision as far as to keep casualties low in Korea?
Was it, you’ve got 2 sides to this coin. On the one side, increase in casualties can
diminish political will. On the other side, increase in casualties can inflame political will
and was it General Taylor’s concern that the United States public would become more
enraged the more people were lost and that would bog us down even more in Korea?

TM: Right, well we had accepted the fact that we were going to have an
armistice. They had been talking to each other for months and what the problem is, if you
got more engaged, you’d have to have more people involved and why do that when
you’re going to pull out anyway? So you did the best you could to hold onto what you
could while the talks going along.

SM: So he didn’t want to escalate things?

TM: Yes that was the reason. Now another thing that happened there at that
time, you probably remember the POW camps revolting. You had a whole lot in Kojado
Island Ridgeway was commanding at that time. They captured a general officer who
went in to negotiate with the POWs. They captured him and Ridgeway gave the order at
that time that they would use everything, including tanks, to overrun the resistance. He
would not stand for a dissident group in our rear to show that the American’s couldn’t
control the PW’s. But Ridgeway made difficult decisions. For example when he had to
withdrawal south of Seoul the second time. He gave an order, he went down to the
bridge, put a general there, an ADC of the 1st division and gave him the order, “When the
civilians start coming across the bridge, let them come. When the 1st American troop
come, cut it off the civilians and if they don’t obey the orders fire over their head, if they
keep coming, fire. We have the whole Army trapped north of the area and it’s absolutely
imperative that they withdraw safely.” It’s in a book, he wrote it. He really had balls. He
was a soldier first and responded to political things afterwards.
But I think that every one of these things we don’t like to think about as soldiers, we must realize we are driven by the politics. By this time in Vietnam also we knew we were withdrawing so all we were just trying to do was to hold things together the best we could along the way. Also keep the casualties down on that, too, but that’s a very difficult thing. As you can see, you go down at the soldier level and they threaten their officers. As a result, some of the guys don’t even go out and do the patrols they’re supposed to do. You remember that one battalion that was overrun there in the 23rd division firebase, MaryAnn I think it was. The reason for that, the division commander had given orders to cut down the patrols to cut down on casualties. Charlie was watching all the time, so when they cut down on patrols he got closer and closer and soon was in a position to overrun it. So it’s a very, very difficult situation and that’s where the poor commander earns his money.

SM: Yes sir. Going back to Korea for a second, what did you think about the transition from MacArthur to Ridgeway and what did you think of General MacArthur as a Korean War Commander-in-Chief?

TM: Well look at General MacArthur. He’s a great strategist and so forth and look what he did and he did in Korea, the first part and Inchon, what he did, was terrific. It’s what he did in island hopping in WWII. Going around the flank. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and everybody was against it but they sold them on Inchon. However, as that war continued, he felt psychologically that he had won. He’s driven them north in the Yala and he expected that to end the war and he would be able to have our troops home for Christmas. It was fixed in his mind. As a result, the reports that came in, Chinese soldiers found and so forth, they were surprised by the Chinese soldiers coming across the Yala because he had…his psychological feeling, it was over. The same thing happened to Eisenhower in World War II. They had driven into Germany and were waiting until after Christmas for our spring offensive. We had seen them overrun retreat. They reorganized and launched the Bulge. Your psychological impact is such that you look at your intelligence and when an odd thing comes in that says hearing tank motors and all, that’s filed because of your feeling that they’re defeated. That’s why I talk to my young officers now when I’m teaching graduate courses at AMU. I say if you ever get into intelligence and all the reports coming in say you’re winning, take one drawer for,
what’s the worst possible case. Then anything that comes in that looks unusual, throw it in the drawer and look at it after awhile. You’d be surprised what starts building up. It will keep you from getting surprised because you’re looking for that other, the optimistic intelligence. But when you have an optimistic psychological fix, those other items are thrown away and you forget about them. That’s why we were surprised in the Bulge, that’s why we were surprised during Tet ‘65 1 where they hit us there in Pleiku and along the highway and we lost practically all of Bin Dinh province.

SM: Let’s go ahead and…I’ve read the articles and especially, I guess the best place to start is a newspaper article that you, let’s see here, this was in Military Magazine, July of 1995 and you talked about McNamara’s book and his comments and you’re critical which I certainly understand and agree with, but I did want to ask you in terms of looking at this as part of a cold war and the Vietnam war is part of the domino theory that this is part of the containment policy containing communism, I was wondering what your thoughts were on how much you thought the United States played in pushing the Vietnamese towards communism?

TM: Towards which?
SM: Towards communism, and in particular for instance, the…
TM: Yeah, well you go back to the time when the OSS man met with Ho Chi Minh and so forth.
SM: Yes sir, Archimedes Patty or even before that, when Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese delegation went to the Versailles Treaty after World War I and wanted to gain an audience to try to secure independence for Vietnam from French colonialism and their treatment at that was they were kicked out, so who did they have to turn to given the consistent responses of America and other diplomats pushing them out, not answering their questions?

TM: Well I think the thing is when you have large nations that are trying to settle difficulties; some of these peripheral difficulties of small nations are not looked at in light of what is right and what is wrong. The overriding factor is what are you trying to do at the top level with the big nations, and as a result, unfortunately, some of these small nation’s problems are overlooked. As they say, “When the elephants are fighting the mice are running,” So I think it’s very difficult to focus on a small nation’s problems. You say,
“Well why didn’t we do this, or that?” Because it didn’t fit in what we were trying to do at the top. After World War I, as you mentioned Versailles, remember initially the Bolsheviks had in their mind world communism; workers of the world arise. So Britain and France were terrified of that because the Russian Red Army rolling over Poland. They also had Bela Khan in Hungary who took over the country as a communist. They were having riots and musing, so Britain and France were afraid of that so they convinced President Wilson to help them guard the supply dumps into which we’d poured in to supply the old imperial Russian Army. They in their own mind had things placed so the French went into South Russia with their armies and some Greek divisions and the British went east through the Caucuses and also threatened the Bolsheviks in the south. The Soviets then turned one entire Army around and went down and fought in the South. What was left in Poland couldn’t go forward, so these workers of the world arise, failed. If they hadn’t have done that, project what could have happened. What could have happened, they could have rolled through Poland, Germany was on the edge of exploding, and the people in Britain and France really weren’t too happy about going back to war again and that’s where they even got people to go to Russia, they had to go through and select people for volunteers because they were war tired. So it was on that, with that in mind, what some small nation says down here is lost in the clutter so to speak. It’s easy to go back and look at one of those but you’ve got to look at the factors around it and if we just didn’t have those other problems, just looked at this in isolation, yes that sounds like a good idea. It would have gone that direction. But with all the rest of it happening we made sure that Europe did not go communist with the factories and the power there. The other place we worried about, the threat to Japan with the Bolsheviks taking over that whole Siberian area and then Japanese had 70,000 troops there in Russia so that was in our mind, those big issues. It was the factory, the base of the factories that could support armies became one of the key things, so I think we looked at the big picture and some of these others and by the time the French left, that Ho Chi Minh came in and fought against them, as you know we at Dien Bien Phu we nearly used atomic weapons and it was Ridgeway who wrote a paper, took it to Eisenhower that says, “If we’re going in it’ll take 500,000 troops,” but cancelled it. But here we are in the cold war in the 50s. We had SEATO formed to block the Russians here. Then the Russians
and the Chinese in Korea and incidentally on that one, the Woodrow Wilson Center has
bought the complete files of Stalin from beginning to end and in there are the papers of
Mao and Stalin getting together to equip the north Koreans to attack south. Mao was
supposed to send one Army in, which he did. Stalin promised close air support for that
Army, and this close air support was putting in MIGs north of the Yellow River and
shooting at bombers and that’s what caused the breakup, the initial breakup for the
Soviet-Chinese block. So here we had that, now we focus, and when you look at these
things and then you have (?) so we can’t go up south here. We form SEATO, Southeast
Asian Treaty Organization, specifically with Indonesia in mind because a couple of
hundred million people at the old oil reserve and we didn’t want the Chinese to get them
and the Chinese had said that you know, this area they’re under Colonialism and
everything else, and they’d build up a structure of communists in Indonesia and they’d
launch an attack on the Indonesian general staff and killed the senior generals but the
others escaped to fight against the Coup. The fighting killed between 2 and 400,000
people supposed to be communists. And later when I was working as advisor to the
Minister of Defense in Singapore, I went to the ASEAN meetings with the Singaporean
military and I talked to generals there from Indonesia. They said they felt the power of
China was coming in their direction and if we had not landed in spring of ’65 in Vietnam,
they would have gone along with the Coup because why do you fight against the east
wing, the bamboo bends and the wind goes on. Can you imagine today, visualize; we’re
looking at that area out there and it now is all under or aligned as communists with China.
It would be a great disaster for us in the future. So looking at what happened in Vietnam
…the Chinese were blocked from going in there because, Ho Chi Minh and his group
was fighting there.

They won that war, there’s no question about it, we withdrew. We lost,
psychologically, because of lack of the public support so we withdrew. But the President
of Singapore said that we bought them 10 years to get their countries in Southeast Asia
organized. So one of the questions that I ask my students is “Was the fighting and
delaying action, if you want to call it that, in Vietnam, worth it?” Well we wouldn’t go
ahead, just say we were going to delay them, but the bad effect of it was that the fighting
exhausted them. As a result, they bought time for Southeast Asia so they could get rid of
the communists in Malaya and so forth.

Look at Southeast Asia today; I feel it was worth the fighting. Now there are
others who will say the opposite but this is my viewpoint on this thing. Incidentally as an
aside, when I was with the committee for Free Afghanistan the Cambodian generals with
whom I’d worked came to a Reagan doctrine meeting in Washington, which was helping
those who fought against communism. They saw our committee for Free Afghanistan we
were doing and they asked for me to be sent to site two in Thailand, to brief their people
and help them set up a guerilla war against the Vietnamese who were running Cambodia
at that time. And on my way there, I was in Singapore and I took the train up and on the
way up there’s a newspaper article that Chang Peng, the head of the communists in
Malaya who started the fighting in ’47 came out of the jungle with his guys and
surrendered. This is in 1990. That’s just an aside, but I mean, that’s the way they were
cleaning up the rear shall we say along the way and that’s what allowed them to get in
this position. So it isn’t a simple straight segment solution. It’s all complicated!

SM: Another question as far as looking at the Vietnam War as part of the Cold
War. I was wondering what your thoughts were on the idea and what’s actually
supported by a number of national intelligence estimates and special national intelligence
estimates done by the CIA in the 1960’s that what was going on in Vietnam from 1956 to
1963 was not just this overarching concern about communist infiltration and invasion of
the south and the north but more importantly an insurgency. A war for independence in
the south where you have internal political dissent turning into armed conflict because the
group of Viet Cong were just not willing to accept the Diem regime, they were not
willing to deal with this in a peaceful political fashion any longer.

TM: Well that’s true, if you look at it in isolation. We could look at that, this
could be looking at an insurgency. Let them fight it out among themselves. However
when you look at the Cold War aspects of it that was the driving force, the Cold War.
Containment by us was the driving force. And if there was an insurgency and you had
them not only there in Vietnam, you had the insurgency in the Congo and in Africa where
the communist’ expanding. Our fear was then, if that insurgency succeeded like Castro’s
in Cuba, and then they became communist, they would have a base against, to use against
us in the overall cold war. So that was the thing that drove us to make sure that these
insurgencies ended up in many cases with us involved. Perhaps we shouldn’t have, but
we were afraid that the other side would get a leg up. If they could win that would give
them a secure area so we had to go in. Also the Soviets came out with the “wars of
national liberation” so we had to come in and start in trying to back up the local people.
That was really the start of all of our MAAGs that we had in the 50s where we started
pouring in our assistance to our allies. If there was insurgency we’d go in, but we’d also
bring in AID. Aid, so we went in with 2 things. We recognized that we had to help them
economically which we did with AID, but we wanted also to build up the military so that
they’d be strong enough to be sure that it didn’t happen like in Vietnam. You’d build a
bridge and the communists would wait until you’d build it, and then a month later they’d
blow it down so you’d start building it all over again. So you needed a military to support
the infrastructure you were trying to build. And I’ll admit, as many liberals say, that
many times we got into things we shouldn’t have. But the thing that drove us, if we didn’t
that the country could become communist. For example, in Nicaragua Castro was helping
the Russians fund the Nicaraguan government. You take the Congo, what did Castro do?
He sent troops in there, remember, and they were fighting in that area so this wasn’t a
local insurgency on its own. You can follow it all the way back from the local
communists to support that they were getting, both some from the Chinese but mostly
from the Russians. So it became not just a little local fight among themselves, it became a
part of who was going to win.
And that’s why we went into El Salvador and you know the problem we had
there. There were major problems with all the liberal church people we had down there
and we even had some nuns who were carrying ammunition for the rebels. These young
idealists felt this nasty big government’s doing humble things. They don’t even realize
the fact that this is part of the Cold War where they’re trying to take over El Salvador as a
base for themselves. It’s a difficult thing for us, as a democracy, to handle. Now you see
the future trouble coming up now, and that’s what this generation’s got to face the
insurgency in Columbia.
There is a threat in Colombia. Two guerilla organizations have taken over whole
sections of country. They are funded by the NARCO terrorists and those guys don’t even
count money, they weigh it as you know. They have bought supplies for the guerillas
from the Eastern European centuries. As a result they have latest radio technicians, radio
communications, using the satellites. They also have bought weapons, which were better
than the government troops had. We’re going to send a few helicopter’s down there but
if the other side buys, like it’s been said in the papers, buys the stinger type missiles, what
will happen? Same thing will happen that happened to the Russians. They had about
120,000 troops in Afghanistan. If something would happen here they’d move people in
by choppers and beat the hell of the guerillas. Now, that’s what they’re doing in
Colombia, they’re using choppers to move troops. But can you imagine what will happen
if the enemy start knocking down choppers. They have to fly high, so they’ll at least have
to triple their Army. Now, you can’t mass like before. This is a problem that’s going to be
faced by today’s generation, how do we handle this. We’ve already started with the
church people and the others are saying we shouldn’t be giving 1 point some billion
dollars to the Colombian Army to fight against the Guerillas. They say we should be
bringing up the level of the country so that all people would be content and there
wouldn’t be insurgencies. No, I mean, this is a problem you’re going to have to face
today. You’ve seen that in the paper about the little church group that’s down there
helping these people.

Then they’ve got on the other hand they’ve got the right wing groups where the
ranchers in the area are buying their own weapons and getting their own companies and
battalions together to fight against the guerillas and the guerillas are trying to make the
government disband them. Look at Ireland, and the IRA. What’s the answer? It has to be
a case-by-case basis and I think that’s going to be very, very difficult for Colombia. You
say, “Well why in Vietnam when it was an insurgency, why didn’t we leave it alone and
go away?”

SM: I wouldn’t argue that we need to leave the insurgency alone, but I’m curious
what you think of the importance of that consideration on tactics and strategy because of
course you’re going to approach an insurgency differently than you’re going to approach
what would be a conventional communist infiltration and you raise a very, I think an
important consideration; the idea of reform and I guess undercutting the political
insurgency by addressing those political issues that they’re trying to address themselves through…

TM: And that takes billions of dollars, and where are you going to get the millions of dollars from Congress for nation building for Colombia?

SM: Well, but for Vietnam?

TM: Oh, for…

SM: Do you think that instead of focusing on the conventional, we should have focused on the unconventional on the nation building, on the…

SM: Well, we could have done that, but to do that you had to have a strong enough military force to protect those things that you were constructions. We had AID and we were trying to build up the local infrastructure. As you remember most people have forgotten that when the guerillas first started going in there they would disembowel the wife of the village chief, terrorism. They killed lawyers, doctors, you know, the whole thing. So that’s the problem, that’s the problem with Colombia. Now there’s a recent news article out which I clipped and sent to my students. In Bolivia, the Columbia guerrillas start going back up in there and giving support for the Bolivians in clearing areas for drugs. The [?] terrorists are so strong now, they have more money than little countries do. That they’ve become a threat, which can join together and threaten the other people in their border so you’ll end up with a government that’s sort of funded by the same as terrorists and what does that mean? It’s a problem, it’s a problem. I personally feel that it’s reached the stage where we should legalize drugs. The reason for that, I grew up when we had prohibition and I watched what was going on there and the good people said, “No, if we okay liquor the workers will be laying dead drunk in the streets.” I accept the fact there’ll probably be more drunks, but to me it is more important to have the sheriffs and his deputies in a county and have a judge who’s not bought out by the navcor, and that’s what’s happening now. In Mexico, they paid a general 2 million dollars and he gave them the information when the raids were going to be. They can buy practically anything along the way and I think it’s more important to keep the judicial system and the police free of the drug money. When the navco weighs money, it’s just a matter of, “How much do you want?” and I think since the drug war in my view is not going well and as a great grandfather I worry for my grandchildren and my great
grandchildren. So I think that that’s about the only way they can tackle it because otherwise this money’s coming. Some of the Mexicans blame us. They say, “The drugs are passing through us, but it’s going to the market. You’re the market who’s buying it, why do you blame us for the money they’re passing through. What about you who have the market there? Why don’t you stop it in your area?” So what is the answer? It’s insolvable in my view.

SM: Are there any lessons, though, that we can apply from our Vietnam War experience to the Colombian problem?

TM: Yes. I think, where I think we went wrong was in the fall of ’65 when the American CC of IFFV became the Senior Advisor to the RVN Corps Commander. First went in there with separate tactical zones. Then later Westmoreland got the corps commanders and IFFV together and they sat down and a decision was made to make the IFFV commander the senior advisor to the ARVN corps commander. Now psychologically for the Vietnamese that was really a slap in their face at this meeting. I stood up there and argued the point that the advisory chain was very important. I was very close to the corps commander. He trusted us. Well I’d gone out and had my chopper shot up and one of them shot down. I got a card from him to show commanders saying, “Do what the Co Van tells you to do.” I mean we trusted each other, and that was a very close relationship and I could convince him to do what MACV wanted so it worked. But the US corps commander sitting on the hill with his American divisions would tell the ARVN Corps Commander what he wanted to do. The US was focused on the big war, fighting the NVA. The corps commander had 2 jobs. He had a military hat, with 2division commanders. He had another hat where he supervised his province chiefs and that’s where the economic aspects came in, defending the villages. They had the Regional Forces and the Popular Forces, you know, to defend them. But we became focused away from that. “Stand aside little brown brothers, we’re going to kill those bastards.” That’s when the effort towards protecting the villages went down the tube while we went out and fought the main force VC and NVA. I think that’s where we went wrong. We should have made sure the mission, even for the IFFV should have been to protect the people. Then when they received enough intelligence, go out and fight the divisions, the enemy divisions. When the Marines came into Vietnam, I think they were
on the right track until Westmoreland told them to stop that program. You know, the
teams they had out.

SM: The CAT program?

TM: Yeah.

SM: Yes sir.

TM: I think, in my view, that that’s where we went wrong. In the future when
we become involved in an insurgency, remember; it’s the people, stupid. Wherever it is,
you’ve got to consider that. Whether it’s Los Angeles or wherever you’ve got to consider
the people. Now, you decide when to go in and you put enough effort on it you can kill
the guerillas. Like Israel has done. So where do you end up when you’ve done that and
driven them out? You end up with terrorism. So the key is you’ve got to go back to the
people again and find out what their problems are. So I think whenever we become
involved we’ve got to carefully identify what the problems are, see how things are going
with the people, and put a hell of a big effort in there to resolve their problem. Like
Colby’s book, I think you should take a look at that and see what they did. I think it was
Comer or whoever it was went back in there and they put the effort on the people.

Unfortunately as we were withdrawing we started to win over the people. There’s a new
book out now on, it’s a follow on from Colby’s on how we were winning among the
villages. As a result of that, to prove that we were doing that successfully, the guerillas
and the communists who were there could have taken over the regions. But no, they lost
their people in Tet ‘67. They were coming from the north and the people in the north and
the south didn’t like each other too much so what did the enemy turn to? Full divisions
with 130 artillery tanks reinforcing the idea of what Colby had said in his book that we
were winning at that level. But as we pulled in our strong American troops out the
enemy then formed divisions and attacked. Nixon had promised that if the enemy did
that we’d come in with the Air Force to support the ARVN. But he couldn’t do it because
he was in trouble, possibly going before the Senate, and he quit. So that went down the
tube. It was a complete disaster the way we cut the money off for the South Vietnamese.
The last major general there was in charge of a group to stay with the Vietnamese and
supply them. He has a report out of the files of the disaster which followed. The South
Vietnamese didn’t even get enough money to get the airplanes up in the air, enough
money to replace the bullets they were shooting. It was a disaster, I feel very, very
guilty. If I ever felt guilty about anything, I feel guilty about this. I didn’t feel guilty
about planning the war; it was in support of our national objective. I talked about this
recently with the young Vietnamese in America. I felt guilty about when we pulled out
and left them high and dry. But so I think that when we go in next time let’s not just go
for the big war, we should have a co-equal nation-building effort. And that takes billions
of dollars. We don’t have billions of dollars to do this all over the world so we should
focus on an area which is most important to us and then when we go in we should make
sure that we go in we’re going to have the billion dollars or whatever is needed for the
Army. However we should also have an equivalent the billion of dollars for the civilian
infrastructure to try and build the countries up. We should go in, not just heavy with the
military alone but also have funds for the post war problems. This takes some follow up
money.

