Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Colonel Hal Vorhies on the 13th of April 2002 at approximately 9:20. We are in the Special Collections Library Interview room in Lubbock, Texas and this is part of the Vietnam Archive oral history project. Thank you sir, and why don’t we begin with a brief introduction if you would, just say when and where you were born, were you grew up.

Hal Vorhies: Okay, that’s a good place to begin, humorous birth I guess. I was born in Englewood, California at a place called the Stork’s Nest Maternity Hospital and it was October 21, 1930, and the doctor who delivered was Fate, F-A-T-E, so I frequently say I was born at the hands of fate. From there, this being pretty much still during the Depression we had a reasonably good life, my father was always able to find work and we lived in Englewood until about the fourth grade, then moved to Burbank. At this time the build-up was beginning in the defense effort in the United States and my dad got a job working with Lockheed aircraft in Burbank. We stayed there through 1947 and my parents moved to northern California and I stayed there for another year with a family that were friends of mine and finished high school and graduated from beautiful downtown Burbank high school, in 1948 and because of one of my instructors, a guy by the name of Ed Bedigan, who taught U.S. History and Civics, he was a Berkeley graduate and encouraged me to apply to go to University of California-Berkeley, but he also gave me some advice concerning the military, he said he had been in the Army, was drafted
into the Army and went in during World War II, he entered his service doing work in Japan in development of the government, the new Japanese government as an enlisted man, but doing work he said was what many of the officers there couldn’t do because of his own background, so he said it’s easy to do ROTC, get the commission, if there’s another war, you don’t have to go in as a private like I did. So, I took his advice, went in, got the commission, there was another war and so following my graduation, took me four and a half years, I largely had to put myself through school financially, which I’d have to say was not as difficult then as it is now, while they doubled the tuition when I was at University of California, it started with $12.50 a semester and it went to $25, that’s irrespective of number of hours, so I went into the Army and they took me to Fort Lee, Virginia for basic officer course, I was reassigned to Stockton, California, that was quartermaster course, Stockton, California to petroleum depo, didn’t stay there very long and the decided to send me off to Germany and I was assigned, went in to Bremerhaven, then they had a replacement depo there, and they were to assign officers to where they were required in Europe. I happened to be sent to France, I and another officer who was actually born French and had been drafted into the Army and got a commission, so it was good that I was with him because my French wasn’t very good. We made or way to Verdun, arrived at night and it was, there’s nothing there, no BOQs, nothing, so we kind of po-boy existence there for a few hours, we got driven up to another headquarters that night, only through his French were we able to survive. I eventually got a job, my assignment was in a quartermaster repair maintenance facility, which meant that I had a lot of French civilians working for me, they mostly were the, I had soldiers too, but because of that and because of being on a day to day business relationship with these people, my French improved to the point where I could carry on a reasonably decent social conversation, and occasionally give an order that could be understood.

SM: Just out of curiosity, how large was the American force contingent there, that was working with you, the American forces, the American soldiers?

HV: I had, I think, I had an hundred and twenty man platoon and a thirteen man detachment which is kind of a strange relationship. I had a platoon in, first in Metson, then in Verdun, we relocated the operation to Verdun which was headquarters for advanced section of the Communications zone which was the way it was laid, Army
people will understand that. My company headquarters was located on the coast of
France which was, maybe several hundred miles away. I had three company
commanders there and I only ever met one of them, because I had a separate platoon, but
military people will understand that as a platoon leader, it was a little bit different from
the normal platoon leader, I had my own property boot, I had my own Article 15
authority and essentially I was a platoon commander of what amounted to a separate
platoon but I was attached for administrative reasons to a local company, which had
higher authorities than I did, like court martial and things like that.

SM: Were you branched quartermaster?
HV: I was branched quartermaster
SM: Was that something that you knew going in, when you?
HV: Yes, because when you were in ROTC, you went into a branch course of
action, course of studies, so my course of studies was quartermaster.
SM: Did you choose that or did the Army choose that for you?
HV: It was a little bit of both, what they needed and what was available. Actually
my choice was to go in the Navy, my brother had been in the Navy in World War II< but
I couldn’t get in to ROTC because you had to have 20/20 vision unaided and I didn't have
20/20, so I went into.
SM: Your brother was in World War II?
HV: Yes.
SM: Did he talk very much about those experiences with you?
HV: Not too much, no, he was pretty close mouthed about it, a little bit. He and
one of my uncles about the same age had served in some of the same battles in the
Pacific, my uncle was in the Coast Guard which had been incorporated into the Navy
during the war, and I didn’t hear too much about it, it was just little snips and snaps of
what he did.
SM: Did their service in World War II have an effect on your decision, you
mentioned the professor, the teacher you had, that talked to you about military service,
did your brother’s and uncle’s service affect you very much that way?
HV: Not too much, actually my brother was gone most of that time. He came
back while we worked in the same, I had a part-time job working in a grocery store and
he was the manager of the store, the store was owned by his fiancée’s father, but we
didn’t live close to each other and I didn’t really see him a lot other than at the store and
that sort of thing so there wasn’t a lot of relationship between me and him on those kinds
of thing, but he didn’t talk about it any.

SM: And in college, what was your degree ultimately in?
HV: International relations. It was political science, international relations
specialization and at that point I kind of specialized in Asia, subsequently I got a Master’s
degree in specialization in Africa, international relations. That was my academic portions
of it. When we got over to France and, I got there in February 1954 and of course at that
time, the French had been engaged for a very long time in trying to re-establish their
colonies and I had a couple of conversations in the hotel I lived in, when I first got there,
with French officers who were, a couple of them were kind of sweet on a couple of girls
that worked in the hotel, so I’d see them at the bar, but they talked about Vietnam and
they were pained a lot I think, because they lost and they were pained because they lost, I
think one of them told me that about half of the San Sear classes had died or been
wounded badly enough they were no longer in the service in that Vietnam or, more
correctly at the time, Indochina War.

SM: That’s how they did refer to it correct, they called it Indochina?
HV: I never heard Vietnam, until 1959 so I didn’t know it existed this, but it was
Indochina, and the other thing about that relationship with French officers was at that
time I learned that their soldiers were not French soldiers, their soldiers were Vietnamese,
and to me that makes a big difference. The Vietnamese were fighting a war, apparently
voluntarily, there weren’t enough French soldiers and French officers to keep them at the
front line with a bayonet, they were there because they were being led and they followed
their leaders, and that meant a lot to me particularly during all the follow-up we had and
the United States concerning this means Civil War and we had no reason to be involved
and the people were oppressed and because it was a colony and those kind of things rang
pretty hollow with me after my experience with talking to the French officers, of course
that’s a narrow source, one has to admit, two or three officers but none the less, it wasn’t
a pleasant time for the people there and there were a lot of, well there weren’t as many
bodies in that sense because most of the French involvement was with military
involvement was the officers, but there was a lot of chagrin over having lost France and also all the businesses that France had up there, there was a lot of concern about that. I ran into that later when I was assigned there, a few years later, but they were a little more sanguine about that time because their businesses were still intact in the South, but not in the North because they lost huge amounts up there. The other concern was what happened to the people that were in the North, I didn’t know what those answers were any more. At the time also, as I recall, they were having some problems in Algeria, and so morale I would have to say in France, didn’t seem too good. I don’t know if it worked out that way, but the Algerians that I had working for me, I only had three or four working for me, were not treated very well by the French, they were more or less treated like blacks in the United States on the ‘50s, not necessarily separate but equal facilities, but second-class citizens in France.

SM: Were there Indochinese there as well as the Algerians?
HV: I didn’t know any when they were in France.
SM: The relationship that, well the discussions that you had with these French officers, were they open, where they frank in discussing these types of issues or did that come after time, after you’d been there for a certain amount of time?
HV: I think they were probably frank in as much as you go, but bear in mind, my French was at that time, even conversational French was not very strong, so any subtle issues probably would have escaped me, so it wasn’t a nice hard understandable issue anyway, words that I could deduce, because English wasn’t being spoken in that context.
SM: As a quartermaster officer, what were your responsibilities there, what you were you doing?
HV: At that time in France? I ran a repair for soldier, we repaired clothing, individual equipment, forklift trucks, refrigeration equipment, safes, office equipment, tentage and office equipment, tune type by the chicockaders and those kinds of things. So our responsibility was for what amounted to all of northeastern France wherever there were U.S. troops located and we had a lot of depots there, ammunition and petroleum, things like. As a matter of fact, ammunition reminds me, we had a big investigation while I was there, because some of the ammunition from one of our depots appeared in Algeria and.
SM: Who was using it, in Algeria?

HV: I think that it was not being used by the French, ammunition depots were not very well guarded, at that time and they were widely spread, just by nature of storing ammunition, you can’t bunch it up or you’ll lose it all, so we had these igloo mounds, dirt covered, spread around over a very large acreage, so if you didn’t have a lot of soldiers guarding it, and we didn’t have the electronic means like we would today to discover that somebody had opened the door, so they lost it.

SM: Was that the major security issue that you heard about and experienced there, or were there other security issues as well.

HV: That was the major one that I can recall happening at that time. There wasn’t anything directed to the Americans to speak of, other than stealing from us. The other thing that was a security issue, not for me personally, but some of my cohorts who were out there, engineers and those guys, was in clearing land in that part of France, they were uncovering munitions from World War I and some from World War II. They were going to have a big ceremony at the cemetery there and the engineers went up to clear some parking area, make them parking lots and one of my friends, an Engineer Lieutenant, was up there one day and a bulldozer uncovered a machine gun nest, complete with machine gun and skeletons. It had been buried with artillery fire, nearby rounds, and that was not terribly unusual. That particular area had signs all over it, warning people not to go into the area because there was mustard gas there, mustard is very persistent and so even in 1954, there was a mustard gas hazard in the area -- that’s kind of an oily substance, doesn’t evaporate, persistent -- there were a lot of duds around in the area. I picked up some link belt ammunition from World War I one day in Wing Reserve, I guess its still that way.

SM: Did you keep it?

HV: Yes. I shouldn’t have, it was probably dangerous. I don’t know where it is. I will not send it to you.

SM: We’re not supposed to take live power technics anyway, so that’s good, but that’s a really amazing story.

HV: That was an amazing security problem, from a family standpoint there it was very difficult. There were, we had no BOQs, we had troop barracks for bachelor troops
but we had no family housing when I got there, so when we lived on economy. I lived in
a house, second floor of a house that belonged to a retired Brigadier General, and very,
very meager and the heat was pretty poor, and Generals wife told us when we first moved
in, places were very hard to find by the way, and you weren’t allowed to go out and look
for your own, you had to get them through the housing office, because they wanted to
avoid price competition, so we had what amounted to a living room, a bathroom, that is a
room with a bathtub and sink and a bedroom and the toilet was downstairs and the
landlady, when we moved in she said, please let me know when you want to take a bath,
two or three days before you want to take a bath and I’ll pipe the heat into the bathroom,
so you’ll have more heat when you take a bath, very French. But she gave good advice
too, she said; do not under any circumstances drink the milk without boiling it.

SM: Why?

HV: I asked one of our veterinarians there, I said, I got this advice, what’s the
story and he said well only abut fifteen percent of the milk cows in France have been
tested for tuberculosis and all of them had tuberculosis.

SM: And they didn’t pasteurize?

HV: No, well that’s a French thing, right.

SM: Yes, I know, that’s what I’m saying.

HV: Maybe Pasteur was in the wrong political party, but they did not there
anyway, and so the solution to that was if you used local milk you did boil it, do your
own pasteurization.

SM: What about water was the water okay to drink?

HV: We did.

SM: No problems?

HV: I don’t think there was any problems. My first daughter was born there and
registered in an area that was a local meredy, like a little City Hall for that area, and it
was registered there because she was born on a military compound in a hospital in
Verdun. Interestingly enough, we went back there in 1980s and visited that meredy and
they just were, as French are in the countryside, they’re pro-American, not in the cities,
but in the countryside they’re pro-American, very friendly to us, and the woman said you
know, it’s really sad, we no longer register any more births because after the Americans
left we no longer have a hospital in this area, but she took my daughter back and showed
her the basic documents and did a very un-French thing, she gave her copies of those and
didn’t require the fiscal stamps that French always require whenever they do anything,
but they were very kind to us. When I went over to the military Casserne, it was a
Sunday, to see if we could walk around and look at it since I’d been stationed there, the
Lieutenant was there, just was ecstatic that we had to come to see his place and so he
detailed a Private to walk us around, and show us every place we wanted to go, and this is
not what Americans normally think of, in terms of digging France with French because
you usually think of them as so having American, but certainly not in that part of the
world.

SM: While you were there in the mid-50’s, what was the atmosphere like, the
attitude towards Americans like them, was it that way as well, was it friendly or was there
a little bit more?