SM: You mentioned it’s the people stupid, and that’s a very interesting comment
to make especially in light of your article on the Tet Offensive of ’65 and War in the
Highlands, and you make a comment, at least I’m pretty sure it’s in here near the end.
You talk about the importance of morale and how it was so important, given some of the
minor set backs or in some cases very serious set backs that ARVN experienced in ’65
that there were a number of instances where they were able to regain the initiative
tactically and therefore were able to kind of come back from those minor set backs.

TM: Right.

SM: But real quick, you mention them…

TM: The lieutenant colonel who was here, G2 to Vin Loc, he and I were talking
about this last night and I brought this subject up. We discussed this a great length. They
had gone through this with the French. He had been with the French at that time in the
Pleiku area with the Montagnards. As these attacks came in 1963, and when they hit us
and hit Pleiku, you know the advisory compound and Holloway Air Field, they also blew
up in a hotel in Qui Nhon where the mechanics and the pilots were stationed. The attacks
on the coast took most of northern Vin Din. It mirrored what they did against the French
in the 1950’s and the word started going around again, “It’s the ‘50s again.” At this time
morale was so low that I noticed officers as I went around that showed up down at the
coast from Pleiku area negotiating for fishing boats to take them to the Philippines. “Get ready, save your skin.” You remember the way they bailed out at the last moment; they’d gone through this before, when the communists took over North Vietnam. Remember the 100 and some thousand that fled south? They’d gone through this before so they could see it happening again, and this time they were going to have to leave South Vietnam. As I say, they were looking for fishing boats and that’s when that fighting took place along Highway 19 in the same place along the side of the French monuments where they had wiped out the Group Mobile. So they could see it coming again. This time however we came in there with helicopters to lift troops as it describes in that article. We used, for the first time, US jet aircraft to support the ARVN troops. We used US helicopter gun ships, jet aircraft, B-52 strikes to support ARVN counter attacks. The morale then went through the ceiling because they said, “The Americans are committed.” Before we didn’t use the US Air Force close air strikes power. This time we did, and just as a vignette one of the things I’d told the AR to do was have the Air Force, when they get through with their bombing, fly low over Pleiku and all the villages to show the resounding, you know, “boom, snap.” Well when they did this over Pleiku one of my officers ran out of the Corps headquarters to see the airplanes going by, fell down and broke his leg and was evacuated from Vietnam. The morale went up…even with the Americans. If we had not changed, I could see us with everything collapsing, withdrawing to the airfield at Pleiku and waiting to be lifted out.

I visualized when the planes come into lift us out, they would also need air strikes from the Air Force and the Navy fighters to blanket the enemy while they were lifting us out of there. I’d even had a little notebook in my pocket to prepare for this. Hell I planned to organize my advisors and clerks into a couple of small, tight companies with personal weapons and gear. I didn’t let anyone know that because morale is a very tenuous thing. As they say, “Hey, the old man’s thinking about bugging,” what happens then? We just would be mirroring what the Vietnamese felt. But there, the morale went up, and then when we were fighting at Duc Co Camp, Gen. Westmoreland sent the 173rd up to take over Pleiku. As a result we were able to get the troops in the Pleiku area which were defending the corps headquarters, mobilize them in a Chief column along with 2 battalions of Marines we brought up from the coast plus airborne troops to fight our way
all the way into Dac To, that was the start of the American troops supporting ARVN.
When they came to Pleiku they didn’t do any fighting, the mission was security for the
Corps HO. Gen Ving Loc asked for a brigade of First Marine Cav. troops to secure Pleiku
so we could form up a relief column to relieve Plei Me. ARVN took Plei Me back. Then
the Air Cav jumped over us and pursued the enemy to Ia Drang Valley. That was the start
of IFFV combat and the end of the advisory effort in the II Corps and the start of the
American big battalion battles.

SM: Which brings up an interesting aspect of the war and ties in kind of with
what I’m trying to get at. You mentioned something in the article about the importance
of morale over statistics and quantification and I was wondering what your thoughts were
about the emphasis on the body count; numbers, statistics, quantification theory, and of
course how that was by him with McNamara as Department of Defense Secretary?

TM: Right. Well, when I first came over there in ’64 I’d hear about a fight at an
outpost so I’d go out there. I remember the first one I went to. I went out and looked
around, there was supposed to have been a big fight. I said well look, there were no holes
in the building and broken windows and the rest of this sort of thing. “You had a big
fight and a lot of shooting here. Where are the bodies? You know, where’s some
indication?” “They were carried away.” So I said, “Okay, where were they? There must
be some blood on the ground.” So we went around and looked and there wasn’t any
blood on the ground. See, the reason for this, if they had an outpost fight, they would get
in more ammunition. The ammunition was available for barter on the black market. So
the next time I went up to another outpost fight, I went up there and one of the first things
they showed me was some bullet holes in the buildings. And then they got me by the
hand and brought me over and said, “See the blood?” and sure enough there was blood all
over the place there. Then I kept walking around the circle. Then I found some chicken
feathers. So I went back and talked to the corps commander and I said, “Look. Please get
on your people, stop this bullshit. I want to see bodies of the enemy when they’ve fought
there.”

And later we were able, during Tet ’65, when they fought at one of the outposts;
they had 126 bodies in the wire that I and the corps commander came down to see 126
bodies!
Unfortunately when the American’s came with Sec. Dets insistence on statistics it started in blossoming, blossoming with the American troops. So when I came back to the 23rd Division in 1970 I insisted on seeing weapons. I didn’t want to see bodies because a poor Goddamn farmer in black pajamas, they’d be dragging him in by the heels. So it was wrong using these statistics. In the case where we did this when we had only Vietnamese troops there we had to do this to cut down the BS. So I insisted on every operation where we had something going, we estimated in the 28th Div when so many were killed, or have so few weapons then in my own mind I’d be able to say, “Hey.”

SM: So in your unit, when you went back for your 2nd…

TM: Yeah, when I went back for my 2nd tour I insisted on weapons. I mean, they’d give me the body count, which we had to send in to make McNamara happy and things, but I want to see the weapons.

SM: Did you ever come across any incidences of inflating body counts from junior commanders?

TM: We got many, far too many inflated body counts but very few weapons. So I have the feeling that this thing had just increased over the years. That’s the way they were doing it when I arrived. When you asked, “Hey, how many do you think you have out there,” and they’d report the numbers.

It’s like zero defects today, zero defects. There ain’t no zero defects. In my generation we let the young lieutenant or the young captain make mistakes. You call him in and filet his ass and say, “Hey, you learned something. Now go back and do good work. You come in again with that your ass is gone!” You know, we just accepted one made mistakes along the way. But “zero defects”, this is sort of a zero defects mentality. In the Mai Lai incident, there were civilians. If we had had close relationships with the people, protecting them, this would not have happened. You know, if we had our, like the Marines, teams down there, there’d be some Americans around and this wouldn’t have happened. And another reason this thing happened was taking casualties from mines. You go to a village and they smile at you and you go through and you walk down the path and boom! You knew the villagers knew mines were there, and that hate will build up and that’s when incidents happen. As you know, Kelly, was a weak reed. We put the unit together, made a brigade out of them and send them over. You didn’t have that
strong discipline, regimental commander controlling the regiment company. The
battalion commander who controlled the company commanders trained Les. At the end,
in the 1970’s, our chain of command was getting watered down.

SM: Well that brings up another controversial aspect of the war. The 365-day
rotation for regular soldiers and the 6-month combat rotation for many officers and
sometimes considerably less than 6 months for officers. What did you think on that
policy?

TM: Well, for the soldiers, yes. You take the casualties they went through with
the mines and all that. If they got through that, they paid their dues. For the senior
NCOs, the ones that had balls and kept going back, they were watered down. I mean,
they were starting to get lost. What I did in the division, I made sure when a soldier came
in, if he’d already had a tour in Vietnam, in a rifle company, to get him off to rifle
company headquarters or something or other jobs around but don’t use him up. Like in
Korea when we had a guy who got a Purple Heart, okay fine, but after a second one if he
came back from the hospital, I’d put him in one of the battalion headquarters or some
place like that, you’ve got to protect the guy. But with the officers, God damnit no, they
need 2 years, 2 years. Stay there. You don’t know where the bathroom is in the first
year. No, seriously, it’s very, very serious. You can say, “Gee, that’s terrible,” and I
guess it is but I think 1 year is bad for the officers but good for the enlisted men. It would
be was hard on the officers and the officer’s families, but God damnit you’re a soldier
and that’s the way it ought to be. I know it’s a hard thing. Maybe it couldn’t have been
done, maybe that’s why Westy had to do it that way but I think for the officers they
should really force them to stay there for 2 years.

SM: Well certainly this addresses the issue of morale.

SM: It also addresses the issue of morale.

TM: Oh yes.

SM: It’s hard to keep a soldier’s morale up who’s going to be there for 365 days
when every so often a new officer rotates in.

TM: Yeah, well the officer’s morale will go down, but then that’s what you pay
the company commanders and the battalion commanders for. If they can’t keep up the
officer’s morale or their lieutenants, you aren’t a very good commander. This is
my...now this all seems simplistic when you look at it but I’m telling you, look; I had been through 3 wars here. I’ve watched this thing develop and you have to use unconventional approaches and you have to be prepared as a commander sometime to do something which is really not in line with what you’re supposed to do. However, you’re on the ground and can say, “I have to do this for the good of my command.” You have to be prepared to take the risk and do it for the good of your troop. Your risk is that you may get relieved, but you have to accept that. “These are my men, my mission is to take care of these guys and if the boss doesn’t like it he’ll relieve me and send someone else in.” I think that’s one thing an officer has to find out is that to be prepared to stand up to the boss even if he gets relieved at times if it’s the lives of soldiers on the ground.

SM: Based on what you wrote in October of 1965 looking back on the Tet Offensive of ’65 in Army Magazine and what you’ve talked about today, and also the programs that were put in place by the Marine Corps, the CAT program. Obviously it was understood by men like you that what was going on in Vietnam did not require or did not warrant an attrition strategy. Why did they adopt one?

TM: Well, the chief of staff of the Army, General Johnson, he’d been captured in World War II and he ended up, you know, POW and then he ended up as Chief of Staff of the Army. He came through, I think it was around December of ’64 or so and he visited the senior advisory commander because we were the field commanders of the area in charge of the advisory teams of the corps. He said if I could have anything that I wanted, what would I want in the area, what they should do. I suggested that what we should do is move in American troops but use the enclave theory which was proposed by General, Gavin. But we’d move in to an area where there were people and set up in a defensive position like they did in An Khe. Keep our troops in the populated areas, and get the Vietnamese troops out fighting the enemy. When the last Vietnamese battalion went in and they ran out of reserves, pile in with what we needed from our US division. Pull and let the Vietnamese pound the enemy and we would pile on when the enemy was fighting a close fight with ARVN. Then we wouldn’t be taking the casualties walking like Braddock’s Army through the minefields. And that was proposed by General Gavin who’s a very capable General.
General Johnson said. “Well that’s the Gavin theory”, he says. “We’re going to be more…we’re going in higher than that. We’re playing more cards.” We’re looking at corps commanders…I think that was wrong. We should have tried the Gavin theory first and then if that didn’t work then the NVA started coming down more numbers then maybe on both sides we’d go into a conventional war. I saw in 1970 that most of our casualties were the result of walking through the fields, and I say if they had the Gavin theory you’d be doing 2 things; you’d be there holding the bulk of the population right under your control with the police going around. And one ARVN ran out of reserves; pile on when there’s a big battle where you could find the bastards. But it didn’t work out that way. That isn’t my theory, that was General Gavin’s, but I felt strongly that was the best way. But no, here’s the problem, I’m only a colonel and here’s the Chief of Staff of the Army and he talks to Westmoreland and the rest of them and they make up, the strategy. But I think they would have done much better by going Gavin’s way. And while we were doing that we could have had the little CAT program going out from each company, selecting a village or something, doing that to give the people security.

SM: Well that certainly addresses…

TM: Now the dangers, I understand from the Joint Chiefs of Staff aspect that we have found out after the war, just recently, about the number of Chinese who were in the Vietnam. They sent about 100,000 down to keep the railroads and stuff going in North Vietnam so the NVA could go down and work on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Recently information has coming out about the Chinese who were in North Vietnam. So the Chinese, evidently, were prepared to go into this thing if they had to. And the last thing we want is never, ever get into a land war with a billion Chinese! It’s better we lose, an area! Use our Navy and Air Force to secure the Pacific. But it’s like Britain, in the 1800’s, didn’t want to get into a big land war with any of the continental powers. They’d join one side or the other side. But I think we’re taking the place of Britain for the new century coming up where we should hold ourselves ready to help somebody in that area or help but not pick up the whole thing.

SM: The Gavin plan seems to emphasize holding ground and protecting the villages while it’s controlling the villagers.
TM: Yeah, well they move into an enclave and what was in the enclave I’m sure they could do a CAT program. It’s only a natural, you know, I mean, that’s the way it works.

SM: Well of the strengths of American intervention as you mention in your article in October ’65 was the helicopter and the flexibility that that afforded. But it seems like one of the weaknesses of the helicopter is how it allowed for the adoption of the type of strategy that was in practice. We had the American fire base that’s far removed from anything, you’ve got the chopper that can lift guys out, do an operation, and run them back.

TM: Initially we supported the Vietnamese with the old banana shaped jobs. They had difficulties with the old choppers-oil leaking on the compartments, etc.

SM: And they didn’t fall from the sky?

TM: No, it’s amazing, it’s amazing.

SM: Well, so I was wondering what your thoughts were on that? It seems like although the helicopter was the workhorse of the war provided all kinds of flexibility but it also, in the end, it acted to circumvent. Keeping men down on the ground, in the villages, in enclaves, because it allowed for that rapid mobility.

TM: Yeah.

SM: So it was kind of counter productive?

TM: I think the helicopter should be used to lift the combat troops out and the people you should leave in the rear, give security to villages there when you have to move out. You’ve got your Regional Force companies and your Popular Force which should be down living among the people and hopefully this would work until they brought in an anti helicopter missile and when that happens, then turn from the lessons learned in Vietnam to the Soviet/Afghan war. The Command and General Staff College translates books. They’ve got 3 books from the Russian experience in Afghanistan. They called me up because I spent nearly 8 years on that Soviet/Afghan War. I made 7 trips over there. And since I worked in that area they asked me for my comments from the Afghan side. I was able to introduce them to Afghan commanders, one a general who’d retired in England. They had me write an introduction to their third book. The important factor is what happened to the Soviet forces when they had helicopters and then they
can’t use them because of the stinger missiles. And that’s why I worried so much when we sent choppers to Columbia. They have infantry troops that can be available. But if you’re going to send them in 70 to 100 miles exposed completely to stinger type missiles. I think that the enclave’s would have worked in Vietnam. You’ve got an enclave and if you were there where the major population is and then the Vietnamese ARVN become committed thoroughly as in Tet ’65, the JGS can commit their Marines and their airborne troops which from the JGS reserve. Then that would be the time the US troops drop start piling in. Then we could...we used once, I think, an airborne drop once, but then we could even use the airmobile forces to block exit areas. I think everyone has proposals, but I think that this enchain theory would have worked.

SM: Okay, and then I had one question about your conclusion in your Army article.

TM: Oh, the conclusion, go to the last paragraph there what General Col says.

SM: Okay.

TM: The last paragraph. Oh, it mentions where they’re dispersed and driven back in the mountain jungle areas. The next move was up to the VC with the approach of the monsoon season they had lost their Tet ’65 offensive. However, they had capability for massive reinforcement with more troops from the north. Once prepared, they could strike again under cover of the rainstorm during early May or June and that’s from the map I gave you that showed what they did during that period. But as General Col said, “The next move is up to the VC. We have defeated them in open warfare. They must now make the choice of going back to guerilla warfare or introducing new PAVN, now NVA, forces in order to regain superiority in numbers. If they do this, the war will enter a new phase,” and that’s exactly what happened. They moved south with the PAVN forces. But the ARVN on the ground, with our air support managed to counterattack the enemy who were there, they drove them back. ARVN defeated them, so what they had to do next was bring in more troops from the north and I think that’s a parallel also after Tet ‘68. We emasculated their forces on the ground, the local forces, their leaders and so forth. They had to fill them up with NVA from the north and as a result, in Colby’s book and that new book that came out, ARVN were making progress. If we kept enough military forces there to make sure they couldn’t come south with divisions, it would be a
stalemate. If they came south with divisions and we matched them with divisions or even the air power, it could have turned the other way and we would see a big, long discussion like we had in Korea where they finally agree to something.

Now I was at a conference about a year ago, we had Russians there, and they talked about what they expected out of Vietnam. They said that they fully expected, a division of Vietnam. In Europe we had the Iron Curtain. In Korea we divided the peninsula. So they expected the same thing to happen in Vietnam. So if ARVN stopped the supplies, it would a stalemate. But we crumbled, we crumbled. It was time to fade and we faded, I feel, a little early. But what can you say with these American casualties. The American public was turned off. They said, “I don’t give a God damn whether we win or don’t win, my guys are getting killed. Let’s quit…” that’s the result of the less of that public support.

SM: I found it curious the specific wording he used, because basically he seems to be surrendering the initiative.

TM: Doing what?

SM: He surrenders the initiative. “The next move is up to the VC…” and it seemed to me that from a strategic standpoint and even from a tactical standpoint that one of the most important things in warfare is to maintain the initiative. That statement doesn’t support that from the Vietnamese perspective.

TM: Well, but the thing is, we were then protecting the villages. We got them back under our control, we got special force teams from Okinawa to assist in reforming the RF/PF and we got the villages back under our control. The RF/PF had broken up into small groups and stayed scattered out in the bush. The initiative we have is protecting the people, not going out and trying to run down every last enemy because they’ll split up and split up and split up and then they’ll finally later come together. So as far as we were concerned in that type of a guerilla warfare, as long as we could protect the people and they couldn’t overrun these districts, what do they do then? They wouldn’t have the control of the people, getting the rice and other supplies from them.

SM: So in 1965 it was a defensive posture?

TM: Yeah. Well they, yeah, they fell back in a defensive posture forcing the enemy to concentrate again to attack us. They tried this and we counter-attacked our
troops and fought them. They weren’t strong enough and we drove them back in the jungle so we’d wait for them to reorganize. I suggest you get that other…let me write that damn thing down. You turn that off?

SM: Oh, sure I can.

TM: Oh, and I think the concluding thing we learned from Vietnam, number one; when we go in to support a country and we have, let’s take Colombia. We’re getting 1 point some billion dollars to beef up the Colombian Army. Great. Tied in with that should be an equal amount to build up the infrastructure, the markets, the training of the teachers and all the rest of that. The thing is, would Congress stand for that Natim Building? No. If Congress wouldn’t fund it, then why should we start a program, which is going down the military route which builds up the headquarters and new unit, but nothing is done to solve the peasants’ problems. You end up with the same sort of thing we had in Vietnam. So I think that when you’re going in, you have to go in on both directions. You get the minister by both hands and say, “What’s your little project?” And get involved that way along with our AID. The military and Natim Building should be going together simultaneously.

SM: Okay, and that was a major problem in Vietnam?

TM: That was a major problem in Vietnam. It started when IFFV took over the big battalion’s war and sort of pulled the Corps along and didn’t keep attention on the people’s security.

SM: And when you went back for your second tour, did you notice any difference as far as the ARVN commanders and the ARVN soldiers? Obviously, in 1965 there was high morale, they were willing to fight, things were going really well, but when you went back the second time how was ARVN?

TM: Back the 2nd time in 1970 they were very apprehensive that we were pulling out. You know, you’re in the middle of a fight and here’s your ally and he’s leaving and they were very apprehensive about that. But remember An Lo battle towards the end? They were fighting. The enemy Easter Offensive failed because of our Air Power support of ARVN. If we’d managed to keep the air power in there I think ARVN might have had it. Unless the NVA launched a multi division attack, and then our public support wouldn’t allow us to go back in with US divisions, so I don’t know.
SM: Anything else you’d like to talk about right now?
TM: Well, maybe the idea is to make up your mind as I said before. We’re going to have allies around the world. To make them good strong allies we have to make sure that we also nation build also so there’s a strong country there. Because if you just come in and help the military and the people are disaffected, they’ll join with the other side and then you’ve got a real problem. Okay?
SM: Yes sir. This concludes the second interview with General Ted Mataxis.
Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with General Ted Mataxis on the 14th of April, 2002 at approximately 1:30 in the afternoon. We are in the Special Collections Library interview room and this is part of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project. Sir, thanks for the interview again today. Why don’t we begin by discussing your trip in 1952 to Indochina during the French Indochina War and what impressions you gained from that?

Ted Mataxis: Let me start with the background on this. I was in route from the states to the Indian Defense Staff College with my family. We were in between Japan and Hong Kong on the President’s Liner Cruise ship when the North Koreans attacked in June 1950. I went into the consulate in Hong Kong and sent a cable to the Pentagon saying, “Please cancel my schooling and assign me to Korea.” By the time we got to Singapore I got an answer back that said, “Continue on the school and when you’re through, we’ll send you to Korea.” So I went to the school and I had my wife and three children with me and a big Boxer dog. So I continued on to the school, a ten-month school with the Indian Defense Staff College. It was very, very good, particularly getting the impression from the British how they operated with the local native troops and how they operated. At the end of the school I sent my wife home because I had received the cable that said they were going to send me to Korea. After I sent her home a telegram came that said, “Since you have volunteered for extended overseas duty, after the Staff College we’re sending you to Kashmir as a United Nations observer.” I sent a cable back that said, “No, I want to go to Korea,” and they sent another cable back saying, “You will report to the United Nations.”

So, I was really pissed. I went to the British General there, General Lenfain, and contacted the Australian General who was in charge of the United Nations mission in
Kashmir. The Brits are very good on this sort of thing, they don’t pay much attention to
you’ve got to do this or that. The key was I wanted to go to Korea and the Pentagon
wouldn’t let me go. So, I decided to go to see the French in Indochina for a month.
Incidentally when they sent that back to me and I said I wanted a 30 days leave, the
answer came back, “You can have leave, but you can’t go to Korea.” They were afraid
I’d go up there and see some old friends and get a job. So, I contacted both the British
Guard at the Staff College guy and the Australian at the United Nations in Kashmir and
said, “Hey, I’m going to be going out to Indochina and want to stop by the Indian
parachute school and do a course.” They both agreed on that because they felt that, “Hey,
all officers that want to go off someplace where they get shot at and get combat
experience, that’s more interesting than being a UN Observer.” So I took off in July and
I went on the AF Embassy run Saigon. They used to have a flight once a week that went
around the world. So I got a flight on that into Saigon. Then I checked in there with the
American group. It was in ’51. They introduced me to the French and the French were
absolutely delighted to have an American officer interested in what they were doing
against the Viet Minh. So, what I would do was check into a French unit and they would
brief me on what was going on in their area and we’d go out in a jeep and look around at
things and to see they were doing. I made a trip all the way down to Can Tho in the IV
Corps. Listening to them, seeing what they were doing and how they operated gave me a
sense of familiarity of what the countryside and Saigon was like. At that time I felt it was
much better than after the Americans came in the 1960’s because at that time they had a
lot of Germans in the Foreign Service…not Foreign Service…

SM: The Foreign Legion?

TM: The German Foreign Legion troops were there and they’d be sitting in one
section of the hotel bar singing German songs and in the other section…the French would
be singing their songs. It was a great experience as a young officer getting to see all of
these things. I did pick up from them how the enemy operated. The one thing that came
across loud and clear was that they would leave you alone for a long period of time until
you got bored and your guard was down, and then they’d whack you. So that you
couldn’t say this was a peaceful area because the Viet Minh would be watching and
waiting, and let a certain area become peaceful and then they’d mount a surprise
operation. So, that was one of the main impressions that I brought back with me. I first
came into Pleiku, the fall of 1964. The fact that we were exposed and if the war started
escalating we’d get whacked along the way by a surprise attack. I didn’t expect it of
course on the 7th of February 1965, but it was one of those things that we had to be
prepared for. I think when you go out for an orientation as I did in 1951, you go around
and observe what the people are doing and the level off fighting. It gives you a better feel
for what to expect. I could match my 1951 trip against the way things went in World
War II and the experience in Korea. I found my earlier trip went very useful when I
returned to Vietnam in 1964.

SM: Now your time at the Indian Defense Staff College, how much did that add
to your understanding or your ability as an advisor? Did it come in handy at all learning
from the English experience, working with the Indian forces?

TM: It helped me immensely because we had British, Australians, Burmese, and
the Indians officers who were Muslims among the Hindus. Watching the way they
operated with each other and the sensibility that they felt toward other cultures. The
British stressed so much, you’re in another man’s country. Here are the rules of his
society. Whatever you do, these are the things you don’t do, and these are the things you
want do that are good. To accomplish that, you had to find out about the other guys’
society and what he thought and try to modify your behavior to fit in with him so he’d
look on you as not an irritant, but someone who was really there to help him.

Now in the 1960’s with the Americans getting ready for we stressed the duty of
the advisors. There were two schools of thought, about Advising. One was try and get to
know the guy you were advising the best you could and become friendly with him and
the other one was to be standoffish so there wasn’t any relationship or personal
relationship between the two. When you ask which is the best, it all depends like a
marriage on the two people. What is the guy you’re advising like, what are you like, and
how do you have to modify your behavior to work with him. Fortunately, the first man I
advised was Gen Nguyen Yu Co. The II ARVN Corps Co had been a battalion
commander with the French. He’d been the French War Academy and he was a
competent professional officer, really good. I remember when I first came there he liked
to drink brandy and we’d sit and drink brandy in the evenings and talk to each other and
he one time said, “I don’t know what to do. My wife keeps having babies,” and that
really hit me! I said, “God, I’m sure he’d been with the French and everything else,” so I
started sort of stammering and stuttering. “Well, you know General, there are certain,”
and he started laughing. I thought he’d have hysteric. “No, no, no. I know all about
that.” He said, “My wife is a Buddhist and she believes she should keep having babies.
We have 11 now!” That sort of broke the ice and then we became I’d say close friends.
We had 49 percent of Vietnam in the II Corps. So I went to see every advisory group at
least a minimum of once a month. This included the Special Force camps, the Province
districts. So that meant every day I was up in a helicopter off at seven and flying around
the area and coming back in the evening. I had my staff meetings after dinner and my
deputy took care of the daily work during the day. But, it was very interesting. I believe
you have to go and visit to see what’s happening on the ground. I got on very well with
our Special Force types because I was Master Parachutist and I had commended the 505
Abn. For two years in Germany. When I came to Pleiku the former advisor was an
artilleryman and he hated the Special Forces. He had one young Captain that had gotten
in a fight in the bar and he was going to really throw the book at him. So, after he left I
called the guy in and chewed him out and gave him an AR-15. Then I called all the
Special Force people together and I said, “Guys, look; the corps has supervision over
what you’re doing. I don’t have direct command influence on this. But, I can have some
influence.” By that time I’d seen some NCOs who’d served with me in the airborne and I
also had an officer who’d served with me over in the 505, in Germany. I said, “When
anything goes wrong, don’t try and sweep it under the carpet. Then what’ll happen, it
will become an issue which I can’t handle. You bring it to me right away and I’ll solve
it. If I wrap you real hard on the knuckles that means that that we had to get it out of the
way, or you could really have your ass hanging high in the sky.” After this we got on like
ham and eggs. Special Force Camps, in my view, held the highlands for us during the
critical summer of ’65. Now the Camps couldn’t have hung on by themselves without
outside help, but it forced the enemy to mass themselves so we could get air strikes on
them. So our Corps Advisors worked very, very well with the Special Forces.
SM: The discussions that you had with your counterpart, this was a General Co at
this point?
TM: General Co, Nguyen Yu Co, and later when he was promoted, it was

General Vinh Loc.

SM: When you were talking with General Co, would you discuss things like

military history? You mentioned the evening brandies you’d have and the talks.

TM: Oh yeah, I’d talk to him and talk about his service with the French and what

he’d done against the Viet Minh and how the Viet Minh operated. He’s the one that told

me that the Corps headquarters had the complete file of the 1950s fighting in the

Highlands complete with maps and other details. So, I got my G2 Advisor the ARVN G-

2 and directed them to draw up a complete study on the Viet Minh “lure and the

ambush”. I felt very strongly our tour turnover year was bad. Inside of a year lessons

would have been forgotten and a new group’s in there trying to find out where the

bathroom is. So, I wanted that information to be there in the file so the new people could

study it and it worked out very well. In fact the Chief of Military History has a copy and

Gen. Hal Moore, when he wrote his book, refers to our II Corps study and what they got

out of that, the intelligence and so forth. After World War II the 15th Army Group made a

huge study of the Battle of the Bulge, intelligence wise, and they were able to identify

items that would show that something was coming, an attack was coming but these were

ignored. We had the same thing happen with our investigation. We identified the things

that would have warned us of Tet’65. But, they were so buried and masked with

everything else that you couldn’t just reach in and identify them. They were immersed in

the whole mass of intelligence reporting. But, our intelligence study worked very well

and today the Chief of Military History has the “lure and the ambush” to study. So we

looked over these, the operation on Highway 19, and what the VC was doing was the

same thing. They would attack a district headquarters or an outpost and wait for the

reaction force to come rushing down the road to assist the defenders and they’d wax

them. So, what we did as you probably heard in my talk, we went through and identified

the enemy tactics and decided that the best thing we could do is when an attack came we

would use helicopters, we would also use the Beaver and the Otter and we even had a

Caribou that we’d use and fly over the ambush. After fighting Tet ‘65, we were getting

ready for the summer monsoon offensive.
Corps went to Westmoreland and said, “Here’s the problem,” and all they could do to help us to set up for the enemy’s summer offensive was say that we could use Special Force CIDGs as a forlorn hope. We knew the guys were going to get waxed, but as I say, it’s like the Citadel in the Civil War or like the Germans in WWII, when a country’s pressed you do the best you can. But someone’s going to take the impact and the SF Camps took the attacks along Highway 19 when they first attacked there in February ‘65. The enemy surrounded the outposts and we had chopper them out. We were prepared for that and with the start of the summer offensive down a district level and province level they reacted the way they’d always been doing. After they get a battalion on the road and it got wiped out we got the survivors back to Province Ho. Then we started air lifting in the reserves and bypassing ambushes. So what we did, was respond to “lure and ambush” by lifting our reaction in.

Then the other thing which was equally important, we sat down and analyzed every district and every district headquarters. We went to province and every district headquarters and every Special Force camp. We drew up a list of those we would defend and those we were prepared to give up. Because the danger was like in a chess game, if we got the corps reserve Rangers, out on the intrudes road, or if we got the people from Saigon out and got them wiped out, that’s like losing your castle or your bishop in the chess game. You’ve lost. So, we wouldn’t risk losing our serves unless it was a vital objective. Now one thing we did do, we put Duc Co, which is on the Cambodian border and the end of Highway 19 as a place we would fight for. We wanted to prevent the enemy from building a logistical base for an attack against Pleiku. So we wanted to have a base there that we could move to and interfere with any logistic base they were trying to build up for an attack against Pleiku. That was our preparation for the summer monsoon offensive of ’65.

SM: Now just prior to that, in late ’64, you had written up a manuscript.

TM: Pardon?

SM: You had written up a manuscript, a 65-page manuscript that you would send forward? That was in ’64, correct?

TM: Whoops, I’m sorry. In ’65 I wrote the manuscript.

SM: Oh, in ’65?
TM: After the Tet Offensive and so forth I wrote one and sent it in and Army Magazine published and article.

SM: Okay, that was…

TM: Yeah, that was in ’65.

SM: The fight in the highlands?

TM: Yes, and then after the fighting in the summer of ’65 Plei Me in the fall of 1965. I sent it in as a manuscript and that’s the one that they didn't clear until the spring of ’66 and they gave back to me saying, “Sorry, the advisors aren’t important now.” I understand what they’re saying, there’s more action from the American troops, so that was it.

SM: The MACV advisory effort continued?

TM: Yes. What had happened, the Senior Advisor became the Deputy Advisor and the IFFV and the US Corps commanders became the advisor to the ARVN corps commander. When I first came to Pleiku in Sept. ’69 I landed in the middle of the Montagnard revolt. One incident there, Fritz Fruend, Colonel Fruend was a French linguist and he handled that very, very well. What I was doing at the time was getting indoctrinated. At that time we had about 35 or 40 leaders of the Montagnard revolt who had been French NCO’s and who were officers in the CIDG had been captured. Now as you know during that revolt they killed a bunch of Vietnamese and the Vietnamese military were really unhappy and they wanted to execute them right away. Well Westmoreland called me and said, “We can’t have this happening. That would be a disaster publicity wise, to execute him.” So I talked to Co over a couple of weeks and explained this problem to him and finally I came up with a proposal. I said, “If we can have these people, I’ll take a half of an A-team, at least four to six NCOs from the Special Forces, put them with them in charge. We’ll make them a mobile strike force and we’ll set up the helicopters and gunships to go with them and you get A-1Es.” So, if anything happened in the Corps we could respond immediately, go out to the area, and if the enemy was too strong we’d bomb them and land someplace near the ambush. We had nothing else like that there at that time, and that was something that I wanted very badly so in case we got ambushed someplace and an American advisor was out there with this strike force we would be able to go out and do something. When they had that ambush of
the district capital west of Pleiku, starting off in the summer there the province advisor
was out inspecting. The province advisor was there, Major Dibbert. He’d been my S1 in
Germany and we came to Saigon he called me and said he wanted a good job and
province advisor was a good job. He was a good man. That’s the thing that as an officer
you have to be prepared to accept the fact that you put people in places where they might
be killed but I have accepted that fact from World War II when I put a company
commander in who was a close friend and he had just shown me pictures of his new
baby. I made him a company commander to replace a company commander who was
wounded. He was up about a week later and got a sniper round in the forehead. You feel
that deeply. The way I feel, that is, I don’t have psychological problems; I put myself in
their place. I put myself out here, the guys helped me get here, and what happens
happens. You can’t be taking blame for this and blame for that, and anyone who did
would break under the pressure be relieved. That’s the way the cookie crumbles. So, we
got these Eagle Flight set up and they were very, very useful to us. You probably noticed
in the manuscript the way you moved around to the places we would get to.

Then the next crisis that came was in December ’64 Taylor had been back to the
States to see President Johnson. He came back and called in the generals, General
Khanh, General Ky, the Air Force type and a group of young generals, and had them to
dinner. Said, “I’ve just come from the President and we cannot have anymore coups. It’s
ruining our picture back in the States of what’s happening over here. You guys instead of
fighting the enemy are fighting each other. Can’t have it.” A few days later they had a
mini-coup. Taylor called them all in, stood them at attention, jabbed his finger at them,
and chewed their ass. Khanh was the Premier and the others were generals in their own
country and had an ambassador chew their ass out. They were furious; they stopped all
communication with the US forces. They wouldn’t talk to the Americans. This was in
December and you’ll see a lot of reference to that in other books and references. Well,
Gen. Co came to me. He came down to my room. The senior generals never came down
to our advisor’s barracks because they expected us to come together. We were supposed
to go up to see them which I always did. But he came down and says, “I want to talk to
you.” So, we went out in the garden and walked around and he said, “I have been told I
can’t talk to you anymore and General Taylor caused this,” and so forth, “And we young
generals got together and decide that Khanh has to go. So, since you worked for Gen. Taylor, a speech writer, and you know him.” He’d seen Taylor come up to visit us and he’d seen that he greeted me very warmly, a young, personal friend. He said, “I want you to go down and tell him this.”

Okay, so I got on my plane and I went down in horrible rain but I got in there. I went to see the Chief of Staff. “I want to see Westmoreland because I want to tell him about a message from Gen. Co.” He said, “General Westmoreland doesn't have time. He wants you to go in and see the Ambassador.” I couldn’t understand that at the time but later I found out that the Agency knew this and they had told Westy and he didn’t want to even talk to anybody about it. So, he could say it came as a big surprise to him. So, I went in to see Ambassador Taylor, and, “Sir, I’ve come down here with a message from the corps commander. He says that they cannot stand this in the middle of the war, and they feel they’ve got to get rid of Khanh. What would you like for them to do? Do you have any suggestions?” and he says, “Colonel,” and you know the command. He didn't have to say, “Stand at attention.” “Colonel?” “Yes, sir?” “Listen to this. I am the Ambassador of the United States to the country of Vietnam. I do not talk to dissident corps commanders. Do you have that message?” “Yes, sir, I have it,” and then, “How’s your wife?” and this sort of thing. The women had gone to tea parties together when I worked for him in D.C.

SM: Oh yes.

TM: Then when I got ready to leave, he said, “Colonel?” and I stood there at attention, “Yes, sir?” “What did I tell you?” “Sir, you said you cannot talk to dissident corps commanders. You’re the Ambassador of the United States,” and he said, “That’s it, and that’s my only message back.”

When I got ready to leave, I said to Taylor at the time before I left, I said, “Sir, this is a shit sandwich,” and I never used language like that to him but I was really dismayed. You can imagine. Something’s got to be done. He said, “Well I assumed that someone would talk to my deputy, U. Alexis Johnson.” So, I got on the plane, flew back up, and I called Co, and he came down to the advisors. He didn’t want his people knowing what went on because Khanh had his…there they had their supporters and he would have some Khanh supporters there and they’d be watching each other. He came
down and I told him, “The General wanted to thank you for informing him of this
information,” and so forth so he wasn't surprised by it and so forth, “But he says as
ambassador he’s an ambassador to the Vietnam government and he can’t talk to corps
commanders.” So I said, “What is suggested is you talk to U. Alexis Johnson,” and they
did go in to talk to him. That’s when they set up a plan that got rid of Khanh finally in
February. But, this was a little vignette on the things that an advisor does.

SM: What was the role the CIA was playing in this?

TM: The CIA had people through all of the areas watching what was going on in
the area. One of the best uses I got from the CIA was a big meeting, corps commanders,
division commanders, and I knew the II CIA “bag man” as I used to call him because
they would come in and get things done. I saw Lu Lan, the division commander with
some kind of a scruffy guy that he was walking and talking to, and I said, “Who’s that
with General Lu Lan,” and he said, “Oh, that’s his Soothsayer.” I said, “His
Soothsayer?” and he said, “Oh yes, he believes very strongly in this,” and I said, “Oh,
that’s odd,” and he explained to me the way the thing worked. Before that I had gotten
together all my helicopters so that we could have a raid. We only had so many in the
highlands and so many on the coast and we would mass there for an operation. 50% of
the time the 23rd Division would find some reason not to go. So, I found when out about
the Soothsayer and I said, “Now look, I know what you do. I will tell you when some
good days are coming up. You go see the soothsayer and tell him these are good days.
So it worked, we got our choppers together and the soothsayer said they were good days
and we had an operation. So, here’s something you do whatever is needed to make the
system work. I mean, the General believed that, so use the system. The Agency would
pay the Soothsayer who then would recommend good days.

SM: Consistent with the operational dates you provided?

TM: Yes, so we’d be able to do that. So that’s another thing, you’d say, “What
does an advisor do?” He does whatever he can to make the system work.

SM: You worked for General Taylor?

TM: Yes, I worked for him in the early 60s for two years. I was speechwriter for
General Lemnitzer and then Taylor interviewed me and I was speechwriter for him.

SM: Did you ever work for General Taylor before you went to the Joint Staff?
TM: No, never had. Never got to the Pentagon. I stayed as far away from it as I could.

SM: How about General Westmoreland? Had you worked with him before Vietnam?

TM: No, never had, but he knew that I’d worked for General Taylor for two years. So he knew that and Taylor was his mentor and I guess you know how that goes, if your mentor’s got some guy working for him that he likes, why you be nice to him. You go out of your way not to wrap him on the knuckles.

SM: Right, so okay, so Westmoreland knew that you had been with Taylor?

TM: Oh yeah, when I came to see him in Saigon there he mentioned that. He said, “I heard from General Taylor that he assigned you to Vietnam. When Taylor got ready to leave for Saigon as Ambassador he went to the Rose Garden with the President. He said, “Ted, what would you like to do?” and I said, “Sir, I want to go to Vietnam. I want to be a senior advisor,” and he said, “Okay, fine,” and he wrote a note to Bernie Rogers and my orders came out right away. So, I went to Vietnam and Westy knew that’s how I came over.

SM: What years had you been with General Taylor before?

TM: I was with Taylor from ’62 to ’64, the two years that he was in as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

SM: Based on your experience with him during those two years, did his behavior in Vietnam surprise you when he called in and chewed out the Vietnamese chain of command?

TM: I can understand he got mad. When somebody gets mad, they aren’t using…and he had just come from the President and told him the Vietnamese Generals at dinner “no coups.” Then they screw things…how would you feel? Your boss just told you to make sure this doesn’t happen, you go back and tell these guys, “Don’t do it,” and they do it. He was mad.

SM: But at the same time, based on just the stories you just told about how you finessed a lot of the things you had accomplished as an advisor, I mean you had to take a soft hand approach?
TM: Yeah but I think the thing here is the President Johnson telling you something, and you go back and tell these guys and within a week they say, “Screw you” That’s pretty difficult. He was told as ambassador to do this, he tried to do it, and it didn’t work. So, he got angry.

SM: What do you think that indicated in terms of American influence and American control over events in Vietnam?

TM: Well you know the book, the Vietnamese General that was here, the Lieutenant General who just published a book? If you’ll read in there, I’ve been reading in the last couple of nights, if you read in there he talks about the arrogance of the Americans, and things like that think it did have a bad effect on things. If you’re a national and you’re there in your country and someone insults you, this is bad stuff. This is bad stuff. Then he went on to say good things about some advisors, but it depended on the personality of the advisor. Some of the people think that, “Hey, ours is the best country in the world and our way of doing it is better and everybody else in the world should adopt what we do.” It doesn't work this way. You go out there and see what their culture is and try to fit in with it.