HV: No, it was not quite that friendly and bear in mind that DeGaulle kicked us
out in, when was it, ’63, so there was some – France has always had a problem with the
United States, militarily and the problem is the French have not won a major battle since
Napoleon’s time and when you think about a nation’s history, most nation’s history are
bound up in their military history and they haven’t got one, and then in those days they
were losing Algeria, they lost Indochina, their battles were not going their way, they
won’t admit it but they had not got over the fact that while DeGaulle took Paris, the
American forces advancing on Paris halted until DeGaulle could come forward with his
troops, the German commander had already surrendered, so that DeGaulle could
triumphantly go in as if he came through France. Well, obfuscation like that does not
build morale, it tends to create a little bit of guilt and so the French, while many of them
were very pleased with the fact the United States had helped to liberate their country, it
was a national insult in many ways too, so the people who were kind of, less locally
oriented, not like the people in Verdun were more oriented on Verdun, I think they have a
tendency not to like us, not unhappy at all that the United States was kicked out and we
left all those very nice facilities that we had built, they were building a new depo when I
was there. They built new housing for the families when I was there, and a couple of
airfields and that red raid rat, and these depot facilities that we put in, all those affected,
so I think they were happy with that, but not too happy with us, and they never are particularly happy with us, even later when I was in Brussells and the French were talking about coming back into NATO, a friend of mine in the embassy, in the American embassy -- a little bit of background here, the United States had three ambassadors in Brussells, one ambassador to NATO who is selected jointly by the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, the ambassador to the European community, and the ambassador to Belgium -- so anyway one of my friends at the NATO mission told me that a French officer had come to him and asked him what concessions were we going to make and what incentives were we going to make to bring the French back into the military side of NATO, which was enough to make your jaw drop, and the American said, you got that wrong, it’s the other way around, you have declared yourself to be out of NATO years and years ago, now you want back in, what’s the price? So that’s France and the United States, but on a one to one basis, getting along with French officers is not difficult.

SM: In the countryside in France while you were there, you mentioned of course the distinction between the countryside and the cities, I guess, later and today perhaps. Earlier was that distinction still there that the countryside was still a little bit more friendly to Americans generally?

HV: Yes, I used French in Metts and Verdun. As a matter of fact when I moved to Verdun from Metts, I’d lived in Metts for only five months, when I moved to Verdun from Metts the people told me I spoke French with a German accent, because Metts had belonged to Germany for 75 years, so they were astute enough to notice my bad French, but my German accent with my French. Go down to Pairs in those days, and you couldn’t get the time of day from somebody if your French wasn’t perfect. It was just; you’ve got to speak perfect French. Later, when I was there in early 90s, traveling down to France it was interesting to sit in a hotel after having been signed in, and the guy wouldn’t speak to me in English, he would only speak to me in French, even my bad French, he would accept my bad French at that time, would only speak to me in French, and then I was sitting in the lobby and some people came in, they turned out to be Eastern Europeans, speaking some Slavic language, and the only way this guy could communicate with them was in English. Right after that, some Japanese came in and the only way this guy could communicate with them was in English and I was just in my
glory sitting there watching him, but anyway that’s they city thing, big cities all over are
rude, that’s not unique to France, but in the countryside, even when we were back there
in the 80s they were just so happy to have us there, talking and so there’s a huge
difference, but hey I find, I live in Arlington, Virginia. I have a house in Clarksville,
Virginia which is right on the North Carolina border and its almost the same thing, the
way you’re treated one versus the other.

SM: In France at the time, did you detect any animosity because the United
States did not commit as much as the French wanted us to, to defending Indochina?

HV: No, well, I mean there may have been there someplace.

SM: But based on your experience.

HV: Not where I was. That might have been, because the people was living, was
the people in town wouldn’t have known what we were doing, that might have been true
in the halls of military and diplomatic corps in Paris.

SM: You said the U.S. military facilities were being built up while you were
there, for that early time, that included a hospital and as you said, quarters and things of
that nature. Did you find that over time the facilities that the U.S. forces had were
adequate or?

HV: Oh, they were terribly inadequate.

SM: They were inadequate?

HV: Very inadequate, when I first got there, before we came to Metts, we
shoveled the manure out of the stables to put our officers club in, built by hand by
volunteer labor. My shop was located in a stable with inadequate everything, everything
was there, we’re talking not very long after the war of course, World War II, so
everything was inadequate. When we moved to Verdun, that was the headquarters and
they had taken over a French concern to have that headquarters, but the other facilities,
the reason I was moved up there was because they built a industrial area for our
ordnance, our long ray, my repair facility, warehouses and vehicle repairs and stuff like
that. That was newly built by us because we needed it and we built the housing because
we needed it and we still had a shortage on our depot facilities and so our whole area
depo facilities built and also a new housing area and a school was built because there
wasn’t a school there, so all of that stuff was put in because we were there, that was the
logical place if we were going to fight Soviet Union again, bring things into France, we
have pipeline built across France to bring petroleum up and the roads were designed that
way, our evacuation plan for dependents went through France to the coast, all that went
by the wayside when we became very illogical and DeGaulle kicked us out, then our
supplies came through Bremerhaven up in the north of Germany, which is not quite the
right place if you’re going to be fighting the Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact. I don’t think
we planned to build these things just to give them to DeGaulle.

SM: Now that Cold War atmosphere, how much of that permeated your everyday
life in France, this concern over the Soviet Union, concern over the possible invasion of
Europe by the Soviets?

HV: It was, I don’t think about that daily any more than when I lived in
Washington and consider I live in a target today, but I do think about it from time to time.
Occasionally when I’m out walking and I hear the combat air patrol flying over, I think
what the, of course it flies over all the time, but there were some things though that
reminded me of it because we had to go through these drills from time to time,
evacuation drills, everybody who had a car there had to fill out a form which essentially
transferred the title of that car to the U.S. government when a certain alert level was
reached, that is hostilities. The reason for that was otherwise you get in trouble with the
French bureaucracies and things like that, those cars then belong to U.S. government,
they had privileges that an individual car wouldn’t have. We were using scrip money in
those days and we stored in a vault in Verdun, I think it was two million dollars in green,
small bills, small being $20s and, and so I think it was once a month we had to inventory
that money and usually it was easy because there were treasury packs so you just this
one, ten thousand ten times, except that it had been counted over times so much that some
of those treasury packs had broken and I got caught on the detail on day of doing the
money inventory and it was a real chore because count that, well I remind you again,
because why did we have that money, to set up positions along the roads out of France
from the Warsaw Pact, edge of the nation, France, money was to be distributed, points
along that road and as Americans came by on their way, they were to be handed some
green, cause green was an acceptable currency and thought to be acceptable even in
wartime and it would have been, handed out some green because we had more than we
had no way to get them to coast except put them on their own, but not on their own
without money, so that’s what that money was for, to assist in the evacuation of non-
combatants, so that was a reminder, and of course the other training we did was always a
reminder, even though we were support troops, we all had to have, our B mission was
fight as infantry as required.

SM: Did you get much range time, in terms of actual equipments training and
things like that?

HV: What kind?

SM: Weapons training?

HV: Yes, we had weapons training.

SM: Qualification?

HV: Yes, maintaining qualifications.

SM: The Army today is very big on PT, what was PT like in the ‘50s for a unit
serving overseas like that, was it a constant thing for you guys?

HV: Yes, it was required. I don’t think that was as much emphasis on physical
fitness then as there is now, in those kinds of units, there certainly were in the combat
arms units, less emphasis in headquarters elements and others and one of the reasons for
less emphasis is it takes time, and you take an hour out of a guy’s day when he’s
supposed to be issuing rations or repairing equipment, that’s one thing. If you take an
hour of an infantryman’s day, and artilleryman’s day, that’s part of his day, that is part of
his combat arms training. It should be part of the other guys except that the people who
have the mission to get the food out, get the fuel out, things like that, it tends to be an
imposition on mission and so its, kind of talked down you might say, still done, you had
to do your, I think we had to do PT testing there, I’m not sure I can’t remember.

SM: And the drills you mentioned, with regard to the possibility of a Soviet
invasion or what not, what about potential nuclear drills, drills in the event that nuclear
weapons were used?

HV: I don’t recall that we did any of that, first place; Soviet Union didn’t have
nuclear weapons.

SM: They had atomic weapons.

HV: No, not in 1950. When did they get their first nuclear weapons?
SM: Oh, they detonated in the late 40’s. They detonated atomic in the late 40s, nuclear I can’t remember.

HV: In 40, after ours went, but they had no delivery systems at that time.

SM: Oh, okay so there was no concern because they didn’t have.

HV: I don’t recall being concerned about nuclear weapons in 1954 and 55.

SM: Actual weapons being deployed?

HV: There was concern about our own.

SM: I know the security issue. Didn’t we have atomic weapons deployed into France?

HV: Let me back off a little minute. There was a concern about nuclear weapons at that time, I’d forgotten about it. And the reason I remember it now is that the alternate NATO headquarters, one of the alternate headquarters was in a couple of the bunkers on the Maginot Line and I went on a tour of that one time and one of the things they talked about was the cover they had on the gun turrets, 30 centimeters of steel so they would pop up to fire and they said that would be nuclear-proof. Now, I don’t know whether that was a concern over existing Soviet capabilities or presumed Soviet capabilities, so there was that, yes. But I don’t recall that we did down in our operation area too much of that.

SM: When did you leave France?

HV: I left France in Christmas of 1956 and went back to Fort Riley, Kansas. Stayed there at Fort Riley, I had applied for a regular Army commission. I was a reservist when I was in France and I was allowed to extend for a year because I liked what I was doing and I decided at the end of that time that I really liked the Army, and so that was when I made a career decision at that time, in order to be career you really want to be regular Army officer, but you had to apply, there was a board action. So I applied for that, I actually went through the board at Fort Lee, Virginia when I came back to France I went through Fort Lee through a school and then on then to Fort Riley. I went through the board at Fort Lee and then after the board action, I’d gone to Fort Riley, and I’m serving in a quartermaster job there, part of going regular Army was you had to serve a two-year combat-arms tour, so while I was at Fort Riley, I transferred from quartermaster to artillery and was an artillery battle commander in Division Artillery, 105 Howitzer section. I didn’t have 105 Howitzer, I had the service company and we had
Pack 75 for a service company. Stayed there and then they sent me down to artillery school at Fort Sill so I was called the battery officer person, so I went through artillery school, came back up to Fort Riley, while I was in the battalion at the time I go alerted to overseas assignment to Vietnam, and I didn’t know where Vietnam was, never heard of it so nobody I knew had went. You’ve got to bear in mind, at Fort Riley there were no national newspapers there and I never had a television so I didn’t have television either. So I went up to the G-2 section, the intelligence section at division headquarters and said give me whatever you know about Vietnam, I’m supposed to go there and the guy went in and brought out the books and they were Indochina books, so immediately I knew that I just faced a name change, so it wasn’t an area I was unfamiliar with from the standpoint of history or geography I didn’t know it. And so I went out to, I was assigned out to Vietnam, went through California, we flew commercial on a piston engine, four engine aircraft, which we hop-scotched across the Pacific and we stayed overnight in Okinawa as I recall. I can’t remember what else we did, probably more than once I suppose. And then I got to Manila and at Manila I was told to stay there because there was a troop ceiling on the advisory group and temporary equipment recovery mission and they couldn’t put anybody in until they took somebody out, so I had to wait in Manila for four days until somebody came out, then I could go in, so it was pretty tight control it seemed to me like, I believe the numbers were equally divided between MAG, military assistance advisory group, which mostly were advising the combat arms division, and the temporary equipment recovery mission and our job was to validate the fact that we shipped things out of Vietnam because the requirement was if we wanted to put a truck into Vietnam we had to take a truck out first, so the old equipment that was destroyed, damaged or whatever had to be either shipped out or totally destroyed in-country and that had to be validated, It was validated the shipments out and the destruction was validated by the International Control Commission and when that was validated then we could bring new stuff in. Well, that was the role of the temporary equipment recovery mission supposedly. The real mission of the temporary equipment recovery mission, we did the other one too, but the real mission was to provide advisory support to the non-combat arms in the Vietnamese military for the Army that meant chemical quartermaster military police, transportation those guys, signal and so that’s what I went in there with. I went in
the headquarters first of MAG term in Saigon and worked, actually I worked quite a bit
with the Vietnamese quartermaster chief, and our Army would call him the quartermaster
general but he was Lieutenant colonel there and so that turned out to be a pretty
important effort. Some of the things we were doing was trying to work up a field ration
for them and we had our own C rations, we’re trying to work up a field ration for them
that would be nutritionally adequate, that could be carried without refrigeration without a
lot of folderol like putting it in cans and stuff like that.

SM: And based on what they are used to eating, like rice and things of that
nature?

HV: Yes, their diet but supplemented in ways that would be nutritionally
adequate for them. For example, you can give them rice in a long tube, like an extended
sock so to speak that they would wear over their shoulder and that was one thing. To get
the protein in there, something called Nuoc-man, Nuoc-man is high protein content, very
high protein content, so it was one of the things at least the scheming, but I never saw the
end product, but that was what we were doing with the Vietnamese, to try to develop
something we could support that would be useful to them and don’t make the mistake of
issuing C rations which had been done before in other places, like Korea. Anyway, my
relationship with the chief quartermaster served a good purpose later on. When we got to
Saigon all officers were interviewed, or given guidance by the chief of staff, and the chief
of staff gave us some guidance, one of which was United States is providing advisors to
Cambodia and we’re providing advisors to Vietnam. Cambodia and Vietnam don’t get
along, they’re not on good terms so don’t do anything in your role working with the
Vietnamese that’s going to cause a problem, viz a viz our efforts in Cambodia, and so
that was one. Another one had to do with health issues, he said, there’s a lot of VD here,
but there’s a lot of tuberculosis. We can cure VD, but tuberculosis is pretty tough so
don’t kiss them. The third admonition was if you get in a contest with your counterpart,
with Vietnamese officer counterparts, any of them, and the contest gets anywhere near
serious you’re out of here, whatever you did was wrong, it didn’t matter what was right
or wrong, whatever you did was wrong and you were out of there. So that proved useful
to me later on when I did have a contest with one of my counterparts and of course this
was after I’d moved up to Nha Trang was directly advising units and the guy I had a
problem with, who had a problem with me maybe was a political appointee to his rank
and he had a very elevated view of his capabilities, which were not very much and he was
absolutely no leader, but we had a contest so I thought well I might as well pack up but
he also was quartermaster officer, chief of quartermaster called him in, dressed him down
so I didn’t have to leave country, so it wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t already had a
relationship with the guy, had some respect for me so it worked out nicely for me, well
nicely, wasn’t very nice, but it worked out.

SM: When you first got your orders to go to Vietnam and then when you realized
Vietnam was Indochina, what did you think in terms of, you must have known about the
advisory presence occurring?

HV: Actually, I didn’t know too much about it, no. There wasn’t much
information in my area in France. There wasn’t much information when I was back at
the quartermaster school in that area out there and there wasn’t much going around in the
first division at that time about the advisory effort, so really, when I went up to G-2
almost all the information I got was the kinds of things you get on an area study type of
thing and that’s all the books they had. I don’t think there was anything up there that told
me that there was such a thing as TERM. I knew MAG, because that’s what the orders
said, and I guess TERM was in there as a part of this, had probably said MAG/TERM in
the orders, I don’t know. Maybe I’ll find those and give them to you, but I didn’t know
what those things were, so that was a matter of orientation.

SM: When you first arrived in country, what were your first impressions?

HV: Smell. I think today you could blind fold me and set me down in Cholon,
the Chinese portion of Saigon and I would know where I was. But that, and I really
hadn’t been in Asia before, to speak of. I’d lived with Asians because I, m from
California, we had family friends who were Japanese. Some of them got relocated; all of
them got relocated to during the war, and then Chinese friends so that was not strange to
me. What was strange was a Chinatown that was a little bit more than the Los Angeles
Chinatown, San Francisco Chinatown, things that I hadn’t realized. So I had a learning
process there in terms of culture, quite a learning process and it came fast because in
essence, living in Saigon, it was like living on the economy. We ate in mess but we did a
lot of nightlife downtown. In fact when I got there I came into the bar and there was a
guy there by the name of Dean Shotwell, Air Force Captain, and the night I got there I
went up to the bar and he said, you just got here, yes. He said, you should have been here
during the good old days and here’s 1959 what were the good old days he said, in 1954.
He had been there as an Air Force officer during the time that the exodus was occurring
out of North Vietnam and the U.S. was trying to bring as many people south as they
could and all that is pretty well documented but it was pretty tough on particular
Catholics up there and so there was just a lot of people coming down. And wide open
city of Saigon in those days, gambling, big time gambling big time prostitution so that
was the good old days as far as he was concerned.

SM: Of course the issue of gambling or more important I guess, prostitution a lot
of people criticize American conventional escalation it fostered creation of a larger
population of prostitutes, but of course at this point the U.S. presence is very small. Is this
the prostitutes were not.

HV: These were there, they were so organized, a house of five hundred women
was called the house of a thousand tits but that was there long before U.S. forces were
there, I mean that was an institution in itself and it was a gambling and a whorehouse
kind of combined, I’m told. It was pretty well shut down by the time I got there. It was
shut down by the time I got there.

SM: But really it was catering to Vietnamese as well as anybody who had the
money to go in?

HV: Well, not just Vietnamese, Chinese too, because there’s a big Chinese
population in Saigon and a lot of other foreigners, and you can see that now. The
prostitution in Thailand is huge and has very little do with American presence, mostly has
to do with tourists coming in for purposes of illicit sex. The other thing that happened in
the bar that night was another guy came up and he said, you just got in? Yes. I had a, you
got thirteen months here, I said yes. He said if I had that long to do I’d cut my throat and
he walked off and Shotwell says he’s been here for two weeks.

SM: What was the morale of the overall American presence other Americans that
you came into contact with, was what morale like of American advisors?

HV: Good, it was good. People had a mission and in Saigon, you don’t have the
ordinary complaints with their emotionally against the command structure, you know,
you didn’t like this guy or that guy, and there were some complaints about support but
the morale I thought was pretty good, everybody I talked to. And I maybe even, the
morale was good in Saigon because people liked Saigon, Saigon’s a big recreational
town, lots of night life, going out on the streets and getting secol erases, you know secol
erases.

SM: Yes.

HV: So big recreation town so morale was pretty good, marital fidelity wasn’t so
good. You get upcountry where people are working with the Vietnamese counterparts, I
thought it was pretty easily, almost the same thing as France, you get out of the big city
you’re in a different culture, somewhat. And people there had a mission, the advisor to
the Vietnamese NCO academy; living there in Nha Trang he had a great job. The
Vietnamese NCOs at the Academy and the family over there. He was a godlike hero, he
was a great leader, he had run a recondo school, where was it, in Fort Knox, I think and
come out there to do that NCO cabin, a huge amount of charisma, a medal of honor
winner from Korea and he would do crazy stunts but the Vietnamese loved it. When they
had visitors to the Academy, he wanted to demonstrate the marksmanship training that
these guys had had with an M-1 carbine, which is notoriously inadequate, the guys name
is Limeral Latin by the way, he would stand like maybe three, four feet from the target,
he would stand at the target on top of the button and have the guy fire a target and he
would lean over and point to the strike of the bullet on the target and then step back and
the next guy would fire, that’s kind of out of your mind unless you have an awful lot of
confidence in the guys doing the shooting. Well that, those guys loved it, they’d do
anything, I think, I don’t know if they’d mutiny against their commander if they told him
to, but he loved his work there he was doing great and because he was admired he got a
lot of what I call psychic income and it’s the kind of rewards that’s better than money.
And the rest of us had all of our frustrations in terms of dealing with, trying to do
something that we bit off, which from a technical service standpoint, support service
standpoint. The ARVN was built on a French standards of the French technical services
are organized different from ours and we changed them to fit them into our mold because
it made supply better but it really screwed up what you would call training for an
ordnance officer who’s used to dealing with things with ordinarily our quartermaster
would do, and now we got a new quartermaster and they don’t necessarily know, because this guy’s an ordnance guy. It really caused a lot of training problems and I don’t think it was ever anticipated at the level at which those decisions were made to structure them for reasons of supply chain rather than command chain. I guess I’d have to say that we would have been better off the be more flexible and accommodating our supply chain to their methods than we were to ours. Maybe not, I guess the long-term view was if they were going to survive forever and win that war, it probably would have been better if they’d been more closely aligned to ours, but at the moment it was a training problem. The other problem was just terrible shortage of the things that they needed and we had no ability to improve on that up at the advisory level, except reporting. We had the frustration of doing reports that were absolutely totally meaningless and took a huge amount of time. The one that was the most meaningless and took the most time was something required by Congress which was called and end use report, where were these things going, what they were being used for, and it was big long lists that each unit had of this equipment that we had to state what it was being used for, where it was being used. Usually, check block this check block that but you still had to do it, you had to go through those things, and you could do it. I had four units I was advising as a quartermaster there locally and I had three outlining ones that I could do fairly easily, but I, at one point, because of rotations of people, at one point I was the official advisor to a couple of signal depots, a medical hospital, a military tribunal, and derivatives of those in other outlying locations in Nha Trang and in other places. I was based in Nha Trang, so at one point I had twenty or so of these end use reports to make take all my time, so I just, without telling anybody, I just didn’t send them in, and next report period came around, I had the forms but I didn’t send them back next report period came around, I had the forms and didn’t send them back. I never hear from them, so apparently nobody in Saigon was looking at them, so I thought that was a great victory.

SM: Yes, sir and on that note why don’t we take a break. This will end the first interview with Colonel Hal Vorhies.

Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Colonel Harold Vorhies on the 26th of April 2002 at approximately 9:05 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock, Texas and sir; you’re not on home in Virginia?
Hal Vorhies. I am in Clarksville, Virginia, up by the lake.

SM: Oh, in Clarksville, Virginia, okay, your home by the lake. Let’s begin today’s interview discussing some more of your duties and responsibilities as an advisor during your first tour, and if you would describe the various responsibilities and some of the difficulties you faced as an advisor, because you were spread a little bit more thin than perhaps many advisors were.

HV: Yes, I was spread thin in both directions, one geographically, and the other in terms of the kinds of units to which I was eventually assigned as an advisor. Originally I started off being advisor to whole Vietnamese quartermaster units in a certain core area, which traveled from Dalat down to Pleiku, Quang Ngai, Kontum, and a few places in between where military units existed. I trained of course, which way I was based, being spread thin like that, it’s very hard to develop the kind of a relationship you need with those outlying units. The relationship between me and the commander in those units, so my advisor capacity was in large part being facilitated on a separate channel of communications, if those units needed to get something down, they needed something, just needed to ask questions from time to time. On the other hand as an experienced military officer, at least in the quartermaster and artillery field, I could provide advice to those people if I saw something was wrong, and they could ask me questions if they didn’t understand. Frequently, you did see things wrong as an advisor, from out of town so to speak and provide assistance. That was what I did for mostly the Signal Corps Units and the Quartermaster units that I became advisor to, Eventually I was advisor on paper anyway, to hospitals and medical depots, signal units with operating units an depot units and as I mentioned earlier, the military tribunal but that was on paper only. I never really did anything [?]. With the others I did some things, reporting deployments was part of it, there were these reports that we had to make through our own channels about how they were using the equipment and if they were using the equipment that we had been providing and more importantly, if they were misusing it, although I never saw much of that. An example of just one of the things you do as an advisor when you’re not on the scene, this was actually before I went to Nha Trang, I visited a unit at Tay Ninh, a quartermaster rock unit there and discovered that they had warehouses in an area where the grass was up five, six feet tall, was growing right up to the building so I talked to the
commander about getting that cut down so he would have fields of fire to protect his area. I don’t think he ever did that, but that kind of thing, but kinds of advice about securing the facilities from the, that ordinarily we would have practiced in our own units, Interestingly enough, about ten days after I was out at that unit, we always been able to do those things, he got attacked by a Vietcong unit and they ran off with several trucks loaded with stuff, food and weapons and ammunition and it turned out an investigation after that took place. He had about 40 to 50 percent actual strength although he was reporting a hundred percent strength and those were I think what we called at the last symposium, ghost people, in those cases I think it was people who were no longer associated with the unit at all and he was drawing salary for them, didn’t have to pay them.

SM: Was that the only instance where you encountered that, where a commander was carrying more men on the books than he actually had in his unit so that he could continue drawing additional pay for them and of course putting it in his pocket.

HV: That’s the only one I know about, I didn’t know about it at the time I was visiting, that came out part of the investigation to the loss of all the supplies and equipment.

SM: Do you know if he was relieved of his command after that incident?

HV: I don’t know I wasn’t a direct advisor to him. I had been called out there by the detachment that I was in Saigon with, that was assigned in Saigon and I was called out there by the detachment to look that over because they didn’t have an officer out there that was in that particular branch of the Army, but it was an interesting detachment out there. They had their housing arrangement, where they had me was about a block from the mess hall they were eating in and the detachment commander, for security reasons required that I travel that one block by Jeep, no walk, and it was, it was right out toward the Cambodian border and not a very secure area, there's a mountain there called Lu By Den that reputedly when I was out there, some American or Vietnamese units shared a spring on that mountain with the VC units, by mutual agreements they didn’t attack the spring.

SM: Because it was a good water supply?
HV: Yes, I guess, that was an interesting trip for me also because I was able to
visit, one of the Cao Dai, temples out there. I had some discussions with the priest in
Vietnam, had lunch with him. When the cow dies it was one of those, head to his arm, I
got down so dirty that French regime, before we got there, by the time I got there they
didn’t have any units any more even though they had extensive barracks and massive
facilities, rather large I would say at least a battalion sized unit could have been there,
come out real easily.

SM: Now the Cao Dai temple that you visited, the priest that you ate lunch with,
what were your impressions of the religion itself and the temple and of course whatever
discussions you might have had with the priest?

HV: The Cao Dai temple was very colorful. It was mostly plaster with a lot of
colorful painting on it. I don’t remember too much about the religion, but some of their
icons were rather centrifugal, it was kind of a composite of religions and I didn’t get into
any deep discussions with him on that, and one of the reasons for that was we were
working in French and that wasn’t a terribly strong, I had lived in France for three years
and used it there not too long before that so I was reasonably able to carry on social
conversations, but when you got into anything like a business transaction or dealing in
theological things I wasn’t too strong. It was kind of a friendly visit and then they were
describing more their structures that and not the religion itself. He probably, most of
what I ever knew about that religion I read about before I got there.

SM: Now your visit there, was that the result of some kind of responsibilities you
had as an advisor, or was it you just passing through and stopped?

HV: No, I was there and interested and so spent, actually I spent a day with, very
pleasant.

SM: Now, you mentioned earlier of course, that one of the supply depots, the
Vietnamese supply deos that you were advising supply units there was eventually hit by
the Vietcong and that made me curious about your personal experiences having to travel
so much, how would you travel?