SM: How important do you think that interaction between Ambassador Taylor and General Khanh, Premier Khanh, he was Premier at that time…

TM: Yeah, he was the Prime Minister.

SM: Right, and it was him along with his subordinate commanders. Here they are, they’re looking up and they see this American Ambassador chewing out their President, their Premier. How negatively do you think that effected his ability to maintain control?

TM: Well I think it did, and the thing was as I said, everyone of the generals, senior generals had their own clique, family wise and otherwise. What happened, Khanh had sent one of his people down to the 23rd Division commander and asked him to seize Co. 23rd Division commander came in and told Co that Khanh was trying to knock him off. So, for the next three weeks he went to a different airfield every day flying around II Corps putting trucks on the runway so that Khanh couldn’t send in his airborne troops or somebody else to try and seize him. They were maneuvering against each other. They were lining up their commanders. When they had a coup they’d go down and get a
commander who would come in to the capital. So this is the way that it was moving. Khanh was moving his pawns around, Co was moving his along with the 1st Corps commander. They were all encountering this sort of thing until finally in February, after the Vung Ro Bay incident instant because you probably remember Khanh talking about bringing the ICC down? I have a picture of that. Then he was squeezed out and become an Ambassador. It isn't a straight thing you’re a military guy and you go up to the Premier or the President. They’re like the dukes in England in the Middle Ages. You each have your own support around. Read that book by the Vietnamese Lieutenant General. It shows the way extended family groupings help and how they support the power struggles going.

SM: Is that the book The 25 Year Century?
TM: Yes.
SM: After Tet of ’65 and the McGeorge Bundy visit that you talked about…
TM: McGeorge Bundy came to Saigon in Feb ‘65. He was sent over by the President. You get that book, The McBundy Brothers which I’ve Xeroxed a part for the paper I gave. It tells how Johnson was hesitant about bombing. So, he sent McGeorge Bundy on a fact-finding trip to Vietnam. I think it was the second day or third day he was there that February 7th happened. He immediately flew up with Westmoreland up to Pleiku with Khanh. There’s a whole bunch of pictures taken around the area in my paper. That’s when they decided to bomb up North. Then the hotel in Qui Nhon was destroyed and then they bombed up North again. Then we were trapped on Highway 19 and the Vietnamese morale went to hell they said it’s just like the 50s. So, that’s when Westmoreland, I’m sure he got advice from all over from his advisors plus the CIA that things were going to hell in II Corps so they decided to throw in the US Air Force to give close air support. It succeeded and that brought the morale up.

SM: The morale factor, you had mentioned in your presentation that one of the more charismatic commanders had been killed?
TM: That’s right, the commander of the 42nd Regiment in the Kontum area. He’d been killed when he took his regiment up counter attack a district capital which had been lost. The enemy had very carefully planned this because they hit ARVN just two kilometers from their base. Normally you’d move out and you’d expect to hit the enemy
down the road. They’d just moved out and were forming up to move on down the road and the enemy hit the command group and they seriously wounded the commander who died later and his advisor was wounded also and evacuated. That’s when I went up with the General Vinh Loc and he interviewed...he talked to the 42nd Regiment Officers and saw how shaken they were. That’s when he decided that this regiment would fall apart so he brought in a new colonel to take command right away and sent up the Marines and a Ranger Battalion to reinforce them so they’d feel secure against the NVA out in the bush, is waiting to leap on you with battalions. The regiment was completely shaken. So, he sent up enough troops for a counter attack. When the ARVN started down the road again the NVA saw the powerful group and they just withdrew because they weren't going to expose themselves to a battle and air striker. They only exposed themselves when they had a chance to ambush and cause to get a lot of ARVN casualties.

SM: Right. Now that brings up I think an interesting point. Based on your experience in ’64 and ’65, did it seem to you like the North Vietnamese or even the Viet Cong were willing to accept heavy casualties in the pursuit of this war yet, or were they, as you just said, more focusing on maintaining the initiative, engaging when it was to their benefit, and withdrawing when it wasn’t?

TM: Right.

SM: Was that pretty consistent?

TM: Yeah, that’s the way. What they were trying to do, as I say, they succeeded there initially Tet ’65 because every district that was cut off from its province, every province is cut off from the other. We were completely cut in two through II Corps. But then Saigon sent up two airborne battalions Task Force into An Khe and they start operating in conjunction with the local II Corps regiments. They also sent two Marine battalion Task Force down to the coast, Binh Dien province and we also moved the 22nd Division down to the coast. We left a Task Force at Kontum up in the mountains. The 22nd Division worked with the Marines. Then the Special Forces sent us five teams to retrain the RF/PFs because they had disintegrated, threw their weapons away, ran to the bush, when they were allowed by NVA battalions. So, that’s how we counter attacked success fully.
The next phase started when we sat down, JGS, MACV, II Corps, and drew up a plan for what we were going to do when the summer monsoon enemy attacks came.

SM: That was the worst-case scenario that you came up with?

TM: Yeah, that was the danger. Here’s what happens; they’re going to hit us again with more NVA troops coming in. So we better be prepared for this. That’s why we got the list of district capitals that we would give up rather than fight for. If the district was isolated you would jeopardize a task force going out to support them. Because if the NVA managed to concentrate a couple of regiments they would have chewed up the relief completely. So, that’s why we decided to but fight for some of those district headquarters.

SM: The criteria you used for that was the risk that would have been…

TM: The risk to the crown jewels, the mobile forces; the Airborne, the Marines, and the Rangers. Now some Ranger battalions weren't worth a shit, depending on their commander. Others were just absolutely outstanding. Some of the Ranger Battalions were filled with criminals get them out of Saigon and put them up in the hills. But you know in World War II we also gave the soldiers, some fellows the option of going to jail or going in a unit. We also unloaded Leavenworth. They selected guys who hadn’t done anything really, really bad but to rejoin their service. We got a group of about 20 in the spring of ’42 that joined our 20th Infantry regiment from Leavenworth.

SM: The petty criminals as opposed to the hard criminals?

TM: Yeah.

SM: Do you know if, just on this subject real quickly, were they promised a commutation of their sentence for service if they went back in?

TM: Yeah.

SM: The idea of using criminals in some of the ARVN units makes me wonder what the relationship was like between not just those ARVN units but all of the ARVN that you witnessed and the civilian population of Vietnam?

SM: What was the relationship like between the military and the people?

TM: What I saw, they would select certain units and send the criminals off to those units. They wouldn’t mix it up with the rest of the group.

SM: How about the relationship between the ARVN units and the Rough Puffs?
TM: It depended on the commander, depended on the commander. We had a
Popular Force unit down in Quin Nhon which was led by a commander...had been with
the French as an NCO. They were tigers, because he had a personal blood debt against
the VC and all he wanted to do was kill VC. Most of them though were just there in the
village to make sure that the enemy propaganda groups couldn’t come in one or two at a
time and turn the village around using terrorism. Tie the village chief up, get his
pregnant wife out there, disembowel her. But you’ve read those stories. That’s why the
Regional Forces or the Popular Forces were enough to make sure that a half a dozen of
those terrorists couldn’t come in and dominate the village.

SM: Were there acts of terror like that while you were in there for your first tour?
TM: There were more before I came in. By the time I came in in the fall ’64
guerilla attacks were the norm. There’s a couple of very good books used by American
Military University and they go into the political set up of the VC and the military set up
of the VC. The military set up, you started off with your small propaganda teams and
then you went to something similar to popular forces and then you went to the regional
force type, and then you had regular VC units. Initially they had propaganda groups
going in and one of the tools they used was sheer terrorism where they would go in and
murder the village chief and his wife and everything. But you know this happened in
Argentina too where they had the communists down there were killing postmen and all
the rest.

SM: While you were there, was there execution of teachers?
TM: Were there what?
SM: Executions of teachers and other...
TM: No, I hadn’t noticed. It may have been down South but we were in the II
Corps area, which was Montagnards and then the farm people along the coast. But, they
did that earlier, when they were in that period of terrorism. But now they’d escalated and
going on up the line to where they even brought in their regular forces, regular VC forces,
and then they brought in the NVA where they’d gone up to warfare level, battalion level
fighting.

SM: Tet of ’65, of course the paper that you presented emphasized the
importance of this in at least making sure that if Tet of ’65 succeeded, that would have
probably ended the war or could have ended the war in Vietnam very drastically and
dramatically for us.

TM: Remember we were only 19,000 military there scattered in little Advisory
and logistics groups around; we couldn’t have done…we had no force and MACV didn’t
have anything to help us with. We were just advisors at that time. But, if our ARVN unit
fell apart we’d be demolished.

SM: Tet of ’68 of course is known as the surprise, the big surprise of Tet. Was
Tet of ’65 a surprise to you?

TM: We knew the potential was there but they hadn’t done anything, so it was a
surprise. You understand when you know something’s looming out there but they hadn’t
done anything, a rifle company could go anywhere in the area there and they wouldn’t be
challenged it was strictly the low-level guerilla warfare. We expected the gradually
increase in strength. Where they’d challenge the rifle company and then a battalion. We
didn’t expect that at that time for the enemy to hit like it did.

SM: But in your presentation you mentioned that I think it was General Co who
said that the enemy had two choices?

TM: That was at the end.

SM: That was at the end of Tet of ’65?

TM: Yes, that was the end of the Tet of ’65 where we had the airborne battalions
and Marines in there. The airborne battalion got trapped with an infantry battalion,
remember, and then they brought up another airborne task force to break their way
through. So at the end of the counter attack we’d gathered back all the area they had
taken and that’s when Co said they got their choices. We met them in the field, and that’s
why that picture of Westmoreland and Co and Khanh, “Hey, the NVA’s here and we
whipped them.” The ARVN optimism was up. At that stage of the game they needed to
say, “We’ve done this. Now they have the choice of going back to guerilla warfare or
pouring in more NVA troops.” They opted for more NVA troops. The NVA kept on
coming south.

That’s the thing with Ellsberg, where he claims that the government was doing all
these secret things. He didn’t know or doesn’t understand like many State Department
the difference between a contingency plan…you don’t tell your contingency plan to the
rest of the people. You have a list of people that are authorized even within the service
so the plans don’t get out. If the enemy knows your plans then they’re able around to
prepare for it.

SM: What contingency planning was he referring to?
TM: Pardon?
SM: What contingency planning was he referring to, was Elsberg referring to?
TM: When we started bombing up North. They were prepared. This was one of
the things. They’re going to start hitting us heavily, we’re going to respond to that. If we
don’t respond to that, we’re a punching bag. So, when Bundy, McGeorge Bundy called
back to the president, which he did, and says, “We’ve got to respond to this,” I’m sure
that the Pentagon, Joint Chiefs of Staff turned to the Contingency plans. They called the
raids in. They pulled up the contingency plans which they gave them a continuum,
“Here’s what we can do or here’s what we can do, here’s what we can’t do,” One of the
ones that was always there, “Let’s call up the Reserves,” which Johnson didn’t do when
Taylor turned in his last paper, it said, “Call up the reserves,” this was decided by the
whole Joint Chiefs of Staff and still Johnson didn’t do it.
SM: Do you think that was a mistake?
TM: Yes I do. For example, read Moore’s book where he took over the battalion
and they got orders to change from the 11th Air Mobile to the 1st Cav, they pulled in a
couple of battalions from the 2nd Division. Then since they were going overseas about
100 of his guys were left behind, his NCOs and the ones that had experience and could
fill the job because their enlistment was up. If they called up the reserves and there was
an emergency, they would have had to stay with the unit. So when they went into combat
some of the casualties they took there probably were more than they would have taken if
they’d had that extra 100 NCOs with the experience. Here they took new guys, just filled
them up. So, that’s the way she goes. But, I basically agree with Ridgeway in the mid
‘50s where he said that we should not fight on the continent of Asia in infantry battles.
They outnumber us. 1.2 billion Chinese, at that time there was a billion. So, what we
should do is concentrate on the Philippines and the other countries down there and
Indonesia. They are the crown jewels. But, Johnson… and I knew Senator Scoop
Jackson very well and he told me that Johnson was fixated; he was not going to be known
as the man that lost Vietnam. So, that was one of the fixations. He didn’t want to lose it,
but he didn’t want to go all the way and call up the reserves.

SM: What did you think about the Bundy visit, when Bundy came over?
TM: Yeah, Bundy came over.
SM: What did you think of that?
TM: They flew up there and you saw all the pictures.
SM: Yes, sir.

TM: I worked with the Joint Staff for two years and I’m very familiar with
Presidential missions. In fact, I’d gone on one with the Harriman mission when the
Chinese attacked the Indians in 1962. I went to work one morning at the Pentagon and I
was assigned to the Harriman Mission that was leaving that evening. I had to call my
wife to bring down suitcases with civilian clothes and field gear. The President mission
sent an ambassador over there to investigate the situation and report directly back to him
about the situation on the ground. So Bundy’s Mission was another one of those
reporting on the situation. When we’d been hit in Pleiku I was very happy to have
someone in the President’s office come and report yes, we’re getting kneed in the groin.
Our people have died illustrating the seriousness of the situation. So in my view Bundy’s
visit was a good thing.

SM: Did anything negative come from that?
TM: Not that I saw. He came up there and then when they went back to Saigon
and recommended that we started bombing up North. Later we were also giving ARVN
close air support. So, as far as I was concerned, it was a good visit.
SM: When did you leave your first tour?
TM: I left; I think it was in August of ’66. After Westmoreland made the IFFV
commander the Senior Advisor of II Corps. I was deputy at Corps there for a couple of
months and then I went to see Westy to make arrangements to go to the 101st Airborne. I
was with them from January all the way through the battles near Kontum in the summer.
I don’t know if you’ve read it or not, but Slam Marshall’s Battles in the Monsoons
covered the battle. In fact, in Korea in 1953 when I was XO of the 17th before I took
command of the Buffalos. Marshall came over there to interview those soldiers from the
Pork Chop Hill battle. The Div. CG knew I’d worked with the Germans on WWII history
so they assigned me to make sure he got everybody he needed and got to know him quite well. So, when I went to the 101st I sent him a letter that said, “Hey, I’m with the 101 in Nham. Come on over and write some more books.” He came over and the first one he wrote was that one about the 101, the Battles in the Monsoons. That was up in the Doc Tho area where Hackworth was.

SM: Did you know Hackworth as well?
TM: Oh I knew Hackworth when I had the 505 in Germany. I tried to get him to come to the 505. He came down for an interview but they wouldn’t release him. Tony Herbert was another one that I picked up. You’ve probably read Tony’s book Soldier?
SM: I haven’t read his yet.
TM: He’s also a very contentious person. I don’t mind those guys because I get them by the balls and say, “Hey, next time you do this, I’m going to have you!”
SM: I meant to ask you earlier, and you mentioned India just a moment ago so I’ll go back to it. When you were in Kashmir, what did you gain from that experience?
TM: When I was at Kashmir I spent half my time with the Indians and half my time with a Muslim Brigade in Azad, Kashmir. What our mission was, assigned to Brigade Headquarters, we were a team of three, an American, a European, and a South American. We had a Central American radio operator. Why a Central American radio operator? The banana republics down there had money radios and this was a step up in money for the radio operator. They got them cheaply for the UN. They tried to put the military observance together so there wouldn’t be too much influence from a single country. Our mission was to observe the troops and make sure that everything was going along well. Whenever there was an incident we’d go down and investigate the incident. Now if there was an incident where two patrols ran into each other and someone was killed, both sides would inform the UN observers to stay away. We would stay away until the one side killed an equal number of the soldiers they lost. Then it was calm again. But, when the other side had a blood debt where the enemy would kick your soldiers and you hadn’t knocked their’s off to balance the debt, psychologically they’re saying, “Screw you, Jack.”
We’d go along over these mountain passes on observation tour things. You go up over these 13,000-foot mountain passes on your feet jogging along and for six months
I was with a Muslim brigade stationed in the mountains. I got to know the tribesmen very well and understood the way they looked at blood debts. Also understood the way they will protect those who flee to them. In other words, I got to understand their culture and that’s the thing that proved useful to me in the future when I went to Iran and later worked with the Afghans. When I was there I went into Afghanistan and went up the Russian border. This was in 1951-52 when the Cold War was at its peak. So as an Army officer I wanted to go up and see where the Russians would come south. So I’d know going on. World War II we, our colonel had stayed over in Germany after World War I. His colonel, from the Spanish American War, sent his officers out to travel all over Germany and France because he says there was going to be another war here someday. He did the same thing to us after WWII. We could take a jeep and go all over Germany. He stresses as an army official anytime you go anywhere you get a book before you go in that, read about it, and when you visit these places, try to become familiar with the area. That’s why I traveled all through the northern part of Africa there and then through the Middle East and went to Iran on my leave time when I was with the UN. As he said this is part of your job, finding out where you may go in the future.

SM: When you went up to the Russian border, what time period was that?
TM: This is 1952.
SM: What did you observe there?
TM: We went up and saw what the roads were like and how bad they were. We went all the way to the Omardari River which was the boundary with the USSR.
SM: Did you get challenged at all by anybody?
TM: No, not at all. At that time the Afghans didn’t care. I was with the UN observers.
SM: Wow, how about by other indigenous groups in the countries where you were moving? Who guided you through that?
TM: When we went up there, the Afghan Army did. We were UN observers, not Americans anyway, UN observers. UN observer in a UN jeep driving around looking at the countryside. Who cares about that?
SM: When you went into Afghanistan during this period, was the culture very much similar to what was going on in Kashmir, the idea of the blood debt and all these other things? How similar are those cultures?

TM: In Kashmir, the major city, was where most India was. The countryside was all Muslim. It was the same thing, extended families on both sides of the border. They were all Muslim. When India was divided, the rule was any princely state would go to Pakistan if they’re Muslim and go to India if the majority is Indian. All the States, except two big ones, and a couple of small ones no one paid attention to, Hyderabad had a Muslim Maharajah with a Hindu majority. Kashmir had a Hindu Maharajah with a Muslim majority. Both sides refused to join. The Indians didn't wait. They sent in three divisions and overran Hyderabad. Pakistani didn’t pay any attention, “Okay, we get Kashmir. They got Hyderabad so we Kashmir.” So then Pakistanis started supporting tribesmen moving into the area and the maharajah called Nehru who was a Kashmir Brahmin to send Indian troops to defend Kashmir. He did, and they landed at the airfield, got off, went to black the tribesman’s approval and that’s when the war started. The United Nations back in the late ‘40s had a big meeting on this and ruled that they’re supposed to have a vote to see which way the majority of the people want to go, and India still ignores it. Now when you read the papers, the Indians blame the Pakistani’s for starting all this. This is wrong, the Indians started all this when they took over Hyderabad and they should have let Kashmir go to Pakistan. It’s been over 50 years ago, and facts become muddled along the way.

SM: And they’re still fighting?

TM: Well, look at the Irish!

SM: Oh boy. Did you ever go to Ireland as a military officer?

TM: To where?

SM: To Ireland?

TM: No, I never have. I’ve been to Scotland, England, never to Ireland.

SM: While you were in Vietnam in ’64 through say the end of your time, I guess December of ’65…

TM: September of ’64 through August of ’66. That was the first tour.
SM: Right, but before you transitioned over to the 101st in January of ’66, for that first year and four months I guess what was the atmosphere like with regard to the body count and how much of an emphasis was placed on that?

TM: Body count?

SM: Yes, on this notion that this is an attrition war and we need to generate body count, that kind of stuff?

TM: In ’64 I went up to I think Doc Pec, one of the outposts and they told us about the big fight they had and the VC had attacked them and they drove them off. I looked around and said, “No broken windows, no bullet holes,” and nothing else? What they were doing is they would claim that the ammunition had been used up and then the ammunition would go on the black market. Afterwards I’d go around and there’d always be something, a broken window or a bullet hole or something. One time I got tired of that and asked where are the bodies, they said, “Oh yeah, the VC were here and they carried the bodies away.” I said, “Where were they?” and they said, “Right here,” and I looked around and said, “Where’s the blood?” “Oh they carried them away.” Then later I came up and looked at something and I said, “Oh come over here and look at the blood,” and there was blood, and one of my officers with me was poking around and he found some chicken feathers. So, I mean it was very unusual. You had to be prepared for these people trying to do everything they could to make money. This is the rough puffs, the Popular Forces. By the time you got to the Regional Forces they were more of a structured military unit but the Popular Forces, particularly in the mountain outposts were just a bunch of guys carrying rifles and that was it. But then in 1970, when I went to the 23rd Division we also had this body count fanaticism at that time. When the US troops first came it was different. It was just sort of a rough estimate so you knew what was going on. Your career didn’t depend on showing how many bodies you had. Years later we were still fighting. Nothing big is happening. We’ve got to make sure that we’ve got a good body count.