HV: When I was in the, my first tour over there when I was in Three Corps I
traveled by Jeep. The requirement for us at that time, well the MAG requirement, was
that whenever we traveled out of town we were supposed to go with at least two vehicles,
so that mean two advisors had to coordinate their trips to various locations throughout the region and that almost never could be done. Several of the advisors in Nha Trang, each of them, like the ordnance officer that was there when I got there, he had ordnance units all over the area as I did quartermaster units and it was very difficult to schedule things, so in practice we ended up, I would go out with my Jeep and driver and the driver very soon, I figured out that I was probably more at risk riding in a Jeep without the prefect Vietnamese driver, than I was driving it myself, so ordinarily I would drive, a Vietnamese soldier with me would be riding shotgun. In terms of self-protection, the maximum I was able to carry at any time, as a practical matter was a Thompson sub machine gun, with a box full of grenades, white phosphorus and just sat there in between the seats in front of the Jeep, white phosphorus of course was a smoke grenade, that’s not choice, it created a lot of smoke, but grenades were what they were supposed to do, kill people. Mostly the way, that’s the only way I traveled within the region, although occasionally I could get a ride from Nha Trang to Pleiku by airplane, most of the time it was by road. The other advisors followed the same pattern, we did do a recreational trip one time, one of the advisors and his wife, me and my wife took two jeeps form Nha Trang to Dalat, same armaments but without the Vietnamese soldiers with us, and my wife’s armament by the way, she couldn’t work the slide on a 45 so her armament, strength wise, so her armament was a double barreled shotgun, I had my dad’s number one, chopped off the barrels to about fifteen inches or so, told her that she should be very careful that she didn’t shoot any of the soldiers that were guarding our house, if she pointed it at anybody they’d probably got away anyway, but we had in that continuing on that, I kept weapons at the house for protection, although we had five soldiers that were responsible for guarding me and my family, same thing, Thompson sub-machine gun.

SM: You had five ARVN soldiers that protected your house and family?
HV: Yes.
SM: Wow, was that standard for advisors?
HV: Not at any one time of course, but five was the, because they had 24 hour requirement.
SM: Right, so they rotated?
HV: Yes, but the house I had an outbuilding, then had in a maid’s quarters and a kitchen and laundry and a garage and so one of those maid’s quarters thing became the soldiers rest area and the place they could sleep when they weren’t on guard when they were at the house. Their unit was very nearby, it was about two or three blocks away, so they weren’t too distant from authority, their bunks weren’t when they were guarding house they were, I, one time, asked the guy that was my counterpart in fighting of soldiers, told him I didn’t really think it was all necessary and he said he thought it necessary because if anything happened to me and my family he was toast.

SM: He was what?

HV: So we kept them all the time. My kids played with them, two girls, we were there for fourteen months, ranges of two to five during that period of time, 1957, but the soldiers were pretty attentive to their duties. I have no complaints with it; I just thought it was a waste although the Vietcong were not very active around Nha Trang at that time, the nearest Vietcong incident when I lived there with the family there was about a mile away, which is close enough, too close.

SM: Now did the other American advisors you knew and worked with have similar security?

HV: Yes, and it depended on their counterpart as to how much, how often, but they did have it, there other families, there were six families in Nha Trang and so they all had guards and then the detachment at the hotel, had a guard detachment with it as well. When I first got there, the area I lived in by the bachelors was pretty insecure, just buildings on a street corner and a little bit, they eventually moved, to it was either Pacific or Pacifica, can’t remember what the hotel was, but we took over the hotel, and it has a brick wall around it and about nine feet tall I guess, and that was a little better, easier to secure at least in terms of psychological.

SM: And when you were traveling, driving your Jeep throughout the countryside in Vietnam going from Nha Trang to Dalat and other places, did you ever encounter any Vietcong?

HV: No, I never did, in fact there were not a lot of instance that I’m aware of when we were there of attacks to people on the roads, that is advisors. There was an incident on the road between Dalat and Saigon; advisors up there got attacked on the
road. Dalat was the other place by the way where there were families living outside of
Saigon, four families, and the only other city that I’m aware of. It’s very boring, driving
around a place like that, so sometimes we’d stop to just to get relief from the boredom
and one time I was driving from Ama Tut back to Nha Trang. It was boring so I stopped
and across the draw there was a nice tree with white bark trunk on it, so I decided to do a
little target practice with the pumps si sygien, and so I fired off a few rounds, got back in
the Jeep and went around the next bend and sitting in the middle of the road was a
surveyor's transit. I think whoever was surveying the road that day thought there was an
attack going on and bugged out. I never saw the people actually.

SM: Now you talked about the difficulties you faced as an advisor in establishing
rapport with your counterparts because of the nature of your responsibilities, when you
arrived in country and over the course of your time there, did you ever get any kind of
additional training or briefings or courses or something that discussed those types of
issues, rapport building, how to be a really good advisor, how to be a really good advisor,
how to improve on your advisory skills, things like that?

HV: No, that was accepted as a fact, that being a military officer and having been
trained and my own skill and having been trained in teaching skills, every school I ever
went to had something in there about skills of communication, teaching, so we got that,
but there was nothing special that I got, some people got language training, I did not,
maybe because I already had some French, but there’s a lot that goes into that that is not
taught in schools and I’m not sure how well its taught now, and that is the issues of
dealing with different cultures. I think it was something that we accepted as a learning
process as you go through it, and for me it wasn’t particularly difficult dealing with
different cultures. Maybe part of the reason was I had already spent three years in a
culture which was not too unlike Vietnamese because of its influence and that was living
in France for three years and while I was in France I had a lot of French employees
working for me and I dealt with French people all the time because I didn’t live on a
military base, we didn’t have housing so I was dealing in a French culture there all the
time, and when I got to Vietnam, the Vietnamese, at least the officers, were very strongly
influenced by the French culture because that’s the way they grew up, many of them had
gone to French military schools, but there certain cultural things that you kind of learn
about the Vietnamese. My counterparts, both of them were Catholics and Buddhists, concurrently, the falla system allowed that, so they had certain cultural things that were a little bit different from the French in some respect, but they had helped when I was there. I think having a family helped, because we socialized with our Vietnamese counterpart’s families as well. At my house cocktails and dinner, the same thing at their house. One of my first cultural experiences in terms of cocktails and dinner was when I had two of my counterparts and their families over for dinner, I offered them drinks and Captain Han says yes, he’d like a martini, so I made a good old American martini, nice and dry and he’d liked to choke on it, because what he meant was martini, which is Barmuth, so quick lesson mart there, the bottle that says martini on it is Barmuth and ugly make is not. The other cultural experience was when I guess, American cultural experience was the amount of drinking that goes on, and then boredom sets in and drinking heavier. Liquor was kind of cheap. I remember a half a gallon of Gilby’s dry gin was a dollar and fifteen cents, so you never know price probe depends on excessive drinking. The other social activities by the way, entertaining the pro-families, we played an awful lot of bridge at home because we were restricted in travel at night, going from one house to another it had to be by Jeep and armed, so we had one couple we played bridge with a lot, people, very congenial bridge games I might say, when everyone at the table is armed.

SM: That’s a good point. Now, the Vietnamese counterparts that you worked with, that were Catholic and Buddhist, you said they were both.

HV: Yes.

SM: Do you know where they came from originally, were these indigenous Southerners or were these counterparts part of the group that came from North Vietnam to South Vietnam in 1954?

HV: A mixture, but I think most of them, my principal two counterparts in Nha Trang, one was a Southerner and one had come from the North. The one that came from the north spoke French better than the other one and he was a much better officer. The other one and I had a conflict, I don’t remember the subject now but it was a pretty strong conflict and it was one of those things that ordinarily one American advisor had a conflict with this kind of punk the rule was the American went home, or at least got out of that job of being an advisor and I had a conflict with this Southerner and I didn’t have to go
home because while I was in Saigon I had developed a kind of a relationship with his 
boss, who was the chief Vietnamese quartermaster, Army quartermaster and he knew me 
pretty well and had some respect for me, so when I got in a conflict with this Captain 
Hangen, the chief quartermaster sided with me, so he reprimanded him. I never had a 
very good relationship with the guy. He was a political appointee I learned as a result of 
that little conflict and he never had much talent, wasn’t a good leader either, he practiced 
end of summary punishment that was a little more severe even than the normal for the 
Vietnam Army. One day I was behind his headquarters building and saw a crate with 
bound barbed wire on it, it was very small about the size of a desk, covered with a tarp. I 
looked under the tarp and there was a man in the crate and I asked what was going on, 
and I had my interpreter and the guy was just being punished for something, that was 
ordinarily in the other unit that I advised, if a guy got that kind of punishment, he was in 
a lock-up which was a room, not a crate out in the hot sun, and it was hot, kind of taught 
himself and his men didn’t like him again, that’s understandable, under the 
circumstances. And he ran a petroleum depo that never did anything, they never issued 
any petroleum, they were responsible for a pipeline that never had anything in it. He just 
couldn’t be moved; there were no threat to his Army career at all. The other guy on hand 
cut, [?], superb boss, his people loved him, you did a great job, he had difficulties with 
the supplies, he just didn’t get all the supplies he needed and sometimes he got things that 
he couldn’t use. One of those by the way, I was walking through his depo shortly after I 
arrived, he had a bunch of field safes, do you know what a field safe is? It’s literally a 
safe accomplished mot, it’s not designed with one of these little apartment or trailer 
refrigerators, they’re about two and a half cubic feet and we had several of those in there 
and I asked him about them, and he said well I couldn’t mope them, so they hardly show 
up on kia, box A, so having been involved in those kinds of thing before I went over to a 
couple of them, and opened them for him. The reason I was able to open them is because 
I knew the storage combinations that we usually put on those safes, these were American 
safes, it was either 33-66-99 or 50-25-70, generally, so I just tried those two things and of 
course that was very impressive as far as he was concerned. But the depot itself just had 
very, very meager supplies and they had to do a lot of repairs, of course those safes for 
example that came in, he didn’t want any. If a safe came in and somebody had used it
and changed the combination, he didn’t know. I had carried with me some of the
diagrams that I used in my previous job in France, that showed where to drill the safes to
open them up, so I gave them to him, he began with the clamps on those, but that was a
tough job. I don’t know where all the supplies were coming into, there was certainly a
dearth of them coming into No She.

SM: Well, was that the only incidents where you saw a significant supply
problem issue or was that throughout other parts of the country as well?

HV: I think that was pretty well the case all over, every place I visited, if they
didn’t have the supplies in the depot and then some places they, certain things became
prestige items like we started the ad for some dumb reason along the way, in those days
the American Army wore black boots. Black boots have no place in the tropics when
you’re trying to war a camouflage uniform because it stands out like a sore thumb
anyway, but black leather boots became a prestige item and inspecting troops one day, I
learned that guys were being issued boots even though they didn’t fit them because it was
prestigious, they should have the boots and so the misapplication of some point supplies,
that’s a minor picky thing, but it isn’t to the soldier who doesn’t have a pair of boots, just
one of those cultural things we get into, I guess, maybe black variety.

SM: Now another question, back to the advisors that you worked with, your
counterparts that is, the Vietnamese who had converted or adopted Catholicism, did you
ever get a chance to discuss that with, them, why did they convert over, or adopt as a
simultaneous religion, Catholicism?

HV: The reason that I was given, not necessarily by those people, I can’t
remember why it was given, that was the thing to do if you wanted to get ahead, to be
Catholic.

SM: Because President Diem was Catholic?

HV: Well, yes that’s part of it, I think and I don’t know how long the conversion
was, how long it had been. I think they were more likely to be Catholic if they came
from the North, for two reasons, one is the Catholics had to get out of the North because
their life was in jeopardy just for being Catholic that’s what [?], the other is that they
were being trained and led by French officers who are more likely to be Catholic than
Buddhist, of course.
SM: How avidly did they practice that Catholicism from what you could see in terms of other religious icons that might have been in their homes?

HV: Yes, they had those, but they also had Buddhist practices, particularly in things like shamans and stuff.

SM: How about actual churches in the areas where you were, did they have churches and did they attend them regularly?

HV: They did and of course, they had a cathedral in Saigon, but they had Catholic churches all over the country, Buddhist temples too and they even had shaman temples up around Nha Trang.

SM: You mentioned meeting the Cao Dai; did you ever meet any of the Hoa Hao?

HV: Not that I know of. I’m not sure what there really was but I don’t think I was ever in any of their institutions. They were the bigger of the organizations, I think they were the one that posed to the most threat to the government for a while, history; I’m not strong in that.

SM: And when you were down in Saigon had you heard about the Bin Suin, the Bin Suin, basically the organized crime ring?

HV: I’d heard about them, and it was a big deal in Saigon, didn’t hear much about the Trang way and it didn’t seem to be as much crime up there as there was in Saigon, I mean, Bin Suin in Saigon, I knew about them because they were notorious up in Saigon.

SM: Over the course of your first tour, what were the most important lessons you took away from that experience?

HV: Cultural, that is important in the sense of things that were very, very useful to me when I came back for my second tour. The other lessons I learned, I think that the enemy soldiers can be very good when the officers are really good. I never saw them in combat operations because I wasn’t involved in a combat unit and as a matter of fact the American advisors in those days weren’t allowed to go out on combat missions with Vietnamese counterparts, so I don’t know from that aspect but the, generally the officers were quite good and the NCOs were excellent, Vietnamese NCOs, conscripts were conscripts. Other lessons that I learned, I guess another lesson that I learned certainly was my second tour is that I genuinely learned to like Vietnamese as a people and many
of them as individuals. I learned that the Vietnam under Diem was not a dictatorship, in
the sense that we used to think of it or use that word, it was democratic in the sense that
people could talk against the president, people could talk against the government without
fear of a midnight knock on the door. I felt, while I was living in Nha Trang, I was living
in a democracy. There were the universally reviled people like Diem’s brother or his
sister-in-law, they weren’t the government, they were, in a real sense they had a lot of
influence over him, with the people. I was there during the attempted coup in 1960, I
don’t think I mentioned this when we were talking before, did I?

SM: No sir, you did mention it in the written portion you gave me but we haven’t
talked about it yet.