When I was with the 23rd Division I refused to accept body counts. I said, “The thing I want to know about is number of weapons you’ve captured. I know you’ve got so many bodies in black pajamas down here. Are they farmers or are they VC?” So when I was acting CG I said, “Hey, the thing I’m interested in is weapons,” and that was the
whole thing. The body count, by that time, this is ’70, it reached the point where it
became prudent for a commander to show that he cause enemy casualties and injured
more of the enemy. Westy was on this attrition factor, which I think was a great mistake
because what do you tell momma- that your son is dead, but he killed ten of the enemy.
So it was worth it, no way! No way. That’s the wrong approach. I still say the Marines
were right, the way they provided security for the people.
    SM: You’re talking about…
    TM: Maybe we should have gone in into enclaves and only used our troops, do
like the Marines did, fix security to the people and only use our troops and join in when
the ARVN ran out of reserves and they’ve fixed the enemy.
    SM: But let the ARVN do the main force fighting?
    TM: The ARVN should be the ones doing the majority of the fighting. We only
come in and pile on when needed. The security of the people are the objective. The
enemy was concentrated on that because that’s where they started working from the
bottom up getting the people to support them.
    SM: By Marine experience you’re talking about the CAP Marine program, the
Combined Action Program?
    TM: Yes, that I thought was outstanding.
    SM: How much flexibility do you think General Westmoreland had in devising a
strategy for Vietnam?
    TM: I really don’t know but I would assume that when he came in he looked at
everything and when the NVA came down into South Vietnam everything that we’d been
trained in the Army, you want to meet the enemy and beat him. So I’m sure he still had
his mind set on that, beating the enemy’s main units. I can understand that, but I say
having been down at the lower level along the way I switched over to the key objective is
the people’s security. The key thing is the people, and that’s why I feel an attrition is not
good in a long war against a stubborn enemy.
    SM: Do you think he had the authority to choose whether it be attrition or
combined action?
    TM: I’m sure he did, as commander in the area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had
Harkins before him, then Westy came in and he ran the area, what was going on out
there. That was his responsibility, and I’m sure he thought it was the right thing to do. That’s what military officers do; they meet the enemy in the field and beat them. But, this was a different war though. Just like our business now with the war against terrorism. I’m scared to death that what we’re doing in Israel now is…I can’t blame the Muslims saying that we’re not even handed; very, very difficult and I feel sorry for the Israelis. I went over on a trip with INSA. They bring ten or twelve flag officers a year to Israel. They take them through the country, all the way through, and you feel sorry for them. However, you saw on TV the Israel tank rolling down the road and they’re rolling over Palestinian cars? What’s that got to do with going after the terrorists, and destroying houses and all that? It’s just a punishment program, only they’ll punish them so much that when you got a people that’s willing to blow themselves up to blow you up, I think the punishment doesn’t work all you do is make them willing to do more damage to you. I don’t know. I’m glad I don’t have anything to do with that area.

SM: Yes, sir. You had mentioned just before we returned to the interview that you wanted to discuss the transition to Swede.

TM: Swede Larson?

SM: Yes, Swede Larson as the commander of IFFV.

TM: Right.

SM: Why don’t you go ahead and explain that situation.

TM: This period was after the 1st Cav Divisions battle in the Ia Drang Valley and General Westmoreland’s decision to make the IFF CG the Senior Advisor to the II Corps CG. During this period I became the Deputy Senior Advisor and remained at Pleiku. The Deputy would be in Pleiku and when Swede would mount an operation he’d see what he wanted the Vietnamese to do, and he’d call the Deputy Senior Advisor to go over and tell the corps what IFFV was doing and what the II Corps was supposed to be doing to support IFFV. The Americans took over the war at that time. We said, “We’ll do the main fighting against the main units and the VC.” After the ARVN been fighting for so long and taking casualties, you can understand that they resented the take over, but accepted it.

SM: What did you think of that approach to leadership, that transition of more of going from an advisory approach where we’re there to listen to them and provide support
to them to telling them, “This is what we’re going to do. This is how we’re going to
fight?”

TM: The way it went, the US was there with the power, the divisions, the troops,
the air power and logistics. I think they just accepted that they didn't like it, but they
accepted it.

SM: What did you do at that point? You didn't stay there very long did you?

TM: At that time I went down to see Westmoreland and said I’d extended for a
year after I’d only been there half a year. I’d already been to Da Lat and made
arrangements to rent a suite of rooms for my wife to come over in the summer of 1965. I
was all set on that. Then when this happened, I said, “No, I won’t stay here. I want to go
someplace else. I want to go to the 1st Bde 101. They’re losing their deputy,” and he
said, “Okay, fine.” He said, “If that doesn't work out you can go home.” He knew I’d
not extended based on what I was doing as Deputy to General Larson.

SM: When you got to the 101st, what were things like there?

TM: Oh, the 101st? Willard Pearson who was commanding it, he’d taken it over
from Williamson…not Williamson, I’m trying to remember…I don’t remember the guy’s
name but I’d known him before. Pearson and I had taken courses together at George
Washington University. We were taking our night courses for our masters so we knew
each other and we got on very well. It worked out well because I’d been Senior Advisor
and whatever province we went to I’d go in and see the province advisor and we’d
“marry up”. In fact we put out a pamphlet in the 101 on Diplomats and Warriors. The
fact that when you came in here you just weren't a warrior; you also had to be a diplomat.
So we’d try to stress to our troops the need to integrate with the Vietnamese. When we
moved into a province and put our headquarters there I’d go to them and say, “Hey, we’re
here now and we’re defending this area.” What Rough Puff Company do you have that
can go out on some operations with us? I’d get them to jar loose some companies
defending their headquarters to go out on some operations in the districts with the
Brigade. So, we got together very well since after my time as Corps Senior Advisor. I
was known very well throughout the area there.

SM: Was this something you did on your own initiative, the relationship?
TM: When I came to Pearson, Pearson knew that I’d been serving there for a year and a half and I was his deputy and we had an executive that took care of the administrative aspects, so my major project was wherever we went to I went to the Vietnamese right away and got us linked up with them.

SM: How effective did you find that as it approached?

TM: It worked very well. In fact, I think that’s what we should have done with all of our troops whenever we went on operations. We should have coordinated more with the Vietnamese. But, we didn't, “Step aside, little brown brothers. We’ll take over everything.” That’s sad. That’s too bad.

SM: Another area of the attrition strategy, another facet of the attrition strategy was the heavy focus on trying to find, fix, and destroy the enemy of course meant that most of the time the Americans weren't staying in any location for very long. They weren't holding ground, they weren't defending specific areas…

TM: Oh yeah. The enemy had gone from guerilla warfare, and you saw from my presentation on Tet ’65 and the summer offensive what they did in the summer. When we got enough battalions together to attack, it would be sort of an even fight, they’d break and withdrew. They wanted to hit us where they could surprise us, and ambush the relief force. Or, when we had helicopter lift going in, if they figured they could move in and attack to trap us. So, they were very cautious about it until the Easter Offensive. Remember, that was the one where they hit I Corps that time? That’s the time when they massed and used their artillery and everything.

SM: You’re talking about ’72 at this point?

TM: Yeah, I think that was ’72.

SM: The helicopter, when you mentioned it earlier, especially in the early period, ’64-’65, I meant to ask you; when you arrived in country, had you heard of the battle at Ap Boc?

TM: We knew there was fighting in the Delta.

SM: What did you hear when you arrived about that battle and the effectiveness or the ineffectiveness of the helicopter?

TM: We heard. I first talked to John Van when he came back to the US after the battle. He came to Taylor’s office to see him and Saigon had sent a cable to Taylor
recommending he don’t see this young, brash officer, so we didn’t. I talked to Van, after
this he resigned from the Army. But yeah, we heard they were having difficulties down
there and in fact, I originally had asked to go to the IV Corps because that was where
most of the fighting was. II Corps was up in the mountains with the Montagnard's. So, I
was supposed to go to IV Corps in January of ’65. Until that period, after Taylor left I
was going to a series of Army schools and I was finishing my MA dissertation. Then
they had a coup down in the IV Corps and Col Sammy Holman, an old friend of mine,
was relieved. He was the Corps Senior Advisor and Westy got mad at him because he’d
been out on a party and been drinking when this thing took place and he was relieved and
sent home.

Then they had the guy who was going, who’d been a friend of mine in the 70th
Division to take over II Corps. They moved him down to IV Corps and moved me to fill
the II Corps Senior Advisor slot in Sept ’64 when I came in he met me and was very
effusive and so forth and he joked that he was in the fighting corps and I was going up in
tribesman in the hills. Then Tet of ’65 happened and the major fighting shifted up into
our area. So, for me it was just sheer luck, sheer luck.

SM: What did you think of John Paul Van?

TM: Who?

SM: Van, John Paul Van?

TM: He was a good man, a good man. He didn’t fit within the military however
because he wouldn’t listen. He wouldn’t accept his final orders when a general officer
told him something. He had his own opinion. Poor guy, he was very aggressive and he
got shot later in the war up near Kontum.

SM: What did you think about his opinions when you talked to him?

TM: I didn’t accept his opinion as such. I figured they had colonels and they had
generals over there, and he was too junior to buck the system. Something had gone
wrong but things always go wrong along the way. If a guy wouldn’t accept the chain of
commands, he was wrong and should retire. Well, I’ve had times when I didn't accept
the chain of command, too, and I got wrapped on the knuckles. But I understood how the
system worked.

SM: But over time, did you come to think that maybe John Paul Van…
TM: Yeah, over time I came to the conclusion that yes, we should have integrated earlier with ARVN. We took over too much. Everything seemed to be going well when Harkins was there. Then by the time Westy came in we were pushing so aggressively to run things that the situation had changed completely from Harkins’ time. In fact, Harkins came in to see Taylor when he was appointed the ambassador to Vietnam. I was in the outer office there when he came in. Taylor came out and Harkins said, “Mr. Ambassador, my condolences.” Then they went in the office and closed the door. It was a rough go, rough go. It’s like I feel sorry for the Secretary of State over in Israel now because it’s very difficult.

SM: What did you think of...well, I guess we should probably quickly discuss the interim between ’66 when you left and when you came back in ’70. What did you do in that time period?

TM: In 1966 the DCS Ops, General Mock, came to the 101 and for a briefing. I took him there and showed him the Tet’65 battlefields. He suggested that when I left there, I was with the 101 at that time, “I’d like you to work for me in DCS Ops.” I agreed and he told me that he left a message down in Saigon, that when I left I was to go to Thailand and recon the route to move north. When I got to Thailand they gave me a jeep and driver and I was supposed to drive from Bangkok there all the way up into the area, or the location border. What they’d planned, remember Westmoreland asked for 200,000 more troops? What they were going to do was go in with those troops into Thailand and move up and establish a line across Vietnam so they could cut to Ho Chi Minh Trail. The mission for the Corps was to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail. So, my recon was made so when I came back to the Pentagon I was going to be working on plans for that mission. That’s why he wanted me to make a recon of the area. So, I came back and went to work for DCS Ops and then the request for more troops was turned down and when I was one of the staff officers in DCS Ops the fall of 1966.

One of my major projects was that I believe in snipers. I’m an endowment member of the NRA and have been in the NRA since the ’30s and I’m a gun nut, I’ll admit it. With the 101, I made arrangements to use parachute money to buy hunting rifles in Japan. We had people from the US rifle team, now with the Brigade train our snipers. We had our own snipers. So, when I said, “Well we need a sniper’s program.”
Then they gave me a big, thick book. McNamara had that studied and said it wasn’t cost effective so they wouldn’t look at it.

Then I got promoted to B. General and I went to the 82nd Abn Div in NC as ADC, Ops. As soon as I got there I called the ordinance officer in and said, “I want you to get M-1 sniper rifles from the ARSENAL…” where we had them in reserve stocks. “I want you to get them,” and I checked in the division who’d been on the Benning rifle team and I set up a sniper school, and we used M-1 sniper’s rifles from World War II. We were training a battalion to go over and be the 4th Battalion of the 173rd. When they got to Vietnam their first body counts resulted from their snipers from our school.

SM: How effective were the snipers you trained for the 101st?

TM: Oh they were good. Hey, you select guys who were hunters or gun collectors or good shots. Psychologically a sniper has to be a certain type of guy. You can’t take the ordinary rifleman. A sniper is out there and he wants a target to shoot at. Snipers, in my way of view, are very, very good and cost effective.

SM: How did you employ them while you were with the 101st? Were they sent out into deep penetration type of mission where they take out leadership?

TM: We would send them to the battalion commanders and he would figure out an area where the sniper would be useful.

SM: Were they primary harassment, or did they have specific leadership targets that they would take out?

TM: When the battalion was going into combat they’d get the snipers down to some of the companies so they would be there when contact happened and they would be able to snipe. Normally when a shot was fired, you’d have M-16s on full automatic. The whole clips were going. The snipers were very good.

SM: Very cost effective?

TM: Yes, very cost effective.

SM: In terms of number of bullets expended and number of men killed?

TM: Yeah, because at that time, remember…well, you don’t remember. It was a long time ago. At that time we were teaching the people to throw a lump of coal in the air and snap shoot at them with their M16’s. Then they taught them with the M-16, to go down the lane and shooting at pop-up targets with the snipers we got them on the range.
out 500 yards when they were shooting with the snipers rifle. The snipers would
concentrate more on being able to get a tight, tight group down the range; they were
accurate. You know we’ve now gone to sniper’s rifles now and we do have them in the
system.

SM: Why was your plan to set up that perimeter, to cut off the Ho Chi Minh
Trail? Do you know why that was rejected?

TM: They didn't want to call up 200,000 people. Remember, we had 500,000
there. That would throw us to 700,000 and by that time the attrition to Tet of ’68 had
turned the American public against the idea we’re just going to keep on going like that
indefinitely. It was hurting killing them, our people. We didn’t have a final objective.
So, it was turned down. That was turned down because we’d have had to go up to
700,000.

SM: Thank you sir. This will end this interview with General Mataxis.
SM: This is Steven Maxner continuing the interview with General Ted Mataxis on the 25th of November 2002 at approximately 8:45 Lubbock time. I’m in Lubbock, Texas and General Mataxis is in North Carolina. Thank you sir and why don’t we go ahead and pick up today’s interview with a discussion of your second tour as a commander in Vietnam. If you would describe the circumstances surrounding getting your orders and if you would, describe your assignment.

TM: Ok, fine. When I came back in ’66 I went to the DCS Ops in the Pentagon first. Then I was promoted to B. General and went to the 82nd division as ADC. I tried to go back to Vietnam after this tour, but they said, “No. We want to send you to Iran.” So I was sent to Iran as chief of the Army section of the MAAG there for two years from ’68 to ’70. When General Westmoreland came out on a visit I asked him if he could make my next assignment going back to Vietnam. That would be my last two years in the Army. Since I was over there during 1964-’66 I wanted to see how things were going at this time. My orders came out and I was assigned in June directly to Saigon. My first assignment was to the 23rd Infantry Division. Unfortunately when I came in to Saigon, they immediately sent me up to 23rd Div because General Malloy was getting ready to go on leave. I became the acting Division Commander during the summer of 1970. Then a new general came in and I became ADC ops. I continued on as ADC ops with the 23rd division until the middle of January ’71.

At that time I was called and told, “You’re going out of country. Pack everything you own, come down to Saigon tonight, tomorrow morning you see General Abrams.” I tried to find out what was going on and they wouldn’t tell me a thing. I came down to Saigon. The next morning I went in to see General Abrams. General Abrams said, “Ted you’re the new chief of the MEOT.” I said, “Jesus, what’s that General?” He said, “Military Equipment Delivery Team, Cambodia. It’s really a MAAG, Military Assistance Advisory Group. However State Department doesn’t like that name. They
want to make sure it’s only a military equipment delivery team because a MAAG also
gives advice and evidently the Ambassador didn’t want any advice.” He told me that
DOD and State Department were feuding over this and State was dragging their feet.
President Nixon became unhappy at this delay and sent a message over to the Joint Staff
that he wanted a general into Cambodia by the end of the week. Abrams told me,
“You’re going into Cambodia tomorrow. You have 200 million dollars to try and put a
Cambodian military in the field of about 200,000 people.” I said, “Geez, General I’ve
had more instructions building an outhouse on a base than this.” He said, “That’s all
we’ve got. You’ve go to go in there. We’ve got one AG officer in the hall. You go out
and tell him what you think the team should be under the numbers that we’ve given you
as the maximum to be assigned and that’s it. You’re starting off from scratch. The
reason we picked you, you’ve just come from handling a MAAG for two years in Iran
and you know the details on this.”

Then I said, “Well, sir anything else?” He said, “Yes, be very careful because the
State Department is not happy about this. You’re going to have a hard time with the
Ambassador.” He said, “The key here is, we’re falling below 100,000. The enemy, the
NVA has three divisions in this Eagle’s Beak, which is only about 50 miles from Saigon.
The danger is if we go below 100,000 most of our fighting divisions are gone. The guys
that’ll be there will be the bean counters, logisticians. If they launch an attack and the South
Vietnamese crumpled we could have thousands of people in the POW camps. That’s the
key reason that we started bombing in Cambodia and then they launched an attack to try
and slow down the build-up. Now we want to try and put a Cambodian Army in the field
which will cause those three divisions having to defend their rear, not just planning an
attack on Saigon.” So that was it.

SM: The bombing you’re talking about was that Operation Menu do you know?
TM: Yes.
SM: Then the Cambodian Incursion of course.
TM: That’s right. And that’s why they did those two operations because they
were afraid with those three enemy divisions if they were left alone and we pulled out our
fighting divisions they could launch an attack and just overrun Saigon. You never know
if these Vietnamese divisions attacked we’d be in bad, bad trouble.
SM: Yes, sir. I guess I should ask some questions briefly about the transition and the change that occurred from the time you left from your first tour to the time you came back in 1970. In particular of course, we’ve got a change in administration from the Johnson administration to the Nixon administration. What did you think about Nixon’s approach to the war in contrast to Johnson’s?

TM: Well the thing was as we’d mentioned before the Johnson administration’s primary mission was to carry out domestic change. The military was given a secondary role to try and keep from losing in Vietnam. It was really secondary to the political business or the local; you know how he was changing things. With Nixon, when he came President he took a look at what he had inherited and realized that he had to withdraw. In’66 when I came home DCS Ops had LTG Mock come by and visited Pleiku and the 101 and said, “Ted I want you to come to DCS Ops, but on your way home I want you to go to Thailand and make a Recon from the port all the way up through Thailand, because we’re going to ask for 200,000 troops, another corps, to tie in with what we had in Vietnam with the objective of cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail.” Later the build-up he wanted was turned down by Congress as you remember. So as a result, Nixon, when we came in was left with us just holding a defensive position, taking casualties, which resulted in the war becoming very unpopular at home. President Nixon decided to choose Vietnamization, trying to build-up the Vietnamese Army to take over so we could withdraw in the main while he authorized first bombing and then the incursion into Cambodia. They went in to overrun the supplies and weaken the enemy within the area. Before we went into Cambodia they had truck companies which were taking material from the ships form North Vietnam and trucking it all the way up into the Eagle’s Beak area. It was a very, very big logistical supply there for these 3 divisions. What he was trying to do was trying to weaken those divisions until we could withdraw out of there.

Now as far as the change in ’65 when the first US troops came in and I went down, as you know, as deputy to the 1st brigade, 101st it was gung-ho. Guys were there that I had served in my airborne unit in Germany. These were old soldiers and some of the NCOs had been both World War II and Korea. Then you had the young fellows who wanted their CIBs like their dads and uncles. So the morale was really good at that time.
The tails were up and they were charging. As the years went on, we took casualties, casualties, casualties year after year.

By the time I got there in ’70 I’d never seen such a mess. It was horrible. TAS “Patriots” account of bad discipline in 23rd Div summer of 1970. As division commander I used to sleep with my gas mask right nest to me in my bed because we had a lot of druggies there, racial problems and reluctance to take orders. What they loved to do was get tear gas grenades and go upwind from the division headquarters, pop these tear gas grenades and run off. Then the people down in division headquarters were forced to put on their gas masks. We had many racial problems at the time there. It was very, very unfortunate. Another thing the new young officers coming in, fragging, were threatened by the troops. If you make us do this, we will frag you. You know throwing hand grenades at them?

SM: Yes, sir.

TM: Some of the incidents there were caused by security patrols. These patrols were supposed to go to check back in and then move further on and check back in. In other words moving around looking for enemy patrols. We had a case where after the first position, this lieutenant had been reporting in that he had been moving from point to point on patrol. They just sacked out in the first position and they were hit with the enemy. He had been threatened with fragging if they moved on. It was extremely bad. We had cases where battalion commanders had to go down to back up the company commander’s order to move out. To get them to move, they threatened to throw them in jail in Long Binh if they didn’t move; it worked. It was a mess. Later when I moved to Cambodia I talked to by a fellow who was writing a book. We were discussing what was going on in the war. He asked the same question, “What was it like when you first came in over here in ’64, ’65?” I told him at that time the Army was in good shape because those of us who went into Korea when the Army completely unprepared wanted to make sure this wouldn’t happen to us again. We kept up the PT, kept people trained tactically as well as we could. It worked out well, the troops were coming in there initially. Then as we kept rotating people through and taking more casualties, the public and even the Congressman were starting to talk out against the war. You can’t campaign with young soldiers and take causalities there, if you don’t have support from home. And when the
public thinks it's stupid and people are rioting against going to Vietnam, what in the hell?
You can’t expect your men lay their life on the line like they did before. I’m fighting for
my country and this is my duty.

SM: When you arrived in the 23rd infantry division, what was in place to deal
with the illegal aspects of this? The drug use and things like that? How did you handle
soldiers that were using drugs?

TM: They did the best they could to make sure that the drug use was held in the
rear areas and they didn’t take drugs when they were going out in the field. It was so
widespread it’s like we’ve got home how. What are we doing in America with drugs?
You know what I mean?

SM: Yes, sir.

TM: We tried to concentrate on the serious problems, fragging and things like
that, but it was out of control. Bad discipline was sort of accepted in the rear areas. The
question comes up. Why didn’t you use court marshals? This was so widespread that we
couldn’t have done it. If we did, you know what would happen, there would be more
resistance and even mutinies! We tried to handle it the best we could. Some of the
young officers which I found out later when they came into the company to take over a
company would call in their NCOs and say, “Hey here’s the problems we’ve got. You
guys try and handle it the best you can. If anything happens pass the word out to the guys
you know who are druggies or those who are threatening fragging and say, “If somebody
gets fragged we know who is most likely to do it.’ Threaten counter-fragging.” This is a
disaster. You know in World War II, Korea or any other time you have a young officer
who is trying to his job, do his job and he has to threaten some of the troops who are
really unruly with counter-fragging, this is a complete disaster. I didn’t find out about
that until after I left the division. As you can imagine it was very close-held. I talked to
one young officer I remember that had been in the 23rd Division and was getting ready to
go home when I was with the Cambodian unit. I had dinner with him and he told me
about that. I said, “Christ do you realize you could be court marshaled for threatening
somebody with death?” He said, “General if you were commanding the company what in
the shit would you do? It was the only way we could hold the company together.” I told
him I couldn’t accept that. He said, “That’s because where you are and where I was. So
that’s what I had to accept.” It was disturbing.

SM: It’s like a street gang mentality almost.

TM: That’s right, exactly. After I’d retired this book was published, I’ve
forgotten the name of it now. I got a call from General Westmoreland. He said, “I’ve
been told that you said in a book that we went into Vietnam with a good Army and we
came out with a lousy Army.” I said, “General that’s absolutely right. Remember what
we talked about when I had my retirement interview?” And I told him the same thing.
He said, “Yes I guess that’s right.” So he got off my back because I was retired.

SM: When you arrived back in Vietnam in1970, of course at this point
Vietnamization had been going on for more than a year. Nixon had already pretty much
decided that the United States was going to withdraw completely; it was just a matter of
time. Did you detect especially among your younger officers, you r platoon leaders and
your company commanders we don’t want to be the last casualties in this war? We know
we’re pulling out.

TM: That’s exactly right. There was also a case where you can say déjà vu with
Korea. The spring of ’53 when I was commanding the 17th Regiment we had the same
problems. The Peace Talks were on and we knew week-by-week and month-by-month
that a Cause Fire was coming up any time. We had a hard time when the Chinese would
attack these outposts like Porkchop to keep the guys going. But at that time, here you
are, the enemy’s attacking and you’ve got to fight for your life. You aren’t fighting for
your country as such then, you’re trying to keep yourself alive until the armistice comes
until you can go home.

SM: I would imagine that also had a rather significant effect on morale.

TM: It did. It was very, very dangerous. Very dangerous for morale. That also
contributed to our disciplinary problems. You know if you were down there and you were
having these druggies and the racial problems and all the rest and also faced the fact that
the war was ending, it becomes very difficult! It depended on the company commander.
You had to have company commanders that had balls and good battalion commanders
that were capable of backing them up. It isn’t the case where they could turn back and
look up the chain of command and use court marshals to do help for them. They couldn’t.
They were down at the grass roots and they had a problem, which they had to deal with.

One of the things when I first came in there, I heard there had been a grenade go off near
some billets. They didn’t even report it to Saigon. I said, “Why didn’t you?” They said,
“Well nobody was wounded or killed. There’s only some holes in the building.” These
reports had been “squashed” along the way. I said, “Look I want every single thing that
goes off like this reported to give an indication up along the line of how bad morale is
really getting.”

SM: Were there any fraggings in the 23\textsuperscript{rd} ID while you were there?

TM: Yes, they were reported from division headquarters to Corps and they’d
have a big investigation with MPs and they couldn’t tell who was responsible.

SM: Yes, sir. Did you ever get an opportunity to talk with General Abrams about
this?

TM: About the fragging?

SM: Well about the problems with morale, the problems with the current policy?

TM: No, because when I came in there the big problem was going into
Cambodia. Most of the things I talked about with him was that. In my initial interview I
was asking him for more information. He said, “Look I’m busy with duties I’m
responsible for.” They had put Cambodia directly under CINCPAC, just like Laos and
Thailand. Cambodia was not under Abrams. He did have one of his deputies that I used
to inform what in the hell was going on in Cambodia.

SM: What area was the 23\textsuperscript{rd} ID responsible for?

TM: Up in the 1\textsuperscript{st} corps area. II corps was to overlook the 173\textsuperscript{rd} and others. This
was up in the 1\textsuperscript{st} corps area.

SM: Was there a significant amount of enemy contact being made in 1970 and
1971?

TM: Very little. The biggest one I think was around February, just after I left.
They attacked in firebase Mary Ann. While I was there I had a very bitter discussion
with the new division commander who had come in. He said his responsibility at that
time was hold down your casualties. His approach to holding down casualties was cut
down the combat patrols, which we sent out from all the bases to protect them. Colonel
Hathaway, one of the brigade commanders who I’d known over the years came in to see
me about that. He was complaining about it and so I went in with him to talk to the
division commander. He said, “No I’ve got to cut down casualties.” We both told him
during the meeting the VC are sitting out there watching us. When we cut down on our
patrols they’re going to be watching what the pattern in and so forth and just wait until
they can launch a surprise attack, which they did on Mary Ann and the division
commander was relieved.”

SM: The order that came down to cut down casualties, do you recall
approximately when that was?
TM: When he took over he was the one who stressed that.
SM: So this was January of ’71 about?
TM: No, he came in probably September of ’70. He came down with it. We’ve
go to cut down these casualties. So evidently he’d been briefed in Saigon.

Now when I came first to the 23rd Div General Malloy was leaving so they didn’t
brief me in Saigon. I came in one day and the next day they sent me out so I could take
over as acting commander of the America’s. When I was there, the various chemicals we
used. You know herbicides and so forth. I think they called it Farm Gate; they’d fly with
airplanes down the road and spray that stuff. At that time we just moved under a tree so
we didn’t get splashed with the stuff on our clothes. We didn’t know at that time that it
was dangerous. When I came in I saw al these barrels and stuff around when I’d go out
to the outpost. I’d tell them for Christ sake use this stuff, get rid of it. They said, “They
don’t want us to use that anymore.” I said, “Get rid of what you’ve got here. Just use
that and then that’s the end of that.” They heard about it down at Saigon and the IG was
sent out to investigate. “What the hell are you doing this for?” I said, “Look let me give
you an interview for General Abrams. I came in one night, the next morning I asked
what was going on, when would I be briefed? They said, “Go up and they’ll tell you at
the division.” “You people didn’t give me any briefing and tell me what my
responsibilities were.” So I used the experience I had from my previous two years and
took off with that.” He took it back to Abrams and briefed him and he called me up and
said, “Forget about it, Abrams said ‘we made a mistake’.” I guess I had two years
experience, which is more than most the guys had out there at that time. They figured
there was no problem sending me up there but they didn’t think about minor little things like you aren’t supposed to be using herbicides.

SM: The herbicides were they used around all the firebases to keep the growth back?

TM: Yes. When I first went out there and saw that the bushes were growing up around the firebases I took a look at the full barracks of herbicides and thought these are soldier’s lives at risk. Well we’ve got some stuff here that can help, let’s use the stuff and then forget about it.

SM: How would that get sprayed around the firebases?

TM: They had little machines that they would use to plug into the barrel and spray it from the firebase. In 1964-66 they sprayed along the roads. They’d have three planes go down the road spraying the stuff to get the trees along the side of the road.

Let’s now discuss Cambodia. When I came in, the Cambodian government met with a band and honor guard. The people from the Embassy didn’t come up to meet me. When I finally arrived at the embassy, the Ambassador was furious. He said, “You weren’t supposed to be publicized coming in.” I said, “Mr. Ambassador I got off the plane, these guys met me. Where were your people?” He said, “Well we had a car there to bring you to the embassy.” I said, “I didn’t know that. No one contacted me.” That was setting off on the wrong foot with him. It was a difficult assignment.

After I had been there awhile, I got a hold of Colby remember CIA?

SM: Yes, sir.

TM: He was working at the time in Saigon. I contacted him and I’d known him before because I’d known his dad from World War II. I brought him over to the Embassy so that the two of us could see the Ambassador to talk about setting up a Phoenix Program in the Cambodian villages. The Ambassador wouldn’t even meet with us. We had to go back to Saigon without meeting him. What I then did, I went to General Dien who was the head of the JGS, with whom I’d worked on my first tour and said, “Hey I hear you have got a lot of surplus shotguns in your warehouses.” We used to give the PFs shotguns, then we started giving them other rifles so they weren’t using the shotguns. I said, “Could I get some?” He said, “Let me check.” He had 10,000 shotguns that they sent over to Cambodia. I put in for shotgun ammunition in my expenses. The
Ambassador called me and said, “You cannot have shotgun ammunition here. It’s against the Geneva Convention to use them.” I said, “We’re using it in Vietnam. We always had.” He said “Well I’m not allowing it here.”

So I went over to Dien again. I said, “Hey I’m having some troubles over there. What about shotgun ammunition? You don’t need that laying around the warehouse.” So he sent over some planes with shotgun ammunition. Next thing I get called in by the Ambassador, “I told you we wouldn’t have shotgun ammunition here and so forth.” I said, “Sir you also told me to have the Cambodians work with the Vietnamese. They are allies and they’ve got shotguns with no ammunition so the Vietnamese sent it over.” We reached the stage where both of us used but he knew when I was equivocating and I knew when he was being “diplomatic”.

Fortunately, I got to know Admiral McCain. He was the Admiral of CINCPAC. I got to know him quite well from his visits and was familiar with my problems with the Embassy. He gave me the name of his deputy and he said, “Look when anything comes up and you want us to send you a message telling you to do something which the Ambassador won’t let you do, you go to Saigon and talk to us form there.” This was because the Agency had coverage of the telephone calls going out from the Embassy in Cambodia. So I’d go back to Saigon and send them a message and a week later a message would come down, “I want to make sure that you get this done.” This was a military commander telling me what to do and the Ambassador couldn’t blame me for doing it. That’s a sad way to have to do things.

SM: It is indeed. Of course it makes you have to wait. Of course you have to get to Saigon, then you have to wait another few days, week whatever to get your order to execute it.

TM: It was very bad. I hope in the future that our people if they’re fighting up at the topside in DC they don’t pass it all the way down to the grass roots so the guys in the field have to wrestle with it.

SM: You said that this was an attempt to set up a Phoenix Program in Cambodia?

TM: Yes, I wanted to get Colby’s assistance. He’d set that Phoenix Program up in Vietnam. We had nothing to send to the villages; the material we were getting in was strictly for the Cambodian Infantry Divisions and Air Force and Navy. There was
nothing to go out to the villages to protect themselves. That’s why I wanted to get those
shotguns down to the village so they could form their own little village defense force so
they wouldn’t just have a couple of enemy agents coming in there with a gun forcing
them to do things. As I say the Ambassador was completely against that.

SM: Did he say why? Did he give you a reason besides the Geneva Convention
excuse?

TM: Well the Geneva Convention, yes that’s in the convention but we didn’t pay
attention to it in Saigon. When we first went over there we issued single shot shotguns to
village defenders then repeating ones. Then these were replaced with rifles as the
fighting increased. I think the thing was the Ambassador felt that this was just a holding
pattern in Cambodia. They, the State Department to make sure things didn’t get in the
papers and cause more problems. He was looking at it differently. My decision was to
build a force, which could put pressure on the enemy in the Eagles Beak, and he was
trying to keep the publicity down.

SM: I’m sorry I just want to clarify. You said it does say explicitly in the Geneva
Conventions that you’re not allowed to use shotguns?

TM: That was originally in the Geneva Convention, they weren’t supposed too be
using that.

SM: Wow! I didn’t know that. As you said it was being ignored in Vietnam.

TM: Yes, we did it in Vietnam from day one.

SM: Right. Do you know if this worked at all in Cambodia? That is getting
some weapons down to the village level so that they could defend themselves against
Communists cadre members coming through?

TM: I dealt with the Cambodian staff and we talked about this. When this stuff
came in, they sent it down to set up little self defense groups in the villages and issued
shotguns and ammunition to them.

SM: How long were you in Cambodia again?

TM: I was in there for one year. I came in January of ’71 and left in February
’72 to retire.

SM: How long was your entourage there of Americans? How many Americans
did you have with you?
TM: We had two groups. One of them was in Saigon that was handling the logistics and the rest of that and a small group forward in Cambodia. As I was in Cambodia they only let us have 50 people there. We couldn’t give any advice or personal assistance. We were just supposed to hand them the weapons. You know here’s the shipment coming in, here’s what you do. That was about it. One of the cartoons we had was a Howitzer with a guy hanging on the barrel and another one looking with question at the ammunition. The thing was “Hey if you’re there, the least you can do is try and give your information to the guys of what they were supposed to be doing.” What we did, was form battalions. We formed up battalions and sent them to Saigon where they were trained by the Vietnamese Army. The companies that were Regional Forces, you know the Regional Force unit?

SM: Yes, sir.

TM: They were sent to Thailand for training. We had a training program running, since we couldn’t have advisors in Cambodia; we sent them out of country to get their training. In Thailand for Regional Forces, in Saigon for the regular infantry battalions and artillery. Another thing when I tried and get material coming off the assembly lines the Vietnamese had priority. I had a big green book, which listed all surplus equipment. I bought the last 57 PAC-75s from the Army arsenal. We had to completely refuse the shells, the fuses because they were World War II. I and brought them in, so we could start training artillerymen. So when the time came a year later they’d get the 105s we’d be able to have people that were partially trained anyway.

SM: Did you have contact with anybody who had worked in Cambodia previously in a similar way or was this the first time that we had sent someone to do this?

TM: We had a mission there before. A MAAG and Sihanouk got mad at them and cut the MAAG out completely. Our major problem and trying to get people to work in Cambodia was get French speakers. Because you know the French had been there in Indo China and most of them, the Cambodian officers, spoke French. One of the difficulties was trying to pick people who could speak French so we could send them forward to the Embassy. It took me about six months to be able to move over there myself. The Ambassador said, “Well we’ll handle everything in the country here with the people that are here. You don’t have to come over here.” I got an airplane from
Abrams when I lived in Saigon for the first six months. Every morning when the weather was good I’d fly over there, stay all-day and fly back at night. The Ambassador wasn’t very happy about that, but he couldn’t say much about it.

SM: What kind of air support assets were available to you? Were they explicitly military or did you also have some civilian air assets?

TM: What we were doing was providing some old training airplanes; the Cambodians use those. They utilized a small Air Force group in the embassy, so they could have air support to bomb when there was any concentrations of Khmer Rouge. MEDTC didn’t have anything to do with that because that would be having the light air equipment delivery team acting like a MAAG. So they had a little cluster of people in there under the deputy ambassador who handled the air strikes.

SM: How about the CIA, Air America or any of the other air proprietors?

TM: They supported us with supplies. Also they would fly in with personnel.

One of the problems we had when the Admiral came in for his first visit from the CINCPAC La Noel gave him a white elephant as a present. Which was a great gift in the old days when they used to have royal rulers. After a couple of months they asked me when is he going to take that elephant? When he came back on the next visit, he said, “Well I’ll get it done.” We had to make some arrangement to fly something in with a plane big enough to take out a cage with an elephant in it and bring it back to California where it was given to a zoo.

SM: Oh, for crying out loud. It did make it back, do you know?

TM: Pardon?

SM: Did the elephant make it back to the U.S.?

TM: We got it all the way back. The Admiral made arrangements with a local zoo in California that would accept it. He got it out of here and flown to California.

SM: What was the relationship like, you already described the relationship between you as the MEDTC commander and the U.S. Embassy staff? Especially the Ambassador was not very congenial.

TM: It wasn’t good at all.

SM: What about between lower ranking Embassy staff members and yourself and your staff? Any other civilians that might have been working there, whether they be U.S.
State Department or CIA? Were they a little bit more cooperative? Did you have a better
working relationship with them?

TM: We didn’t have anything to do with the CIA in there. They were strictly
under the Embassy. But local people, yes. One of the guys in the Embassy had been in
Vietnam, in the Army and he later joined the State Department. Outside of the official
duties, we had the usual cocktail party dinners. We got on with them, no problem.

SM: What about the relationship that you developed with your Cambodian
counterparts, both civilian and military?

TM: It was a very, very good relationship. They would come to us, we’d sit down
and decide what was needed to form new battalions. Then we’d make arrangements for
the equipment to come in. I got to know them very well. In fact, after I retired I came to
the US and after three months they called me up to the Pentagon and asked whether I
would like to go to Singapore as the chief of a civilian consulting group. So I did that for
three years. While I was there I had Cambodians come down and visit me. I’d take them
to dinner. They’d have things they wanted the Singaporeans to do for their Navy. For
example they had and old LST tied up in Phnom Penh, you know the Mexican river?

SM: Yes, sir.

TM: We’d given the French that. The French left it there. They wanted to float
it down to Singapore and have them rehab it. The problem was they had to send back to
the plants that originally had constructed the LST to get the blueprints to find out where
the wiring would go. Because the wiring would be on one side and it would be all torn
off before it reached the other side. They didn’t know which wire connected to which. So
they’d have to get the blueprint to rebuild it. Then some of the places they wielded sheet
metal over the cracks in the ship’s deck. They got it finally repaired so they were able to
use it. They came to see me to try and get direct contact with the Singaporeans because
they came to buy things. They came down to Singapore to try and expedite purchases.
Because if you waved dollars at the Singaporean businessmen they were ready to get
anything you wanted.

SM: What did you think about his leadership of Cambodia that you had contact
with? Lon Nol and others?
TM: Lon Nol and the ones that were the government officials turned over the
military aspect strictly to the chief of the Cambodian Army and ran the Army the best
they could. They had never had a real good Army. They were up against the Khmer
Rouge and the Vietnamese who had been fighting against us in Vietnam. So they were in
bad shape. We trained an initial group of battalions and they launched an offensive, and
were counter attacked by the enemy. About half the battalions were wiped out. They
never did schedule another offensive action. They just went over to the defensives trying
to hold on.

SM: Were there other countries assisting in this, other than you mentioned
already that the ground forces would be taken over to Thailand? Some of the forces
would be taken to Thailand; some of the forces were trained by the Vietnamese, how
about other nations involved in this?

TM: In the Philippines, they helped train some of the intelligence people. But
what happened when they came back instead of being intelligence officers since they’d
been trained more than the normal officers they had there, they ended up taking tactical
commend jobs.

SM: How about other allied countries, the Australians anybody else involved in
Cambodia with you?

TM: Yes, the Australians were very helpful. What happened we bought some,
six million dollars worth of trucks. I went down to Australia and made arrangements to
buy these trucks. What we did was our money was washed through the Embassy so it
came out on the other side as the Australians were donating these trucks to the
Cambodians. We had really funded them and then when they were coming out a funny
problem happened. The Embassy, they were shipping these trucks into Saigon and I
wanted to send my people down there and get things organized. The Embassy said, “No
we will take care of it.” So they sent somebody from their Embassy down. Instead of
making sure that the trucks were coming with the keys in the truck and organizing the
loading and unloading the Embassy said, “Well load them on a ship and unload them at
the other end.” What you should do when you do this, you have your trucks organized
with the keys and the shipping and all the rest of it. So it was a big screw up. I had to
send down some of my NCOs and unscramble it in Saigon.
SM: How long did the trucks have to stay on board the ship because they didn’t have the keys to drive them?

MT: No, they unloaded them but they were unloaded in a motor pool thee. It wasn’t organized.

SM: I’m sorry go ahead.

TM: That’s ok go on.

SM: In terms of the purpose of your mission in Cambodia from the time you arrived, to the time you left how would you evaluate either success or failure and what would you attribute either one to?

TM: The way it worked we had meetings at the Embassy weekly. I think our budget was 220 million dollars. We’d sit down with someone form the Embassy staff who would go over what we were getting for the Cambodians and coordinate details for when the material was coming in. It worked fairly well, except as I say when the Ambassador objected to the ammunition for the shotguns.

SM: When you eventually left Cambodia did you feel like you had accomplished very much?

TM: Well, we did the best we could trying to raise 200,000 people in the middle of a war with equipment coming and training—it was very, very difficult. The Cambodians did the best they could. They weren’t as good soldiers as the Vietnamese though.

SM: I wouldn’t want to use a cliché to describe this, but it seems almost like it was a little bit too little, too late.