HV: We had an advisor that came into Nha Trang, he predated the Special Forces
guys that came in 1961, he had run the recondo school at Fort Campbell, and was
assigned over to Vietnam and his job was, he was never too sure what his job was to be
then, advisor to the NCO academy located at Nha Trang. His name Lou Mewepp, and I
believe he was a Major when he came in and he had won a medal of honor in Korea for a
bayonet charge to take an important hilltop. He was about to be court martialed for that
action, S. Olay Marshall who was out at Korea doing historic studies and things, and
looking for heroes, wrote Lou’s operation up as a heroic act so he won an award for it
instead of being court martialed. He came there to Vietnam to go to the NCO academy,
was idolized by the NCOs at the, they just loved him, he was brave, he was brash and he
would take risks with his own well-being in the process of training NCOs, they just
thought he was great. He got along very well with the commander of the NCO academy
as well, and during the attempted ’60 coup as it first started the government called there
outlying military units to come to Saigon to protect the government. The commander of
the school loaded up his troops, delayed his loading, delayed his departure, he did not
want to be in Saigon before the conclusion of the coup so he wanted to be en route to
Saigon when the coup was either successful or was defeated so he would know which
side to be on when he got there. It was kind of a smart move and of course the coup was
defeated so he could come back, still be the commander of the NCO academy and on the
side of the government. I think the guy who commanded the, there was a naval school
there too, I think he had reasons for delaying his departure so he could be on the right
side. One of those things they had to learn I guess, when they were subject to coups.

SM: Political survival?

HV: Yes.

SM: Did you ever witness someone who didn’t, who didn’t have that kind of
political savvy that suffered as a result?

HV: No, I didn’t. I have no personal lollies on that, but one advantage is that
these guys have that I knew of out there, was they were quite a ways from Saigon so they
could make any rational argument for not getting there before the coup was decided, so
guys living closer into Saigon probably had to make a difficult choice had to commit
themselves before the battle was won.

SM: This raises an interesting and probably an important cultural point, here in
the United States, we’re raised with this idea that you’re supposed to be loyal to the
death, and in Vietnam, loyalty, especially going up, I mean there’s a tremendous amount
of filial piety and loyalty to the family, but loyalty to some abstract concept of
government or chain of command going up, did you see that as powerful and as potent as
perhaps many Americans were raised, was that the case in Vietnam?

HV: I don’t think so. I don’t think there are very many places in the world
where, we’re talking military here yes, aren’t we?

SM: Combination.

HV: In terms of military I don’t think there are very many places in the world
that military is so committed to the civilian leadership as it is in the United States, it is
really in the military culture for sure, obviously not so in the civilian culture, we had so
many anti-war demonstrators, clearly if you were in the military and you want to be an
anti-war demonstrator you had to get out of the military. If you were in government and
wanted to be an anti-war demonstrator, you could be an anti-war demonstrator, we had
one luncheon speaker in Lubbock this last couple of weeks ago, Daniel.

SM: Yes, Mr. Ellsberg.

HV: I think that probably was not true in Vietnam and you could see it also in the
way that the succession of leadership after Diem was assassinated shows that there are
some factions that people adhere to that aren’t necessarily the government.
SM: But actions that many Americans might view as being almost traitorous or treasonous, I mean, just being able to say I’m here to support whoever wins the coup, you know, there's no loyalty to one side or the other, its just I want to maintain my position and I’ll support whoever it is that comes to power, basically being able to change sides at will.

HV: In essence that was a survival thing there in which the person wanting to survive was not committed to either the coup leader or the current leadership to that point where he was going to jeopardize himself and his family, a lot of family loyalty though.

SM: Did you ever see evidence of that at different levels, for instance, maybe not necessarily during your first tour, but while we’re on the subject of this aspect of Vietnamese culture, and maybe even in your second tour, of course, depending upon what was going on in a particular village, if the ARVN were standing there, okay, we’re loyal to the ARVN, if the next day the VC are standing there, well okay, we’ll be loyal to the VC, but its basically the same kind of survival mechanism.

HV: It is, you see that all over. What was the Vichy government in France? Survival. Whose got the strongest battalions, if you’re weak you’ve got to decide to bare your hairy chest at the incoming bayonet or go on with it, so I wasn’t in the villages in Vietnam. In the second tour I wasn’t allowed to be because of my prior assignments with elements and all of the SIGINT activities, I was not allowed to go outside of Saigon without permission, and if I did go outside of Saigon with permission, I had to stay no lower than Corps headquarters. I really didn’t get out and see much of the village; everything I knew about was hearsay. On that particular subject, well I’ll get on to that later when we talk about the second tour.

SM: What is it though, I’ll write a note down.

HV: Oh, I was just talking about my restrictions, I had gone up to Pleiku on a visit on my second tour and I had permission to do that, they bunked me in with a Lieutenant Colonel who was the G-2 for the Corps, and he was an Air Force officer, he said he had an observation, for an observation aerial artillery auxiliary flight going out the next morning and he knew I had been a field artillery officer, he asked me if I was interested in going, I said sure. So I went out in the morning and he took me over and I got on the plane and we flew out and we directed some fire in an area where there was a
suspected Vietcong mortar unit, or North Vietnamese mortar unit and when we got back, landed and this G-2 is standing out on the ramp waiting for me, and here he is lit into me because I hadn’t told him I wasn’t supposed to be doing that sort of thing and he got chewed out for it. He was kind of a character too, and the first thing I noticed about him when I, the first morning when I got up living in his BOQ facility was his breakfast was about a ten ounce glass of gin, straight and he had a big alcohol problem. Later on he was ordered out of Pleiku and back down to Saigon, he was in an Army aircraft going down, aircraft stopped at Nha Trang and he got out and disappeared and later on he was found and court martialed. That’s back to that liquor problem that was prevalent in that time, and prevalent even more so in the second tour of the area. We had an ordnance officer who had a farewell party and it was on the sixth floor of the BOQ, and a lot of drinking and it was his farewell party so he was getting ready to go in a couple of days, and as he was leaving the sixth floor, walking down the stairs, that building had stairs similar to many French buildings, where they’re built around what would be an elevator shaft with an elevator in it, and the handrails were too high, he bounced off a rail, went across, bounced off a wall and hit the rail again and fell six floors. He didn’t quite make it home. But just boredom and drink go together.

SM: The commander who disappeared in Nha Trang, was that basically a lost weekend for him?

HV: I think so, I think he’d been, well he’d been ordered out so I imagine they were watching him, I don’t know, I imagine they were watching him pretty closely in Pleiku and imagine when he got to Nha Trang he saw the opportunity to fix on some alcohol and get some. That was what he did, he didn’t disappear in terms of desertion, he just didn’t get back on the flight [?].

SM: Do you know what happened to him after his court martial?

HV: No, never heard. I only heard he was going into court martial, I didn’t know what the result was.

SM: Were there many enlisted American soldiers there?

HV: Not in my first tour, no. There were most of the soldiers on the first tour were NCOs, because they were advisors too, they weren’t going to send PFCs over who couldn’t, how were they going to advise them? A good group of people actually, the
people were pretty well selected who were over there, I thought, then in 1961, Kennedy put the first Special Forces units in, of course they were really well trained people. They weren’t quite Army, I mean in many senses of the term, they had their own sets of standards but they were superbly qualified to do what they were doing. I had some trouble with them, because they felt free, one of my additional duties in the detachment there was the supply officer so they felt free to pick the lock on the storage facility and take out of the supply area whatever they wanted.

SM: When was this?
SM: In ’61?
HV: Yes.
SM: So you were there still in’61? When did you leave?
HV: ’61. I got there in ’59 and left in ’61, two year tour. But I was there to say hello, welcome the Special Forces guys. They were not supposed to go out on operations with their counterparts either; these rules of engagement were ridiculous. As a matter of fact I think I was probably in the violation of the rules carrying an automatic weapon, to travel, but these guys went out with their counterparts and they did, in their own covert way, help them in their operations, which they weren’t supposed to do. They also did a lot of training, they did extensive, I think, medical training, that is the field medicine training for their Vietnamese counterparts, because they were well skilled in this first kind of support, little more than just ordinary first aid, ability to do amputations and things like that. They did all that teaching.

SM: Well as far as the Special Forces, when they arrived and the rules that governed their activities, of course they were training not just medical, but also the use of all kinds of weapons systems, mortars, machine guns and everything and certainly they must have been given some leeway in terms of self-defense, in defending whatever outpost they might have been in.

HV: All of us were allowed self-defense, but they weren’t supposed to go on operations with them.
SM: Right, on active patrolling, okay.
HV: But that changed really quickly.
SM: Officially or unofficially.

HV: I’m not sure. By the way, all of us, when we first got into Vietnam, that
time, we went out, I think it was two weeks of training in the vicinity of Saigon and a
good part of that was familiarization and firing of every weapon, individual weapon and a
couple crew served weapons that existed in Vietnam. So, it was suspected that we were
going to be needing the defend ourselves and we might not have our same old familiar
grand rifle so we were trained with what was in the existence in the armament at the time.
It wasn’t just taking it in the classroom and looking at it, it was getting it out and firing it
on the range. So, you asked me about advisory training that was going on the plane
sweeps, we got.

SM: Did that include enemy weapons as well?

HV: There were some in there that were not U.S., yes so enemy weapon was any
weapon that an enemy had.

SM: Right, I didn’t have like any AKs on hand, or . . .

HV: I did not train on an AK-47 at the time. They didn’t have any out there at
the training facility.

SM: And of course they weren’t prevalent until the mid-60s anyway.

HV: Not down South, they might have been prevalent up North before.

SM: You spent your first, about six months in Saigon, then you went and you
were serving, basically as a roving advisor there in Nha Trang and Ban Me Thout, and
Dalat and that whole area, is that what you did for the next year and a half while you
were in country?

HV: Is that what?

SM: Is that what you did for most of the year and a half that you had left in
country after leaving Saigon?

HV: In Saigon I was a staff officer and was tagged to go out and do those couple
of advisory missions, but mostly I was a staff officer. We worked on things like trying to
improve the system of supply.

SM: So you worked on TERM and things like that, right.

HV: Yes, I was in TERM in Saigon. One of the things as we tried to transition
the Vietnamese from the French logistics system to the American system, everything
changed, the method of requisitioning supplies and equipment and accounting for them was quite a change for the Vietnamese. At the time I thought it was a dumb thing to do, for us to try to change them while they were essentially at war because it really made things, made it difficult, logistics is always difficult, it made it more difficult with trying to change the way they did their logistics. But it was a smart move, if we were going to be there until they were actually successful in the defense of their country, then it would make sense because all of the supplies were coming from us and if their system was compatible with ours it made it easier, and that way I was in Saigon working on that kind of stuff and a couple of other things that we were trying to do. We worked on trying to get them a field ration that could survive as tropics without the protection yet that provided enough nutrition to a guy working as an infantryman in the field. So we had an ongoing effort on that and thought I was there. It had started before I got there and it was still going on when I left Saigon. Essentially it was, when I was there, the big things were getting rice in a form that they could carry and prepare in the field, in a relatively easy manner that kept it protected from insects and mildew and things like that and also ways of getting Nuoc-man into a field ration. Do you know Nuoc-man?

SM: Oh, yes sir.

HV: Very, very high in proteins and it was an essential part of a field ration and so working on that. There was Nuoc-man and Nuoc-man, where I lived in Nha Trang I could drive through a little village called Corda to get to where the naval academy was and Cordo had been a processing place for Nuoc-man, a little factory there. The factory had not been in operation for a year and a half, when I drove through Cordo, I held my breath when I went through the village because the smell was so strong, nauseating, but you know how they make Nuoc-man?

SM: Yes, sir, not very appealing to describe.

HV: Well actually, when you think about it, a layer of salt and a layer of fish and a layer of salt and a layer of fish and then fish putrefies, goes through the salt and comes out and they put it in nice little concrete containers. But I like Nuoc-man, so.

SM: In Nha Trang, when you were there, of course people very rarely eat the Nuoc-man straight, typically its mixed.

HV: They rarely do what?
SM: People, at least the Vietnamese people that I’ve encountered, very rarely do you use Nuoc-man straight, as the drippings, you mix it with stuff, lemon juice, water, a little bit of sugar maybe, something like that, is that how they prepared it in Nha Trang while you were there.

HV: I never had it mixed, if it was mixed, I never knew whether it was mixed or not, it came out on a little dish and you put it in on your rice.

SM: Was it like dark black, or was it light?

HV: Actually, if it was made from shellfish it was very light, didn’t have a very, very strong odor or flavor, depended on the quality of the fish that went into it, what it was. The worst fear amongst the advisors was running their jeeps into one of those carts all those jugs of Nuoc-man. I did want to say something about, during the time I was in Nha Trang the, we were very, very unhappy with the newspaper coverage by American correspondents, the correspondents as I understood it that were out there were stringers and they get paid by the line, and if line didn’t get printed, they didn’t get paid, so there was kind of incentive to sensationalize stories and you’d get them into print and sometimes they kind of made us angry because they were reflecting the efforts back home to cut down on the funding for like the U.S. operations mission and those very systems even in those days. One reporter that came to Nha Trang and we later saw what he wrote on it, included in his story, what he called the fact that the American advisors there were living in posh housing and it was free to them, in fact that irritates a lot of us, more so in those days because our pay was not very high and to say that we were living free was not true because we were forfeiting our rental lots so we were actually paying for the housing and it was generally pretty bare bones houses, there was no requirement for heat and none of them were air conditioned except what we provided ourselves, those kinds of things were irritating. Another reporter and I say the story on it, reported back home, and I saw the story on it, implying that our money going in Saigon was being used for other than necessities and the reporters said you can be in Saigon for a week and you see mostly foreign cars, well, they didn’t make cars in Vietnam, so every car was a foreign car whether it was an old Renault taxi or a Buick from the United States. Those kind of stories were intended make people think we were throwing a lot of money at Vietnam that was being used in corrupt purposes. I had a friend who was at the time that
I was there, he was Lieutenant Colonel Morris is his name, I’d known him in France, and he was part of that, I guess what Janet calls the secret army. He was up in Laos in civilian clothes, they were off the Army’s books so to speak while they were there. Of course, people like Janet knew that they were there, and they were and I found it interesting to hear her say who got that symposium, it was hard to get information but they knew where to hang around and listen to what people were saying. Well, these guys, Colonel Morris and a couple of his friends were sitting in a bar in Vientiane talking and a reporter sitting, these guys were sitting at their table and reporter sitting in the dark came over and started asking some questions, they said we can’t talk about it, so the reporter went back to the bar and these guys decided to pull his leg a little bit, so they started talking about how, wasn’t it horrible how that ammunition dump just outside of town had gone up a couple of days before, and they just built this story up, it was a few miles out of town, built this story about this big ammunition dump being destroyed and Colonel Morris’s wife sent him a copy of a newspaper, I think she was in Bangkok at the time, English language newspaper which reported on this ammunition dump going up. The interesting part of it was, for a couple of bucks the reporter could have gone out and checked the story out and found out that there never was an ammunition dump there. I got a chuckle internally about Janet talking about, I mean Jane, did I say Janet, Jane.