TM: Well, that’s true but remember the reason we came in there. Before it had been under Sihanouk who was completely neutral. Then Lon Nol had this coup where he took over. While Sihanouk was there he got on with the North Vietnamese. He allowed them to use the Ho Chi Minh Trail coming down, they didn’t bother them. They set up truck companies that brought their supplies from the port in to the Eagle’s Beak and let them use parts of Cambodia as their reserve area. He got on with them very well. When Lon Nol came at that time in ’70 we tried to help him. Then as I say the first thing was Nixon had sent over there a Colonel Ladd, who was the President’s Representative there. He was one Ambassadors staff to try and work with Lon Nol and his people. He had a
few million dollars worth of rifles coming in and other items. Then when Congress
passed the bill for 220 million dollars they had to have a MAAG there to handle it. He
couldn’t handle it with just five or six people like he’d been doing before, a kind of
covert aid. That was the time when the three enemy divisions in the Eagles became a
threat when we went below 100,000 people. The first MAVC did was try to bomb the
Eagles Beak where the 3 divisions and supplies were. Then as we were going down very
fast in strength and the divisions were still a threat, they launched the invasion to overrun
the supply areas. Then the third step was getting this 220 million to organize a 200,000
man military force. It was late. By that time it was 1971.

SM: At that point it seems like the damage to Cambodia had already been done.
The North Vietnamese had infiltrated so much and the Khmer Rouge had grown to such a
strength it would be very difficult to over come.

TM: That’s right. Unfortunately when we finally pulled out in 1975, the
Cambodian leader who was handling the government at that time he refused to fly out.
He said he would stay there and take the fate of his people. When the enemy came in,
they executed him. We were a big country and frankly we used them. It’s unfortunate,
but that’s the way things are.

SM: If you would go ahead and describe some of the other problems that
emerged in the 23rd ID with regard to casualties, land mines, things of that nature.

TM: Earlier in our oral history I had mentioned that the Chief of The Staff of the
Army, Johnson came by in December of ’64. He was visiting the different senior
advisors groups and asking them, “If you could have anything you wanted what would
you like?” I told him what I would like was to take Gavin’s Plan, General Gavin who
had recommended enclaves for the U.S. units to move to. The principle was that they’d
go into an enclave area on the coastal area where most of the people were and leave the
Vietnamese to fight against the North Vietnamese and the VC. Then when they ran out
of reserves then we would “pile on”. In the mean time hopefully we could be doing the
same thing the Marines were doing with their small units, each unit helping a local area
by providing security for them. He said, “No, we’re going to fund a bigger war. We’re
going against the divisions and NVA troops send down from North Vietnam.” That was
the end of that.
When I came back to the 23rd division in 1970, we were starting to get increased casualties from mines. We’d go out on a sweep, into a valley or to a certain area and the VC would have this area very heavily mined. Then they knew we were going to come back via one or two routes coming back into camp. Then they would then place mines on the routes we’d use coming back in. We were taking very, very heavy casualties from mines. In my mind then that just reinforced what Gavin had said. “The best thing to do would be stay down among where the populace was and make sure you had them secure. Then when the time came, you had a target where the enemy was concentrated attacking the South Vietnamese troops. Then once we had an objective to attack we could do our fighting there, rather than wandering around looking for the enemy.” That was one of the things that I felt that the enclave theory would have been a better one.

Ok, the next thing when I was with the 23rd my son came over in ’69 to the 101st Division. It was very interesting his division commander, General Hennessey had been a company commander of mine in World War II in the 276 Infantry Regiment. His brigade commander had been my S-3 in the 505 back in ’59 thru ’60. He was a platoon leader first then they pulled him in to be an S-2. He called me at the division headquarters at 23rd and said, “Dad what’s an S-2 do?” I got a hold of my G-2 and gathered some manuals and maps and sent them up to him with a helicopter to Hennessey who passed it on down to him.

Then I got my chief of staff and said, “Hey what’s the status of our battalion staffs, in the division? Who are those Bn. Staff officers?” They checked it out, our 11 battalions rather than the normal nine. We were about of the 23,000 strong. We found out that the battalions S-1, S-2, S-4 and S-5 were lieutenants who were ROTC or West Point who had come directly in the Army. Then had their platoon leader experience and then they’d assigned to be a battalion staff officer. I checked with the infantry school to see what they were teaching these lieutenants in Basic. They did not teach them anything about battalion staff. I had a letter written to CONARC, which outlined statistics and recommended that they take at least one week of the Basic Infantry Curse and include a week on the battalion staff so at least they’d have a glimmer of what in the hell a staff officer is supposed to do. I got a letter back from CONARC saying that they had big study done on this in the ‘50s and they felt it wasn’t worth including information on the
Bn staff in the Basic Course. Well to me that’s really stupid because the situation was so
different now. They’ve got lieutenants who are out there fighting platoon for six months,
and then they move up to battalions not knowing anything about their staff duties. What I
did, I had my G-1 division G-1, G-2 and G-4 and (G-5) each set up a several day course
for lieutenants when they were going to be sent to be a battalion staff officer. They’d first
come up to division and see how the staff worked at division. Then we’d send them to
the brigade staff to see what material they’d be sending into the Brigade from their
battalion staff. Then we gave them a little pamphlet. Which included the reports you’re
supposed to fill out to send back into brigade headquarters. So we’d tried to train our
own Lts that way. You can imagine a poor kid coming out of six months as a platoon
leader in combat. He probably had six months with a division in the states and then came
over to Vietnam for his year. After six months with a platoon and he is assigned to run a
staff job which he knows nothing about. Fortunately the S-3s had been to the advanced
class where they were trained to be staff officers. That was one item I put in the division
SOP that time which I was very proud at.

SM: I was going to ask you that. You seemed to purposefully leave out the G-3,
S-3. I assume that was because the S-3 position typically was a senior, either a captain or
a major in the battalion, correct?

TM: Yes, that’s it. Also they had been to the advanced class. They’d been
taught there about the battalion and brigade staff. The Basic officer course didn’t cover
this. That’s why we set up our own program.

SM: When you were with the 23rd did you have any armor assets attached to you
or many armor assets? Do you recall?

TM: I am trying to think. I can’t remember specifically anything but an armored
Cav Squadron.

SM: How closely were you working with ARVN units?

MT: We worked with ARVN very closely because the Corps area was really
controlled under the ARVN. You know they had the responsibility for certain areas and
we worked very, very closely with them. Since I had been an advisor for 18 months in
1964-1965 one of the first things I did when I got to the 23rd division, I took my staff
SM: Did you have interpreters with you or were they fairly good in English?

SM: When you went and met with the ARVN did you have interpreters?

TM: No, we still had Advisors at the divisions there. So we could link in with our advisors when we worked with the ARVN division staffs.

SM: Could you describe any joint operations that you conducted with ARVN and how well they went. Do you recall anything in particular?

TM: No, I don’t recall anything specific there.

SM: Of course when you left in 1971, in January of ’71.

TM: ’72.

SM: I mean when you left the 23rd infantry to go into Cambodia.

TM: I left the 23rd in January ’71, with one days notice.

SM: Right, when you left the 23rd what did you think about the unit and how it was functioning in I corps?

TM: As I mentioned I was very disappointed because our morale had gone down and we were having fraggings, too much drugs and racial problems. Those three things were horrible.

SM: Were those problems permeating not just the rear areas, but all the way up to the front line?

TM: Yes, one of the major problems when it came to drugs was to make sure that when a unit went off to a firebase or something that they just absolutely clamped down on drugs for security reasons.

SM: Were you running urinalysis tests at the time?

TM: Pardon?

SM: Were they running urinalysis tests?

TM: No, not at that time. However when I left Vietnam I had to take a reanalysis test. I initially refused and General Abrams called me in and said, “Ted for Christ sake please.” I Said, “Yes, sir General. I think it’s a shitty deal, but I understand.” When they’re doing this to the general officers, well I guess they had to.
SM: Unbelievable. What information were you receiving during your second tour with both the 23rd infantry and also in Cambodia, what information were you receiving about what was happening on the home front back in the U.S.? Were you getting pretty much daily information, whether it be though radio or magazines and newspapers that you’d receive?

TM: There was no organized plan to get these things down, but people would make sure they got the current weekly magazines and other information plus letters from home saying what was going on. The radio programs were also helpful so we kept up pretty much to date.

SM: What did you think about what was happening at home, especially after the Cambodian Incursion in 1970 of course, the huge uprising, the student activity?

TM: The uprising and the National Guard shooting the guys at Kent state was a, disturbing and reflected on our morale. That’s one of the things that caused the morale in the troops to go down so badly.

SM: Were there any other events or anything else that you wanted to talk about with regard to your second tour that we haven’t covered yet?

TM: No, that’s about it. I covered General Johnson’s visit and so forth and the mines and about the 1,2,4s at the Bn Staffs and so forth. Oh, the last thing was montagnard revolts. The montagnards revolts we’ve covered in December. I’m sorry in September of ’64. That’s the one the French speaking Colonel helped at that time get settled. Then we had another little problem in December 1964. The montagnards were tribal people. They lived by tribal laws so to speak. They had two different types of rice wine ceremonies that were very important to them. One of them, was an individual where the individual came there, drank the rice wine and then got a brass bracelet showing that he was a brother of the tribe. There was second one they had tribal rice wine where they’d have two tribes get together and they’d have a rice wine ceremony between them. They would have allegiance with each other, that they would support each other. What the Vietnamese did, they understood into this and they were having troubles at that time because the montagnards Fulro, F-U-L-R-O. Fulro Organization was in Cambodia and they were trying to instigate the tribal people to revolt against the Vietnamese government. So what the Vietnamese did, they set up three huge meetings
throughout II corps, one after another where they had the rice wine ceremony of allegiance. They would have the Vietnamese come to these. The Vietnamese leaders Montagnards would pledge allegiance to each other. This worked fairly well; it sort of got the Montagnards doing something, which they were familiar with. You have two tribes getting together, having trouble. They get together and say, “Hey we’re going to have allegiance with each other.” They understood that. Then they weren’t as receptive to the material coming in from Fulro, a revolt against the Vietnamese. That helped some there. Incidentally Colonel Fruend was very, very good on this tribal business. Have you contacted him at all?

SM: No, I haven’t. Could you spell his name for me sir?

TM: What I’ll do when I get home, I’ll look it up in my general officers list and I’ll send it to you.

SM: Ok.

TM: Have you had a chance to get into the oral history aspects with Bowre or Cleland?

SM: No, sir.

TM: Pardon?

SM: No, sir.

TM: You haven’t?

SM: No, sir.

TM: I’ll look them up and what I’ll do is I’ll send you the names and if you’re able to it’d be a good thing to try and get something from them on the oral history aspects too I think.

SM: Yes, sir. Absolutely.

TM: That will go outside of what we just covered in Cambodia because they both served in other positions throughout Vietnam.

SM: In Cambodia with the montagnard people there, did you witness any interaction?

TM: No, the montagnards were up in the mountains and the Cambodians were only trying to hold on to their towns. They didn’t pay any attention to the rest of the ones.
SM: But tapping into that rice wine ceremony on the Vietnamese side, that was very smart?

TM: Pardon?

SM: That was very smart.

TM: Yes, well the Vietnamese they were doing the best they could and they’re the ones that came up with this. The tribal people are very superstitious. When they have something that they’re very in to, like a rice wine ceremony and where they kill a buffalo for the ceremony and it really helped. I feel it was very significant in sort of dampening down the efforts of Fulro to try and get them to revolt.

SM: Did you have any indication that the North Vietnamese were trying to do the same thing? That is try to gain allegiance or alliance with them, the montagnards or were they ignoring them as well?

TM: This was left up to Fulro. Fulro was over in Cambodia and I’m sure the North Vietnamese were the ones that got them started on this.

SM: When you left in 1972, what did you think about Cambodia and its prospects?

TM: All we were trying to do was hold on as long as we could. The mission there was to hold on until we got the U.S. troops out of there. That was our overriding mission. As I say the poor Cambodians were used so-to-speak. South Vietnamese had a chance for something, but the Cambodians at that stage in the game, it was so late we were just trying to put the Cambodian army in the field which would force the North Vietnamese to divert part of their strength against the Cambodians rather than focusing it on an attack on Saigon.

SM: Of course a month after you left, in March of ’72, a month after you left in February of ’72 was the major Easter Tet Offensive.

TM: Yes.

SM: Where were you and what did you hear about that?

TM: I was on my way home and heard about it in the news. What I did when I left Cambodia in February 1972 I made arrangements to tour the states. I had left the States in ’64 was gone for two years, back for one year, gone for four years, 2 years in Iran and back for two years in SBA. I hadn’t been home much so I contacted my wife and
said, “I’ll be home in a month.” I took a month’s bus trip around the States just to look and see for myself what was happening and trying to get myself back, mentally back, in shape for retirement. In ’72 when I went home I was home for three months and then I went to Singapore to be a consultant in June ’72 and was there for three years. I was just absolutely dismayed that we were withdrawing from Vietnam and Cambodia. I was just completely dismayed in my own mind. Then I was home just for three months when I got called up to Valley Forge Military Academy to work up there with General Pierson for eight years.

SM: What did you think when the decision was made by the Nixon administration that the ability of ARVN to hold back the NVA during the Easter Tet Offensive, this is proof that they can handle it themselves, so let’s step up and withdraw American forces?

TM: Remember their first attack after we were leaving the Vietnamese did fairly well and held them. Then in 1975, Congress was cutting down money. The Vietnamese weren’t even getting enough gas to get their airplanes up or enough artillery shells to support their troops. By this time the NVA was coming down with division with 130 artillery, which outranged any artillery that we had or that the Vietnamese had and tanks. It turned into a conventional war and we weren’t even supplying the Vietnamese adequately. I felt we’d let them down very badly.

SM: What did you think about the Paris Peace Accords in 1973? And the American withdraw in January or the American Peace Accords that ended peace as Nixon put it a “peace with honor?”

TM: This was the one where they had agreed to leave some North Vietnamese even when they were going for the peace treaty to leave some North Vietnamese in South Vietnam. Wasn’t that the one?

SM: Yes, sir.

TM: Geez, it was horrible. When you lose a war what do you do? You’re in despair, that’s about it.

SM: In 1973 is that how you felt, like we had lost?

TM: I felt it was going down the tube yes.

SM: In 1975 when Saigon did fall?
TM: When Saigon fell, hey it’s hell to lose a war.

SM: Yes, sir. Where were you at that time?

TM: I had just left Singapore to come back to the States.

SM: Now, what took you to Singapore again?

TM: When I retired in 1972 I guess I left in February and finally retired in April.

I hadn’t planned at all for retirement. My generation didn’t. It’s the generation that did.

I figured I was going to get my doctorate at the time in International Relations. Then I

got called up to Washington and said they wanted to send me to Singapore. Singapore

asked for a MAAG, Military Assistance and Advice Group. The US turned it down.

Singapore said, “We’ll buy one.” So I went up to Washington. I said, “Hey you guys

asked if I wanted to go to work in Singapore, I can’t I’m a regular officer. I can’t work

for a foreign government.” They said, “No problem,” they called the JAG in. The way

the handled it, I worked for a UMPC Ltd, it was a small scrap iron company that was

buying material from Vietnam. I had a desk out there and where I went once a month to

receive our pay. Then I went back and went to an office next to the Minister of Defense,

Dr. Go King, Swee and did my work there during the month. I’d go back out once a

month to collect the money from my team and then pay them. It was a civilian MAAG.

SM: This was to train the Singaporean Army?

TM: Yes. When they became independent on one would help them because they

didn’t want to make Malaysia unhappy. Evan Britain didn’t help them. They finally got

an Israeli troop out there teaching them. The Israelis trained them up to battalion level.

Then the Singaporeans decided they wanted to expand to division level and they also

wanted to send their people to the States for training. That’s when they asked for a team

MAAG from the US. That’s what I did. I went out there and organized division level

training for their people to sending them back to the States for additional training.

SM: So they were being trained in U.S. military schools?

TM: Yes. Initially they had been trained by the Israeli team up through battalion

level.

SM: Do you know why the United States, I take it from what you said, it was the

United States that has declined to send a MAAG to Singapore?
TM: Yes, well at this time as you realize this was ’72 and we were withdrawing
from the war in Vietnam. Also Congress didn’t want to get involved with any more
countries overseas. That’s when the Singaporeans said, “Well buy our own team.”
SM: I guess probably the Case-Church amendment might have had an affect on
this?
TM: We started getting the Vietnam syndrome. You know, forget about
international relations. Let’s take care of things at home. That’s when the Russians
started expanding into Africa and started working on Central America, using Castro.
SM: Was there anything else that you wanted to talk about with regard to your
time in Southeast Asia in particular?
TM: No, I think that we’ve covered everything. What I’ll do is take that material
that you sent to me and I’ll work my way through that. Then we’ll make plans. I’ll send
you a letter giving you Fruend and Cleland’s address. Then when I come out in the fall
there I’ll stay for a couple of extra days and get this finished up.
SM: Just out of curiosity would you be willing to discuss some of your time in
other places?
TM: Pardon?
SM: Would you be willing to talk about briefly your time in other places? In
particular in the Middle East and Afghanistan?
TM: Yes, when?
SM: Right now if you can. If you want to, just for a little bit. Basically one of
the other things that we’re interested in, is how the Vietnam War impacted your activities
and your opinions I guess what you did in the Cold War. Of course the Vietnam War had
a very lasting impact.
TM: After World War II I feel the Cold War first started in 1946. Then I was in
Berlin at that time with my battalion. Earlier in June 1945 my battalion from World War
II had gone home and I joined the 3rd infantry regiment, which was scheduled to go to
Japan in Sept 1945. We were supposed to leave Europe and go through the Suez Canal in
the fall and go to the Pacific for the final attack on Japan. Then they dropped the bomb
on Japan and we became occupation troops and were moved up to Berlin. Initially we got
on well with the Russians, parties, drinking vodka and whiskey until they replaced their
combat troops and with new troops from the USSR. That’s the time they took over
Eastern Europe. Remember Churchill said in ’47 the Iron Curtain fell. Well it started
falling in ’46. When the Cold War ended in ’89, I was busy at that time working with the
Afghans.

In the early 1980’s I had joined the Committee for Free Afghanistan. In 1983
started inching yearly trips for one to three months at a time over to the Soviet/Afghan
War. So as far as the Cold War was concerned I was in the thing from the beginning in
Berlin when we started getting crossways with the Soviets until ’89 when the Russians
pulled out of Afghanistan. So, I’ve seen it from the start to the finish. I’ve also worked
with the intelligence people on what’s going on in Afghanistan. I also have a one-hour
class I call Afghanistan 101. I’ve given 14 of those talks around the area in Denver. In
Nov. 2002 I was down at the Air Force Academy giving them the classes on Afghanistan.

SM: What got you interested in Afghanistan and when did you first become
involved with the war in Afghanistan?

TM: Well my first time with the Afghans was in 1950 when I was attending, after
the Indian Army staff college; In 1951 I went to the United Nations in Kashmir before I
went to Korea. I volunteered to Korea and sent my wife home from the Indian Staff
College in 1951. My orders were changed from going to Korea- they sent me to Kashmir
instead. So I was made a trip to French Indo China to observe the French war with the
Viet Minh. Then I went and I served for about six months with the Pakistani Pushtu
brigade at Kashmir. Got to know them well and their tribal laws and the rest. I was very
interested in that. I made a trip up into Afghanistan, up to the Soviet border. I finally got
involved with the Committee for a Free Afghanistan in the ‘80s when they formed CFA
when the Soviets attacked the Afghans. Then in ’83 when I left Valley Forge the
Pakistanis asked me to since I was going to China to talk at their Strategic Institute to
come over to Pakistan and do a weapons research problem to see what I felt should be
giving the Afghan guerillas. As I noted in ’83 I’d gone to China to lecture their Strategic
Studies Institute. So then I took a trip from there down to Pakistan and went up to
Peshawar and saw the Afghans mujahideen. They took me around the different
mujahideen groups. I turned in a report to the Pakistani Army C/s them recommending
that they get Chinese rockets and a sniper rifle and other weapons. Then the Committee
for Free Afghanistan started sending me out there once a year, one to three months at a
time for seven trips up through ‘90 to help the Afghan Mujahideen. In ’90 I went into
Afghanistan north east of Kan Dahar to look at one of the new mujahideen battalions
they were forming in there. We got lost in a minefield and we walked out in the truck
tracks. I decided that I was 72 and this is a little stupid. After 50 years it’s a bout time you
do some thing else. So I became a professor for American Military University, which I
am still doing.

SM: When you were in Afghanistan of course the United States government in
particular of course the CIA was involved.

TM: The CIA was involved but they were only involved in moving the
equipment into Karachi. The Egyptians and Chinese and the US sent the equipment to
Karachi where it was turned over to the ISI, the Pakistani CIA who handled it. Then later
we found out after the Soviet left, that the ISI had many fundamentalists and they were
giving more of the equipment to the fundamentalist groups than the other groups. The
Mujahideen groups there had seven groups in Afghanistan fighting against the Soviets.
The ISI were giving most of the new weapons to the fundamentalists groups. 1990 was
my last trip to the Soviet/Afghan war. The Congressional Advisory group on
Afghanistan, which we worked with very closely, requested that we send someone over
to find out what was happening with weapons. I turned in a report that said even if the
CIA put in covert weapons they should also covertly try and track where those weapons
were going by their serial numbers and not just dump weapons and let people do what
they wanted with it without us knowing what was happening.