SM: Jane Hamilton Meritt.

HV: Talking about hanging around, knew where to hang around to get the story.

SM: And you didn't know how much of that BS, because they knew who you were.

HV: Well, yes you got to [?] through your stories, just like any reporter should.

SM: What did you think of press coverage of ARVN operations and the battles that occurred while you were in country?

HV: The ones I knew about, bad.

SM: How would the press deal with those, did they handle them in the same way as far as emphasizing the sensational.

HV: Overall I think they emphasized the anti-war view and part of that, when I was out there the second time, particularly, the question was constantly asked, why are we there, nobody tells us why we’re there and they asked that question over and over, and
I had an answer to it, I knew what the answer was, but also it’s a propaganda technique,
If you ask a question and then refuse to acknowledge that there’s an answer, you keep
asking it over and over and over people begin to believe that there is no answer and that
was one of the big questions that was going on in the anti-war movement, propaganda
efforts and that was kind of derivatives of that in the pressure point. I wasn’t pleased
with it.

SM: Well, certainly that was the case later in the war, but how about in ’61, the
same people that were covering, trying to sensationalize the use of American funds there?

HV: I think there was a big difference in those days, the big difference was the
reporter could say whatever he wanted out there in those days and where do you think the
story got checked, where was the editor, back in the United States. There was no in
country supervision like that, a team leader. I think there really wasn’t enough of that
later on either, second tour. Somebody in the country, who could ask the questions of the
reporter to see whether or not his story was correct, if it had to go all the way back to the
States the guy that asked the questions doesn’t know anything either, so I think that was a
bit of a failure in the news reporting and they probably were seeing that even more so
now with television when you’ve got somebody’s out in Afghanistan, where’s the editor,
who’s editing his story, it’s somebody back in the States.

SM: Or it’s self-editing.

HV: Which means that he can say whatever he wants to say and nobody is
checking on him. We have a bureau chief in Washington to see that whoever is part of
that bureau is doing their reporting properly, right. Well, I don’t think we do that in
Afghanistan, but we didn’t do it in Vietnam very much as far as I know.

SM: For the first tour, from ’59 to ’61, especially in the latter portion of that, say
late ’60, early ’61, do you remember, or did, you obviously had very strong feelings
about the press coverage of the American advisory effort and American economic aid
going to Vietnam, how did the same reporters cover, say ARVN military operations in
’60, ’61?

HV: Well, I didn't see any. I wasn’t, when I was there the first time or the second
time, I wasn’t on distribution for newspapers form the United States so the only thing I
got was if somebody mailed me an article, so I can’t really talk about that and I’m not an
expert on television coverage by any means, so.
SM: I was just wondering if you had seen anything.
SM: Why don’t you go ahead.
HV: Most of the American up country did not have very much in the way of
medical support, while we were Nha Trang there was a Vietnamese Army hospital where
I was treated for a cut that I sustained on an airplane when I hit my head on something
sharp but for the families, there wasn’t too much. There was however a Canadian
actually, missionary unit that was located north of Nha Trang and they had a doctor or
two and they took care of minor things for the families that were there. They never
charged anything, didn’t want to charge anything but they would accept group
medications that we could give them and fortunately for us at the time, you could buy
anything in a pharmacy in Vietnam without a prescription so if we had a need for the
doctor’s services, whether it was a cold or anything else we’d just ask them what they
needed, biological things, antiseptics and stuff like that, unavailable medications and they
would just give us a list and we would but it and give it to them, that was the way they
paid. Eventually the bachelor’s that were there in Nha Trang and the families teamed up,
the bachelor’s built a clinic for them and the families bought air conditioning for it, so
that’s kind of the way we took care of that medication, but any other thing that we had to
do was done in Saigon, have to go down on either the weekly Vietnamese Air Force C-47
crew flight, or Army aircraft, down to Saigon to medical facilities there. Interestingly
enough when I first got there, I did have to go to the dispensary and one of the things the
doctor was telling me that American doctors, in those days anyway, knew very little
about tropical medicines and something which might have been a simple cure for Chotor
and Lippman for twenty years would be a mystery to American doctors, and it was an
interesting revelation and I think, in much the same way when I was there the second
tour, there were doctors that know about a lot about tropical lice.
The other thing, in a family situation we didn’t, we shopped at the commissary
but the commissary was in Saigon, so all the families and the detachments of bachelors
that were outside of Saigon got mimeographed lists of what was available in the
commissary or what was hoped to be available in the commissary and you’d go down and
check off what you wanted and say how many of them you wanted, it was about an eight
page list I think and send it along with a check which was you calculated it should be and
then the other few bucks and the check was written not to exceed two hundred dollars or
something like that. And then it was put in a package and sent down to Saigon and at the
commissary there, they had shoppers and shoppers job was just to fill the requirements
and total it up and stuff was sent to Tan Son Nuht and put on an airplane and sent up to
Nha Trang. Okay, and then we’d meet the plane and distribute the goods to the families
and to the detachment, but it was very hard to find out how much your check was written
for, sometimes you had to wait until you got a bank statement before you knew on those
ones. It turned out to be a convenient way to shop, it’s now, entrepreneurs in the United
States are doing the same thing nowadays.

Or other local support like barber shops, we didn’t have any PX or anything, so
we’d go down to the local barber shop and I used to go down there and enjoy the luxury
of getting a shave from the barber. After I got back to the States, had been here for about
a year I was talking to another guy who had been there after me and he came back and
said that barber was a Vietcong Lieutenant who was in there as an intelligence gathering
operation, so I mused over the fact that here I was getting a very close shave with a
straight razor from a Vietcong and survived it. We had the enemy’s radio operator helped
the detachment. Telephone service wasn’t very good from Nha Trang down to Saigon
and our backup was an HF radio, DC 610 or something, Singapore designation, but and it
ran manual Morse and voice but the operator there was a Vietnamese and many thought
he would work without a his on his body, his upper body was horribly scarred from burns
and that was from a white phosphorous grenade he said, later on I began to, after I
learned about the Vietcong barber I began to wonder, probably he might have been
Vietcong as well, he was in a good position to provide intelligence support to them,
anyway, he and his family eventually just…

Another thing having to do with PX shopping and my counterparts bought, my
principal counterparts at the time, each one at one time asked me to get them something
form the PX, cigarettes was one of them, I can’t remember what the other was, and so I
didn’t tell them, no, of course [?] for us to do that, everybody did it but I didn’t like the
idea so I went ahead and got the items that were requested and gave it to them, when they
tried to pay me I told them no, I couldn’t accept that, it had to be a gift and what that did
was that they never asked me again because it was culturally embarrassing for them to
have asked for a gift, even though they didn’t know they were asking for a gift when they
did it, but they knew that next time they asked it was going to be a gift and so they didn’t
ask, so that worked out kind of nicely, avoid stuff we were talking about a couple of
weeks ago, PX systems.

Another thing at Nha Trang, that were kind of anecdotal but not totally, I was
tasked at one time to provide beach intelligence data and the reason for that was that folks
in Saigon were trying to do advance war planning and looking for places where they
could do landing ships, Nha Trang had kind of a natural harbor, they would, interesting
that, so I’d send them reports month by month about what the beach situation was and
strangely enough in Nha Trang it changed a lot. During the monsoon season, you could
walk into the water and it’d be over your head in about eight feet, walking from the edge,
breakers coming out in, breaking at twelve feet, matter of fact, I guess the year before I
got there, one of the interpreters was out during monsoon season and the beach was at,
waves were very active and he was killed, he was picked up by a wave, driven into the
sand, broke his neck and that’s how powerful it was, and then in the dry season, you
could walk out a hundred yards and still not have your bathing suit went and you could
stand in the early morning, you could stand at the edge of the water, with your toes an
inch from the water and there was so little wave action you wouldn’t even get your toes
wet, so huge extremes there, particularly in the underwater situation, you could step in, be
over your head shortly and sometime n the dry season, a ship could not get from corps
headquarters to the shore because it was shallow, but I was running the beach intelligence
operation.

The other thing about being up country, besides going down south for occasional
medical reason, if there was one, was whenever I went to Saigon, there was kind of an
emotional mind clone there because at that time, the only military place in Saigon in
Vietnam where an American flag could be flown was at the MAAG compound and I
always tried to make it a point if I possibly could to go out to the MAAG compound and
stand retreat, you kind of miss it when you're away from it as much as we were, up
country, admitting it what. I guess people in the United States now and since September
have a better feeling for that and what happened in Vietnam at the time. Another event
that happened while we were in up country was the breaks BOQ, which is downtown
Saigon, was a multi-story building that the ground floor was for parking vehicle, it was
kind of open garage, and the floors above it where the officers lived. One day somebody
was doing a check there and the Jeep footlocker in the back seat and the Jeep belonged to
one of the generals and turned to the generals’ driver had parked the Jeep there and that
footlocker was loaded with demolitions. The timer on it did not work. The other
interesting part of that is same thing happened several years later and in fact did go off
that time, blew off the bottom floors of the prank, swoop a number of casualties.

SM: Were there any MAAG V casualties in your area, while you were there?
Were there any MAAG V personnel injured or killed while you were there, in your area,
around Nha Trang and the other?

HV: The ones that I knew of while I was up, a guy by the name of Davis, Becker
Davis, who was part of an Army Security Agency unit was ambushed on a road and
killed and that was in 1960, that wasn’t in my area and then there were two, maybe three
people killed at Bien Hoa just before I got to Vietnam, they were at a night detachment
there and being a tropical building it was essential like a screened porch, almost like a big
round floor was almost like a screened in porch. It was very open, let the screen wire
keep the bugs out the MAAG guys were sitting in the mess hall area, watching a 16 mm
movies which was one of the reliefs from boredom and unfortunately there were
Vietnamese soldiers guarding, they were standing outside also looking at the movies
through the screened wire and a sapper type came in. The MAAG people, as soon as
they realized they were under attack, which was very early on, started heading for the
weapons, the Vietcong killed two of them that I know of, I’m trying to remember, Major
Bys was one of them, and they named to BOQ after him and an NCO was killed, they
named a BOQ after him too, I’m sorry. The sapper who led the charge apparently was hit
or accidentally detonated and he blew him in half, so he never go to charge to the
building which would have been really devastating if he’d ever gotten that far and so that
was the major event of that time, which was about 1959. I started to mention the floating
restaurant that was blown, I don’t remember the time frame on that though, the floating
restaurant in Saigon, I was not in town, I think it was during the first tour, they detonated
a bomb on the restaurant, killed a lot of people but as the people flowed out, trying to get
out of the way, the terrorist, the Vietcong put a claymore mine up and so those people
came off the boat, fired the claymore killed lots more, I can’t remember the time frame
now. It was, I guess that was all I had on that.

SM: Did you hear of other terrorist actions of the Vietnamese that took place out
in the villages, you said you didn’t get out to the villages yourself but of course there
were all kinds of terrorist tactics used, killing teachers government officials, was that
stuff going on in country while you were there, that you heard of at the time.

HV: Yes, in fact it was quite big problem and that was one of the reasons that I
had at one times decided I might do a dissertation on those kinds of things which was not
the terrorist aspects of the the, but how the Vietnamese developed a political
infrastructure, South, which had to involve what they were doing, was getting rid of the
existent hierarchy. People, as the Communist always did, get rid of the people, who were
intellectuals, or in positions of leadership, it was going on and of course we had Phoenix
brothers.

SM: What about later on in the war?

HV: Wasn’t any different.

SM: Pardon.

HV: It was Phoenix there in 1959; no excuse me I’m not going that way, no, it
wasn’t, the king and I, yes.

SM: Did you know if the ARVN had any special units that tried to stop that kind
of activity in ’59, ’60 and ’61 while you were there?

HV: No to my direct knowledge.

SM: When the Special Forces came in, do you know if they tried to do anything
to stop that kind of stuff?

HV: To stop it, try to stop the North Vietnamese?

SM: Well, stop the Vietcong from going into villages and terrorizing them?

HV: I don’t know, except that I believe that was one of the things they were
trying to help stop. The other thing of course, was the Arctic forces, rough puffs; Korean
forces would try to provide some protection for them. I think the Rough Puff stop was
more defensive whereas the Special Forces stuff was kind of often we’d try to get them before they got them.

SM: especially, work at Mont yards and stuff like that?

HV: Yes.

SM: You mentioned that one of the American advisors killed while you were there was a specialist working for the Army Security Agency, what was the ASA doing there at that time, do you know?

HV: What was he doing?

SM: Yes, that were they doing, the ASA, what were they doing there and what was his job, do you know?

HV: Intercept of signals intelligence, signals intelligence junk, direction of finding and intercept. They came in fairly early, as a matter of fact, the ASA people liked to say their Specialist Davis was the first guy that was killed in the war, not true, but depends on when you figure the war started because Major Bys and the other NCO were before him.

SM: Yes, there were American advisors who were killed much earlier than that.

HV: But Davis, it was an ASA detachment located up at Phu Bai. Interesting little story about that, this was later in the war. The ASA detachment had intercepted what was an attack plan, North Vietnamese attack plan in their area, the officer in charge of the detachment was not there, got that translated so the senior guy there was the Specialist 4, Minnick, he thought here is this highly classified stuff, very highly classified, this information, and there was an ARVN unit there that was going to be in the path of, or the target of this attack, and so Minnick thought, I’ve got to do something about this, so he reasoned he couldn’t go over to the ARVN guy and tell him as Spec $ Minnick, they would have blown him off, they wouldn’t believe him, so he went into the Lieutenant’s hooch and put on a Lieutenant’s uniform and went over to the see the ARVN battalion commander, and he briefed him on this intercept which was a detailed attack plan he violated a lot of laws there, Minnick did, not just rules and regulations, but laws and, but anyway, the ARVN unit commander believed him and he set up an ambush and he cleaned the North Vietnamese clock, he was right and they had no idea that he was going to be there so it was a very successful military operation, Lieutenant came
back he put in court martial charges on Minnick for violation of Title 18, the U.S. code, which has to do with things like Daniel Osbrich did and impersonating an officer. Cooler heads prevailed and Spec 4 Minnick is one of the more junior people in the Army, to have received the Legion of America. That’s nice in lieu of court martial, I thought.

SM: Do you remember what time frame that was?

HV: No, it was before 19, I think it was before 1968.

SM: That’s an impressive story. Could you spell his name for me please?

HV: I can’t, I think it was M-I-N-N-O-C-H though.

SM: Okay, now a couple of questions, one political question real quick, what did you think when JFK got elected and what did you think about this new leadership that the United States was now under?

HV: Say it again, the question.

SM: What did you think of JFK when he was elected, and what did you think of the new leadership as it emerged?

HV: Well, I liked Kennedy, I voted for him, no I didn’t I wanted to vote for him but I couldn’t, that’s not the story, anyway, and I liked what he was doing with the Special Forces, I thought he was on the right road in Vietnam at the time, because I figured that our mission there was to secure the South Vietnamese border so their democracy could grow, that was the simple mission statement as far as I was concerned, and a good one. I did not believe that we should have been there in the first place, but having been committed there I believe we had a role to perform and we could do it if we chose to, so I wasn’t unhappy with that at all. I wasn’t happy about other things; Kennedy lay the saber, that one op [?], that’s not the Vietnamese part.

SM: And what about the emphasis that he eventually came to place on the Special Forces and then, what did you think about the Special Forces as a concept in Vietnam?

HV: I was a typical Army officer, I felt the Special Forces were not very Army, but they were doing things that the Army itself could not to, the rest of the Army couldn’t do, so I didn’t have a great deal of heartburn about that, besides I always wanted to be an Airborne officer myself to some degree, that’s halfway there, not halfway, quarter of the
way there. What I didn’t like, really didn’t like, super didn’t like was the Diem incident,
I thought that was a huge, huge blunder at the time, I’ve thought it ever since.
SM: You’re talking about the coup in 1963?
HV: The assassination.
SM: Of course, you weren’t in Vietnam at that point, where were you?
HV: When did that take place?
SM: That was in November of ’63, weeks before Kennedy was killed.
HV: 1963? I was in Washington DC, on the staff of Army Security.
SM: I’m sorry, whose staff?
HV: On the staff at Army Security Agency.
SM: Oh, the ASA staff, cool. Let me
Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Colonel Hal
Vorhies on the 26th of April. This is CD number 2 of the interview. Sir, why don’t we go
ahead and pick up with your observations on how U.S. policy evolved from the time you
arrived in country in 1959 to the time you left in 1961.
HV: Okay, that maybe kind of thin gruel here, I think the problem was associated
with a rather weak, almost salami slicing approach to helping the Vietnamese. It evolved
too slow. The time to come in and get the job done was done in rather piecemeal
actually. We had, I think, not a very good relationship with the Geneva Accords that
divided Vietnam, we probably could have fudged them a little bit more to get, we fudged
them some anyway, we could have fudged them a little bit more, we would have provide
security for South Vietnam, we fudged them in a way that we put people in terms they
knew they were fudges, not supposed to be an advisory unit but that’s what it was, it was
confidential. I guess they, I think we didn’t have the best people in the State Department,
at least our feeling was, as officers occasionally downstream looking, up boy the State
Department has not, doing things that it might do to make the job of providing a secure
life for South Vietnam so it can proceed with its democratic aspirations, maybe the term
for a master bunker says a little bit about that, sandbag bunker was the term in Vietnam.
I don’t know, that’s I guess, maybe some of the experts that came out there weren’t quite
as much as grave as that end, I’m not sure of an actual tailor that was over in Vietnam in
my experience, probably shouldn’t even be commenting on it but that was, so I think its
not all that clear.

SM: Okay, what did you think about the direction U.S. policy was going with the
new Kennedy administration?

HV: I thought it was going in the right direction, he was beginning to put people
into it, to do something about the mission, that is, providing a secure environment for the
global democracy. When Johnson came in and we had started with a very small force,
and Special Forces people and expanded it and then the direction beyond that was putting
a ceiling on it, we needed more people. That’s U.S. policy in the vacuum, not counting
the depths of the other warlord, in space. In general my feeling on that is that a warlord,
was the administration was not providing the administrations’ program was not providing
the leadership necessary for the United States at war, we let the tail wag the dog, the tail
being the anti-war movement, instead of the dog barking out the instructions and getting
the people behind him. I guess its kind of hard to do when you start off with an all
volunteer force out there, and then who cares if a professional, since its an all volunteer
force of professional Army, the NCOs and officers were out there, there were no draftees,
and the people at home probably could care less if a professional soldier was killed in
those days, then the draftees started getting killed and they began to get more concerned
about it but in the wrong way. I think I would happened to like the leadership. I’m old
enough to remember what things were like in World War II, there was a huge effort in the
United States, bring leadership to the people, to get the people involved, get them on
board at the war, one of the ways to do that was through paying for the war with taxes,
another one was war bond drives, lots and lots of effort. There was a lot of anti-Japanese,
which we would call racist today propaganda, a lot of anti-German, which could be
considered racist today, propaganda, it was designed to what the American interests then,
getting out there and fighting and winning the war that was crucial to give a democracy
and I think that administrations lost some initiative on this Domino Theory business,
looking back on it of course, it was initiative that they should have propelled, that’s
another aspect of getting the people on board to fight this war, somebody else run the
negative ops and road trips, which was costly.

SM: In 1961, when you left, when was that in ’61 that you left country?
HV: I think it was about September.
SM: September of ’61?
HV: Yes.
SM: Was there anything else before we move from Vietnam; was there anything else that you wanted to talk about with regard to your first two years in Southeast Asia?
HV: Well, would you like a little anecdote?
SM: Sure.
HV: Okay, I was talking to an officer who was stationed Ban Me Thuot, and somebody else had told me that he had been attacked by a leopard, in town. So I ran into him that same day I asked him about it, and well, he’s a little better and late at night one of the neighbor's came up to him, knocked on his hooch and told him they had a leopard that had been chained at one paw, and the leopard had chewed his paw off and got out of the chain and was loose in the clip, lose and dangerous. They went to this Lieutenant because the Lieutenant he knew that he could be harmed, so the Lieutenant grabbed his carbine and went out looking for the leopard, this is late at night, and he was walking down a narrow street and as he came to a cross path, this leopard came out in front of him and passed him and reached out and tore open one of his legs, shin, and then the leopard went around behind the Lieutenant, came up behind him while he was still concerned with his legs, and jumped on his back and clamped his jaw down on the Lieutenant’s left shoulder, he took his carbine, turned it around with the muzzle to the head of the leopard, pulled the trigger with his thumb and blew the leopard off his shoulder. So, I said well that’s quite a trophy, a leopard skin with head. He said, it wasn’t any good because he didn’t have a paw on. If that was mine, it would be on the wall with the story written on the inside of it.
SM: Yes, keep it without the paw, wow. Was that?
HV: I saw the scars so I know he was telling the truth.
SM: Yes, were there many incidents involving wildlife in those early years that you were there?
HV: Yes, there was another guy up there who was in Ban Me Thuot who was an advisor to, united culture advisor, his name was Early Cision, anyway, he would of out and soldiers would ask him if he was odd too.
SM: Was this IBS?

HV: One yard, if there was some wildlife animal that was following them because he’d go crawling through the bush looking for a tiger, he was crazy, but apparently he survived, but there were lots of tigers. Tiger population I’m told increased by the second tour, increased significantly in Vietnam because of the Arc Light strikes, B-52s go over and drop their loads, sand throw them in light box, and they’re devastating to wildlife, they don’t do so much damage to humans, but devastating to wildlife, but the tiger population goes up and down in accordance with the food supply, the Arc Light strike increased the food supply dramatically. Tigers just don't, people there when I was over there, I think tigers usually don’t eat a fresh kill, they’ll kill it and put it up in a tree or something and then come back and eat it, so previously killed food, like Arc Light strikes would do, or at least dumb down so they were easy prey, increased the food supply for tigers, and increased the tiger population. The way they hunted tigers and cats when I was there the first time, was they’d tie a goat or something to a tree and they’d build a stand and they would wait until a goat was killed by the tiger, killed and left there, and then they would go up the next day and they’d check it every day and when it was killed then they’d go into the stand and sit there at night for the next couple of days till the tiger came back to eat his ripened goat, and that’s the way they killed them, some big tigers there. I saw one that was skinned and mounted and if you banged your head and hands together on the cat’s ears, your hands would be fifteen inches apart, that’s quite a skull. They said that cat weighed about a thousand, killed by a multi-war that was shot down leopard, tiger was its last spring, but there were lots of cats.

SM: How about other animals?

HV: Yes, a lot of deer. We did night deer hunting, we got one of the guys, I didn’t but one of the guys that was with us, he got a deer that we had to cut in two in order to lift to get it in the Jeep, it was so big. I got, what the called a dog deer, had fangs like a dog, it peeled bark to eat it, anyway, it was about sixty pounds, but the meat was as light color as veal, and there no gamy taste at all. There were bear, gower, buffalo, cows, jungle fowl, peacocks, various swarms of them. I quit my hunting there, we were out one night, well armed group I might add, out hunting with them, landing my trunar aircraft and I saw what looked like the eyes of a nice target, fired at it, didn’t get it, next day I
was in the same place and I saw that in my line of sight at that place, was multiplier
hooch, I never went hunting again. There were no reports of anybody hurt but
nonetheless I fired a round in the dark so I didn't leave with other people, so I never did it
again.

SM: Now did you have problems with other, maybe not animals that you were
hunting, but just in general, snakes, stuff like that?
HV: Yes, there were those. One day I was driving to Dalat and heard a splat,
looked behind my Jeep, a snake which was probably around eight feet long had fallen out
of a tree and it didn't land on the Jeep, right behind it. I could see it in the rearview
mirror and one other time when I was driving along I saw one come out toward me, but
he slithered up the road, so I don't know what either one of those snakes was. The bigger
problem, not a bigger problem, the most annoying problem there liking me in the tropic
basin, a region in our flies, mosquitoes, they're a problem, they're not much of a problem
compared to flies. I have driven my Jeep into a tight bend in the road, where you had to
slow down, and flies came in, there were so many flies I could not see through the
windshield, the flies were on the Jeep, the outside, the flies were between me and the
Jeep, so many of them came through, and they bite and you've got to keep your mouth
shut, ears covered and all that, but they were just all over you, they were worse than
mosquitoes in my mind, mosquito nets were powerful.

SM: How about spiders?
HV: Yes, spiders and cockroaches, you wouldn't believe. Around where I lived
in Nha Trang I sprayed the yard about once a week with DDT, which of course is no
longer used any more, but it really kept things down.

SM: Well, how did you feel when you left in September?
HV: Actually, I enjoyed the life there. I had a career to get on with so I had to
get back to go to my next school.

SM: What was that?
HV: I was, it's called, it was for captains and majors, company officer's course at
the quartermaster, postal quartermaster officer there.

SM: Now did they call that the advanced course at the time?
HV: Yes, they did. They've got . . .
SM: And this was, you’re still a, you were still basically going the direction of maintaining your quartermaster field rating, is that right?

HV: Yes, because I had opted to go on a competitive tour for regular Army office, I had become a regular Army officer and I’d done my artillery tour, but when I came out of that tour, went back to quartermaster, quartermaster had a slot to fill in Vietnam, so they picked me up and sent me to Vietnam, so I came out of the artillery essentially right into quartermaster back in Vietnam, and so when I came back I was due for the quartermaster advanced course, never would be in artillery again because after that I got an assignment to Army Security Agency and from that point forward I was working for military intelligence?

SM: So how did that work, here you are, you went into the military first with Quartermaster, then had the foray into artillery, went back to quartermaster, but found your way, or was eventually assigned to the Army Security Agency, was quartermaster typically the officers they used?

HV: Yes, they used all branches because quartermaster was a major command, I mean Army Security Agency was a major command so I went into Army Security Agency and a G-4 which was just staff, so I started I their logistics area and over time I reassigned me some things like that where I became the deputy chief of staff of logistics and then I went directly from that to being the deputy chief of staff of operations for Army Security Agency.