SM: That is what happened. Basically they were dumped in the country and
there wasn’t any tracking mechanism in place?

TM: The CIA didn’t check anything. They just turned it over to the ISI. At that
time it was still part of the Cold War and what we were interested in was killing Soviets.
We didn’t even think about Muslim fundamentalists at that time in the ‘80s. It was after
the Soviets left that we started getting concerned about Muslim fundamentalists.

SM: Did you ever get a sense that what the United States was trying to do was
basically turn Afghanistan into Russia’s Vietnam?
TM: That was the reason we first went into it. We felt that we were just getting them arms and equipment and so forth to cause the Soviets to make them bleed like we did in Vietnam. As the war went on, the Russians had a very bad time of it. Initially they were doing fairly well until we sent the stingers in. With the stingers in they couldn’t use their helicopters for mobility as they did before. They were faced with doubling the number of troops they had there or pulling out. They decided to pull out. I’m also very pessimistic about our assistance to Columbia. I’m afraid what’s going to happen is the Columbian rebels will start getting the stinger type missiles. When they do I don’t see how the Columbian Army can handle it.

SM: In terms of what happened in Afghanistan, you already mentioned that we weren’t thinking in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s about fundamentalists. At the same time though, you had experience in other parts of the Middle East in particular Iran. Of course by the time you found yourself working around Afghanistan by the time the United States was involved there we had some dealings with some Iranian fundamentalists.

TM: That’s right but that happened after I was in Iran ’68 to ’70.

SM: What had taken you to Iran, what was your job there?

TM: I was chief of the Army mission in Iran. We had a MAAG there, Army, Navy, Air Force and I was chief of the Army mission for two years. At that time the fundamentalist problem hadn’t come up at all. It came up I the late ’70s when then Khumani came in.

SM: While you were there as the chief of the MAAG, you were assisting and training the Iranian forces that were loyal to the Shah.

TM: That’s right we were training them because the Shaw was blocking the Russian advance into the Persian Gulf area. My major job at that time was building up their airborne brigade and re-equipping their tanks with new M-60 tanks and so forth. They had World War II tank equipment there, tanks from World War II. Then we got permission to sell the tanks from World War II to Israel so that we could buy 120 mortars from Israel for the Iranian Army.

SM: So we were giving them M-60 tanks?

TM: Pardon?
SM: We were giving them M-60 tanks, to Iran?
TM: Yes.
SM: Was there very much other equipment that we were sending to them?
TM: We were really equipping them so their army could defend against the Soviets. Everything they could take to build up against the Soviets. Then at the time I came in there the M-47 tanks were being upgraded and we were re-equipping them with new engines.
SM: Was there any fighting or anything while you were there?
TM: As you know the Kurds are in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran. At that time Iran was helping the Kurds to fight against Iraq. That’s when the Iraqis used poison gas on them. The Iranians and the Iraqis nearly went to war at that time.
SM: Right. While you were there what were the more important lessons, were you able to apply any of the lessons that you had learned in Vietnam to what was going on in Iran? Because you were an advisor in Vietnam previously was that of particular assistance?
TM: Yes, I’d been an advisor in Vietnam for a couple of years before ’64 or ’66. I didn’t go to Iran until ’68. But the major thing we had in Iran was building their regular Army, building up their airborne force, building up their tank divisions. We worked with the Russians there on the new tank division. We would put APCs, our old APC, we’d put the M-47s with the Russian APCs because their radios sort of matched with each other. Then our APCs went with the new M-60s tanks we were sending in. We also spent a lot of our time on building up the airborne brigade in addition to building up the Iranian Army regular force unit.
SM: You had Russian equipment as well?
TM: Right, we also had Soviet equipment. What happened from Iranian, the oil wells on the Persian Gulf they had surplus gas. With the spare gas the Iranians ran pipelines up to the Soviets. The Soviets bought this gas from the Iranians. They built up a couple hundred million dollars they owed the Iranians so they in turn sold the Iranians recovered equipment from the Soviets to equip their Army. What I recommended to them was buying 130 artillery pieces which had a longer range than any of our artillery and then the APCs and trucks and jeeps for their Army.
SM: Is that what they did? They bought both the artillery.

TM: Yes, the Iranians bought Soviet artillery, no Soviet tanks. They bought Soviet APCs and then wheeled vehicles. Then we got our 120 mortars from the Israelis by sending them the surplus World War II Sherman tanks.

SM: That’s terribly ironic though isn’t it? They were buying equipment from the Russians and really that’s why we were supporting Iran to begin with because they were a bulwark against Soviet expansion into the Middle East?

TM: At that time we had the TOC remember KM?

SM: Yes, sir.

TM: The Iranians were friendly and the Russians wanted money, well they wanted to pay off their debt. They had so much of this equipment so that was a good deal for them. I got to know the Russian major general that was in charge there quite well.

When we’d go to the Embassy parties we’d sit and drink vodka and have caviar and talk about World War II. He invited me up to visit Russia. I made my trip to Russia in I think it was ’69.

SM: How did that work (laughs)? Did you have to go through any kind of special clearances to get there?

TM: The thing was I got an invitation from the Russians to go and the MAAG chief says, “No you can’t go.” I said, “Well let’s check it.” So we checked with the State Department. At that time they were having a nice detente; you know getting along nicely with each other. They said, “oh sure send him up there.” I went up with a tour group.

Which also visited Leningrad the military also took me to their museums and it was very interesting.

SM: What do you recall from that visit as far as the state of Russia, hot the people were living? Their economy?

TM: When we went up there in ’69 I guess we were very covered by intelligence types. You know looking and watching what you were doing. The people were rather gaunt at the time. When I went back again with my wife when was it? ’85 or there about. Then I went back with Ted again. When I went back with Ted just a couple of years ago he was up with a group of professors from North Carolina, the country had changed completely. Some people were very unhappy. They said, “We no longer have a
program to take care of our children.” You know the young consumals and all the rest of
that are run by the Communist party. The people that were making the money had it
made. The others were having a very difficult time. But I guess they’re getting over this
gradually with Pushkin.

SM: What was the average when you were in there in 1969, what do you
remember as far as the living standard for the average Russian? Did they seem to be
living well?

TM: Not well. They were living, they had very cheap quarters. The government
took care of that, it was very cheap. They had enough food and the rest of the necessities,
but they didn’t have additional goodies of life that they have today. For example they had
this Gum Department Store. On my first trip when something came in they’d all rush
down and stand in line and buy it. For example you go in and buy a couple of a dozen
glasses because they were available. So you brought those home. Then when you ran
out of light bulbs, you go around looking for someone who had bought light bulbs that
you could trade with. They had a complete separate economy it was based on trading
things back and forth.

SM: A black market barter system?

TM: Yes, that’s right.

SM: You couldn’t just go down and expect to find it on the shelf.

TM: Oh, no that was it. They waited until something came in and when it came
in, everybody rushed, even if they didn’t need it, they bought it and took it home so they
could trade it later. Now when my wife and I were there on a tour the woman who was
taking our group around took us through the gum store and they said, “Look here’s
French clothes and other imported items.” Anything you could find in Europe you could
find in the Gum Department Store, but as she said ordinary people didn’t have money to
buy it. They said the people who have the good jobs or in the black market are the
customers.

SM: Although the goods are available no one can buy them today?

TM: Yes, ordinary people didn’t have enough money.

SM: When you got back from your trip to Russia how long did you spend there
in 1969?
TM: In ’69 my wife and I were there for two weeks.
SM: Did you get debriefed when you got back?
TM: Yes. In fact ever since the strategic intelligence school in 1950 that I went
to before going to India I always made it a point to try and gather whatever information I
thought might be useful and pass that on. When I was with the Committee for Free
Afghanistan I had some of my people going up near the Soviet border. One time they
came back and said they saw a big, white light in the sky and then it would die off. Like
turning off a light. Next time I sent them up, I sent them up with compasses. They had
the compasses and focused in where it was. It was the Dushanbe Air Base. I found out
later that was a Russian anti-missile beam that they were using to try and shoot down
satellites.
SM: A laser?
TM: I got that basic information and passed that on to the military attaché. I
didn’t find out what it was until I read the guy who wrote the book *Red Storm Rising* or
something.
SM: Tom Clancy.
TM: Yes, well he put a book out the *Cardinal and the Kremlin* and in here it
mentions the secret beam at Dushanbe. He does good research.
SM: Yes, sir. This was an attempt to create a laser that could shoot down
satellites?
TM: Yes.
SM: Ok, well that’s pretty fascinating! Did you ever?
TM: I never got any feedback on that. I was TS. On this stuff you don’t. You
just get a report together and turn it in. They probably already have the information, but
every once in a while they get something new.
SM: When you were in the Committee for Free Afghanistan in Afghanistan, did
you work very closely with individual Afghani groups, the Mujahideen?
TM: Yes, that’s what I was over there for. I’d go into Peshawar, which is up on
the Afghan border where most of the three million refugees were. When I got to
Peshawar I’d go around and visit each one of the groups to see if they had any wounded
that couldn’t be trusted in Pakistan to send to the US. That was one of major projects that
we were doing. The people that were wounded badly couldn’t be handled in Pakistan, we
would raise the money to fly them back to states and take them to a hospital. Then we’d
use that as a local propaganda so to speak, we’d have the doctor’s talk to them so they
could see what was happening in Afghanistan. This assisted us to raise money to try and
help the Afghans. That was the reason of the Committee for Free Afghanistan. It was an
NGO, you know a non-governmental organization.

SM: Did you ever come across American military working there as well, U.S.
Special Forces anything like that?

TM: Yes, when the 5th Special Forces were going and I brought a general from
Afghanistan, one of the Mujahideen. He’d been the king’s head of the commandos.
He’d gone to the Russian Special Force School, the British Special Force School and
he’d been to ours. So I brought him down to Bragg and had him brief the people who
were going over. General Boulra was the battalion commander at that time in the Special
Forces. He went over with a group to do mine clearing. The United Nations has a
special mine clearing group and they went over to assist in the UN mine clearing project.

SM: What about Russian units and Russians? Did you ever make inadvertent
contact with them in Afghanistan?

TM: No, I never did. Never contacted them. But after the war was over they had
a Russian major come to Bragg here to see how we handle our retirees. We have a
program with every MOS we have in the Army which we’ve linked it with a civilian
MOS. For example if a guy was in charge of a motor pool, we’d list two truck companies
and taxi companies and things where they could use a guy with these skills. He came
over here to see how we did that because the Russians were cutting their forces back and
they just were discharging people. They had no program like that and they wanted to get
more information. I had him out to the house for dinner. I had a big map of Afghanistan
in my study and we talked about Soviet/Afghanistan war. He said, “Well I was an
intelligence officer here”, about 50 miles form where I was. He asked me whatever the
Ukrainian battalion that they were raising to send in to Afghanistan? What had happened
a year earlier I had gotten together with Gen. Singlaub, you know who he is?

SM: Yes, sir.
TM: General Singlaub was the head of the anti-Communist league. I went out to
one of their meetings in California and got together with some Afghans and some anti-
Soviet Ukrainians that were there at the time. We drew up a covert plan where we would
publicize that we were recruiting Ukrainians from Australia and the states and in Europe
to form a battalion to go to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets. This wasn’t true, but
we just passed the information out, hoping the enemy would pick it up and put
intelligence people looking for that. That would have them looking for something that
didn’t exist rather than a regular unit. He said, “Whatever happened to that unit?” I told
him at the time that was just a deception plan.

SM: A reuse. Oh, my. What did he say?

TM: He was surprised.

SM: Did he laugh?

TM: Yes, well we’d had a few drinks. You know you get soldiers together. “You
fooled us on that one.”

SM: Anything else like that? Did you ever encounter anything else like that in
your experiences overseas in the military?

TM: No, that’s the first time I ever had feedback on a covert plan that we put out.

SM: That’s amazing. In terms of Afghanistan and what happened in Afghanistan
after the Soviets left, were you surprised that the fundamentalists became so powerful and
eventually took over?

TM: Yes, after the Soviets left in 1989, I went over there for my last trip in ’90.
As I mentioned, my mission was to make sure that they were also giving some of the
modern weapons to non-fundamentalists groups. I turned in a report on my trip, which
recommended that even covert army shipments should be followed up on!

It took until ’92 until the Mujahideen defended the Communist Afghan Army and
took Kabul. When they took Kabul they all had a loya jirga! It’s very similar to 2002
loya jirga. They all got together and agreed that the Rabini would be their president. The
UN blessed that with Holy Water. A year later Hekmatyar Gol, chief fundamentalist
attacked the Rabini government and started the civil war. The Pakistanis sort of
monitored that and waited to see what happened but and the civil war went on. It was a
stale mate so the Pakistanis at that time threw their weight in back of the Taliban. They
drove Rabini out of Kabul up to the northeast, the Tajiles and Ubecs formed a Northern
front up there and held out against the Taliban.

Then went into Afghanistan we started sending Special Force people with the,
Northern Alliance and calling in air strikes until the Taliban collapsed. Then the other
southern tribal groups started getting together and the Special Forces would assist them
also. Whenever the Taliban tried to organize resistance they’d call in air strikes on them.
That’s what caused the Taliban to collapse. Then we had the Afghans come to Germany
and select a leader. He was supposed to be a leader for six months, which he’s been.
Then they had this what they call a local tribal meeting Loya Jirga and they selected him
and he has 18months to draw up a new Constitution and then they’re supposed to vote.

SM: What do you think about this?
TM: I am very pessimistic, particularly for the US. We’re having our people
going into towns and searching, seizing weapons. I just read in the Bragg paper here that
they had a woman soldier playing an Afghan woman and they were searching the other
people and they didn’t search her. She got a pistol and shot someone. It’s part of the
program to teach them to be careful. I don’t think we should touch those people. We
should form local army units. We could send a company of our soldiers down to protect
them and then let the Afghans go in and do the searching. These people are a very proud
tribal people and they just hate foreigners pushing them around.

SM: That and how do you overcome that very powerful taboo against touching
women?
TM: You aren’t going to.

SM: How could an American soldier go into a village and search?
TM: Now, what they’re doing is having American women come along with them
to search the women.

SM: Is that acceptable in their society?
TM: They will turn more people against us I’m afraid. You’ve got these tribal
groups out there. The Tajiles, the Ubecs, the Pushdos and the rest. Their leaders are like
governors in their area. Right after the Mujahideen took over in ’92 these guys were
appointed governors in the area. They were running their regions in the country. Then
when the Taliban took over, they chased them out. Now when the Taliban was defeated
these people came back. They have an estimated 60,000 troops out in regional areas. We’re trying to train an Army of 5,000. Come on! I’m very pessimistic about this.

SM: What do you think about this idea that we can assist the current Afghani leadership to create a democracy? Based on your experience what kind of a foundation do the Afghani people have in terms of governance through democracy?

TM: None at all. They’re about the stage in civilization of England in the 12th Century. Where there were powerful dukes around the countryside. That’s what they’ve got, these powerful warlords if you want to call them that. They were running it as governors 1992. Even when the king was there, the orders don’t come out directly from the king. The king would call a meeting of these regional groups. They’d all come in, sit down and talk about it and agree what should happen. Then the king would take with what was agreed and pass it out. They never, ever in the history of Afghanistan have they had something where they’d go down and say this is what you’ve got to do. They had to get the regional ethnic groups together and agree what they would do. The regional groups are the ones that can host their own people.

SM: In terms of your pessimism does it also extend to this idea that the current leadership could develop a constitution that predicated on democratic principles?

TM: Well, if they develop a constitution what they’ll do is call in these regional groups and have a loya jirga and see what they’d accept.

SM: So they’ll do it in keeping with the Afghani tradition?

TM: Yes.

SM: So it won’t be democracy?

TM: Well if you come to it, they have a form of democracy right now. You have the villagers get together, like in New England the town meeting, you know? They agree to a program, then they get the villagers representative to go to the region and discuss what the region agrees to. Then the regions get together and go into Kabul and have a loya jirga then come up with a conclusion that all the regions can accept on. They won’t accept something where the government just sends down to the region director that says, “You’ll do this.” When the Communists had the coup against the king, they then tried to tell the locals this is what you’re going to have to do! That’s when the revolt stared.
They will not accept orders from the top that tells them what to do. They have to get all
together and develop a consensus. We don’t understand that.

SM: Who selects as you put it, I guess the regional governors? How do they
come to power, who selects them?

TM: The most powerful leader with the most troops would be the one running the
region.

SM: In that respect, it really is almost war lordism. You’re talking about a guy
who’s got money, land and an Army.

TM: That’s right.

SM: The people that live in that region, basically live under his rule.

TM: That’s it. He listens to them. He gets the town counsels together with the
regional groups and they discuss the problem together. They are like a colony in the
1600’s where all the men in that village have guns and they’re the village defenders. I
have a picture in one of my briefings where you have a grandfather, a father and a son all
in the local militia.

SM: That’s amazing. Well in light of your experiences, what would you like to
say to the American people in terms of what we should try to accomplish and how we
should try to accomplish it in Afghanistan?

TM: I think one of the most important things there, is start putting in money to
build roads. It’s one of the things that I feel, you can defeat an Army and the people turn
to guerrilla, you defeat the guerrillas. You can defeat the guerillas like the British have
with the Irish and the Israelis have with the Palestinians. What do you have then?
Terrorism. I firmly believe that whatever money you put into military aspects you should
also have a concurrent program to upgrade the living of the people in there. One of the
best things is roads and other things like hospitals and Schools Nation Building.

SM: So infrastructure improvement, things of that nature?

TM: We don’t have enough money to do that all around the world, so we’ve got
to be very circumspect.

SM: Do you think Afghanistan is one of those places we should invest some of
that capital to improve Afghanistan?
Well in 1992, Rabani was president sent General Safi who was an old friend of mine, to the US. That’s the one I mentioned I brought to Bragg to brief the SA. Safi was sent to go up to Congress to try and ask them to have the United Nations set up a Peace Keeping mission in Afghanistan. What we were told at that time, “Sorry that was part of the Cold War. Now, we’re engaged in the Middle East. The Afghans are on their own.” That’s what happened form ’92 to 2002.

If we had focused instead on it in 1992, we probably wouldn’t be having the problems we have now?

I feel that very strongly. I hope we learn something this time. Instead of going in and saying the women should do this and the women should do that, you’ve go to educate the people down to the village level so they will accept this first. Don’t put it down to them as a rule you must follow.

That’s already whip lashed against us, hasn’t it?

The government is trying in the schools to educate the children about today’s world.

I mean for instance when the Taliban were first removed and women went back, women were pulled back into the workforce. Women came back and took their jobs. That seems to be going back again a little bit towards the fundamentalism in Afghanistan.

Yes, if you look at when I grew up 80 years ago a guy ran his family and the woman did what the husband wanted her to do, within reason. You know what I mean. We’re now trying to sell what the Afghans consider the other extreme. You can’t go to the other extreme. You have to work your way toward democracy gradually. They have to get this group that’s in school now and teach them to start moving in that direction. They can’t push it down their throats.

I guess what would you say are the most important lessons we should take away so far from our experiences in Afghanistan?

One of them, we must take a look at the country and see what their culture calls for. We shouldn’t say, “Hey this is what we want you to do.” We take a look at what their culture is and try and assist the best aspects of their cultures to start them
moving on the road toward democracy. But not say if this country doesn’t want
democracy, we’re going to force them to have it.

SM: In terms of looking back even further now to Vietnam, what would you say
are the most important lessons we should take a way or should still take away from our
Vietnam War experience?

TM: Well at this stage in my life I look at our country, we’re 5% of the world’s
population. With China coming on line and India with a billion people our influence in
the world, gradually is going to shrink. So we’ve got to be prepared to evaluate what we
do to make sure we don’t get over extended in debts, which our children and
grandchildren will have to pay. Certain things we can’t solve, we shouldn’t try to solve,
we should leave it to the countries to solve and select only those things, which we think
we can be successful in.

SM: Do you think that the United States, our recent and current approach to
Vietnam, that is the normalization of the relationship, normalizing of relations between
the United States and Vietnam?

TM: I think we’re doing a good job. The people who are leading this are the
staffs at Texas Tech who are visiting the universities and bringing Vietnamese and
Cambodians here. That’s what I feel should be done.

SM: When that happened, when the United States first normalized relations with
Vietnam, back in the 1990s how did you feel when that happened? Did you think that we
should hold out until the Communist regime collapses like we’re trying to do in Cuba?

TM: No. Look we go together with Japan after World War II. We got together
with Germany. You fight your wars and then when the fight’s gone you look at the
political situation and do the best you can.

SM: Yes, sir. Is there anything else you’d like to talk about today?

TM: No, that’s about it.

SM: Outstanding.

TM: I’ll send you a letter when I get back home with these other names. I think
it’d be very useful.

SM: Ok, let me put a quick ending on this. Thank you very much sir, this will
end the interview with General Ted Mataxis.