SM: Which is more of a military intelligence focus?

HV: Well, it’s all military intelligence.

SM: Right, but in the G-4 at least you’re still working in the logistics side of things. The other one was product type things, but once you’re in operations, you’re looking actually at military intelligence work

HV: Right.

SM: So, when you left in ’61 you went to quartermaster advanced course and then immediately after that you went to Washington to the ASA?

HV: Yes, ASA.

SM: What was the atmosphere like in D.C., especially regarding Vietnam and the progress of the war?
HV: Studied disinterest. There wasn’t much. I mean there weren’t a whole lot of people over there and Kennedy was doing things like visiting Fort Bragg and seeing the demonstrations and the Rangers and Special Forces, so, it was kind of popular, but the war was not so well known.

SM: Well, just after a year of you being back in the States of course, the U.S. became extremely preoccupied with events just south of us, at Cuba, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, so you were there at the ASA during that.

HV: Yes, I was. We were running very, very long days in headquarters, like everybody else in the Army we had lots and lots of people down in Florida, but we had Army Security at stations down there, intercept sites and things. The scuttlebutt around the area was there were so many military people down in Florida that the whole peninsula sank six inches. It was just huge numbers went down there. We had guys going down on TDY, and there was so many people on TDY down there that you couldn’t get a rental car except in the upper class, like Cadillac’s and stuff, just Florida must have, I never went down on those things, but Florida must have been inundated.

SM: Now, during the crisis itself, at that point you were still in the G-4?

HV: Yes.

SM: What were your primary responsibilities, what kinds of things had you had to prepare for and take care over?

HV: Well, as always with the case in those kinds of things, we never have planned enough in advance and so we were scurrying like crazy, finding out what we had in the depos and where it was and what could be gotten and doing as rapid procurements to get things that were necessary to support people down there and maybe beyond, at what was going to be beyond, so it was a very, very busy time.

SM: Do you recall what the principle shortages were? What things did you have to scurry for most?

HV: Receivers was a big thing, we had none. Actually, I’ve gone a visitor, but we’ll continue. I’m going to take my mobile phone so I can get him on the right track. Putting units down there with equipment that maybe we haven’t been maintained well enough so you need to get new stuff to them, receivers and things of that nature as you
probably imagine it was big increase in the requirement for intercept of communications routines, Soviet Union and Cuba, think.

SM: Oh, yes. Do you want to take a break for a minute?

HV: Just a second, yes. All of those people down there with shortages, you know, readiness wasn’t a big thing, in terms of everybody having everything they needed so we were scrambling to get out of the depots or pull it from some unit that had it, didn’t need it, and get it into that area. The big thing though was trying to figure out what was going on and what the dangers were and all the order of battle stuff and what the, hold on just a second.

SM: Sure. Okay, go ahead. Well, obviously you were very busy with some mission essential activities as far as supplies and things of that nature, from your perspective, being in Washington and being in one of the focal points of gathering intelligence and gathering information about what was happening, what was your, if you could take a minute to pause and think about the gravity of the situation, what was the atmosphere like in, was there actual concern?

HV: Wartime atmosphere, our conference room, ASA headquarters, was turned into a war room and we were keeping track of everything we could keep track of, even though from our standpoint, we couldn’t influence much, no direct influence because we didn’t command any troops, except our own that did the intercept, so that was our effort, how do we improve on collection of what’s happening down there in terms of Signal Intelligence and how do we protect our own communications, which was not to easy to protect our own intelligence communications from intercept as you remember them, the Soviets had a big listening post out there, they had their own SIGINT organization, in Cuba and so we were rolling that became, certainly, a lull, my perspective was kind of like the difference between the private in the foxholes and the Lieutenant Colonel in the battalion. I had kind of the narrow focus and so while I saw what was going on, I didn’t necessarily know everything that was going on.

SM: Now the ASA, obviously they handled Signals Intelligence, what about other forms of intelligence gathering?

HV: Mostly, Army Security Agency was mostly interested in Signals Intelligence, both in those days, the tactical and at the strategic level. Largely in
collecting, but ASA really put out much of a product, it didn’t put out any product strategically, except critical communications reports, critical, but all that stuff was fed into NSA and NSA did that kind of reports and stuff. Our miscrivage tactically units were responsible for doing reporting to their local supporting commander and that’s kind of way that the other part of it was communications security, and largely that, in peacetime that was mostly training other people, so you try to penetrate their communications to show them their weaknesses and then help train them how to, communications. The other things that are done that they looking, doing something very close to human intelligence type stuff and that’s going around in various places like in Europe and seeing what the antennas look like there on the other side of the wall or in countries that were not friendly to us, or even some of those that were, see what kind of antennas they have up because you can deduce kind of what their targets are, see which way they’re oriented and deduce further what they do. And the other training aspects and lifetime too are communications jamming and interference. We used to have in Vietnam, after my first tour of ASA they used to have some aircraft over there that had big jamming capabilities. They were Navy aircraft that were provided to us. I was on the team that put them together and get them over to Vietnam and they were designed to be interceptors and jammers. They were not used as jammers because the Air Force officers did not want them, but the jamming forces they did use in violation of that, were usually used to tease the enemy radio operator range would have ultimate, but ordinarily it would not be used. So, that's more or less what ASA did, not much in the way of HUMINT, as a matter of fact when I went back to Vietnam in ’68, I went back specifically to go into a HUMINT operation because I didn't want to go into a SIGINT operation because an Army Security Agency group that was there was commanded by a guy I had worked for once before and I didn’t want to work for him again, so I volunteered for two reasons, didn’t want to be with him, one, one was timing, when I got there because I had to go to Command General Staff school and in those days you had to be in the proper cycle in order to get the time to Command General Staff, and you’d get assigned to Command General Staff school, real easy to get a promotion so I volunteered to got to Vietnam so I would be in the right timing cycle to go to Command General Staff school and the other reason for
volunteering was that I could select my unit that way, otherwise I just go assigned and
probably would have, not the whole time, but.

SM: Well, what happened after the Cuban Missile Crisis, you stayed at ASA,
after the Cuban Missile Crisis, you stayed there at ASA and continues to work at G-4?

HV: I’m going to have to go through a doorway here, my dog’s barking I can’t
hear the phone line. Okay, ask me again.

SM: I’m sorry, after the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis; you stayed with ASA
and G-4 for a little while longer?

HV: Yes, I stayed there, then I went to Panama. I was assigned to Panama
because we had an Army Security Agency station in Panama, Cheva, Cheva; we had a
Special Forces detachment it was under the ASA. Actually, I went to Panama, not as a
Army Security Agency Officer, I was flying down there as quartermaster officer, so I
went back to quartermaster and was in the support area there and then my regular Army
commission transfer to the military intelligence came through, and I did that branch
transfer to military intelligence then ASA could reassign me again, and so ASA
reassigned to be the Deputy to their Army Security Agency, Southern command, so that’s
what I did.

SM: And where was that?

HV: In Panama.

SM: So that was in Panama as well?

HV: When the canal was being built. Another one of those foreign tours that kind
of enhances your knowledge of other peoples’ culture. We lived on post there and right; it
was just a couple blocks from a school. We weren’t satisfied with the school in Panama
so we sent our kids to a private school in Panama City, which kind of gave us a little
different perspective on life, having kids going to the local economy school, and I was
there until form ’64 to middle of ’66. One Thursday I got a message from one of the
Security agent headquarters that said be in Washington on Monday morning for an
extended stay, and I called and said what’s an extended stay, and he said 180 days. What
for? We’ll tell you when you get here. So I went up, left the family behind of course,
went to Washington on TDY and that was when I started working on the Freud project
with the Navy aircraft outfitted for the Army Security Agency, stayed with that for nine
months and the Army general from ASA said I understand you want to go to Graduate
school, and I said yes, I did and he says where do you want to go, he says where do you
want to go? He said okay, you go, so I went and since that wasn’t interesting from the
standpoint of Vietnam, very interesting assignment just to. Here it was 1967, and I was a
student at [?] school and, ‘67, ’68 at the, the military was my career, first thing was paid
for me. I was, and I went out for seminars while I was in, conducted by a very left
leaning professor, as a matter of fact I saw him a couple of weeks ago. He explained in
class how Vorhies was here had a one track mind and you don’t need to pay much
attention to him because I go much on and on and on, that was the introduction to the
class, and over time the other students would [?], you’re fishing, you aren’t that way, you
really don’t believe again, seemed to be intelligent, but another guy, and I said all of my
people in the contemporaneous group, were just like me, I looked forward and my image
got close minded, not in the military, maybe on the campus, but not in the military. After
about, it was about four weeks into the session, the professor happened to leave class, had
to be gone for a well or something, he turned the class over to me, so there was a change,
but that was ever needle, we had demonstrations going on, particularly in ’68, anti-war,
my wife and I were kind of embarrassed, bear-baiting stuff. A few times we got invited
we got invited cocktail parties by people in the university and it was always so that we
could be, I guess, pointed out, baby killers and things like that, it was embarrassing. We
were at a woman who was married to a guy who worked up by the Kennedy staff and
came up and after talking to my wife about it, figured out my wife was not in favor of the
war, didn’t have to, so she said to her, how could you be married to this man, so that
attitude so. The anti-war aspect that wasn’t understandable.

SM: Did you have any run-ins with students who protested?
HV: No, actually, well there were discussions about war, that kind of run-in?

Yes.

SM: Anybody?
HV: Not the physical.
SM: Nothing physical?
HV: No, just loud accusations, things like that but not very often, more likely in
something like a cocktail party than in a classroom.
SM: Right and that would have been more the faculty than the students. In those more confrontational environments, go ahead and if you would describe, you mentioned the baby killer type of thing, but do you remember or any specifics of the kind of epithets or accusations that they would hurl at you as a representative of the U.S. military?

HV: I think one of the most memorable on that score was on the other side of the coin. I was passing through Los Angeles and, this would have been 1967, and I was in uniform and I went into a little kiosk there to buy something, gum or something, what I needed was the change and so I went up to the counter and gave the woman a dollar, I guess it was gum, I told her give me some chewing gum, and she says keep your dollar we can give chewing gum away to soldiers. I’m so embarrassed by the way people in Los Angeles are treating the military, she said, I want you to know that I support you. So, that statement of support like that was not expected and I didn't get my change, but that’s more memorable I guess than maybe, well I put them out of mind, distasteful.

SM: Yes, sir, absolutely.

Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Colonel Hal Vorhies on the 29th of April 2002 at approximately 1:05 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Colonel Vorhies is in Arlington, Virginia. Sir, why don’t we start today’s interview with a brief discussion of some of the events that took place in between your first and second tours, and I was wondering if you would explain the atmosphere in Panama when you were there working with the Army Security Agency.

Hal Vorhies: Okay.

SM: And that was in 1964, correct?

HV: Yes, that was in ’64. Let me back up just a tad on that. When I came back from Vietnam in ’61 when I went to the quartermaster advanced class, and then I was assigned up to Washington DC to work at Arlington Hall station and I was the post commander, ’61, first I went into dust bog, a G-4, then I became post commander and that was during a time when there were a lot of anti-military demonstrations going on, Arlington Hall Station was on Highway 50, just a short distance south of Arlington Cemetery, and so while we were not very well known, a totally secure post, you had to have a really good reason to be there in those times, we were concerned about parts of the natural activity becoming a target for demonstrators, so we had some training in that, and
some of our concerns were how well is military giving the Posse Kamikadas Act which
would not allow us to step outside the post to defend ourselves and so that was really part
of the still the anti-war situation that was going on, that had started and was going in
1963, then I went on, was assigned to Panama and my job there at first was with the
support elements because I went as a quartermaster officer and while there in that job, in
support, I don’t know whether it was because of my work previously on the rations for
the Vietnamese army, but anyway, I became the guy who was responsible for coming up
with the master lineate for the canal zone, for U.S. Army forces in the canal zone, then I
was transferred to the newly developed intelligence corps, and I was reassigned over to
the fuel station the Army Security Agency had there at Panama as the executive officer.
So I was actually the third ranking guy at the Army Security Agency, in the South
Column as it was called. Most of our workfare was in intercept operations and most of
those had to Latin America, but as there was a lot of current concern in those days about
communism and world defense, it still wasn’t very long after the pesto fall of Castro. It
was an important Cold War operation and there was a, under the auspices of the National
Security Agency, speaking in terms of evolutionists, onerous thing to do. There was
some concern on time there, where we were having some agent transmissions coming out
through that area and one of our tasks was to set up for a tour, identify, locate who the
vagrants were, that was kind of an interesting operation. Other Cold War aspects of down
there of course had to be battle planned. The Panama Canal was then and still by some is
considered very vital for the United States even though we gave it up, its still very
important to us and that’s what it changed from Cold War now situation, I guess to, the
Chinese aren’t really healthy, not unhealthy. I was there, doing that work at, Army
Security when I was informed that I was to pack up immediately and go back to
Washington DC to work on the project which was designed to get some aircraft and put
together a system of signals intelligence, communications and jamming devices, so I
started out on that, there were probably about six of us working on that project and our
task came from the Secretary of Defense, must be the equipment up for Vietnam in three
to six months which was very tough task but we worked that very done in the night, and
the aircraft we used were some P-2 aircraft, but then the Navy had P-2Vs, and they were
a model which was no longer very much used by the Navy, they had already moved into
a later edition of that kind of aircraft, they were anti-submarine type. So we put those
together and I did some TDY out in California, San Diego, because General Dynamics
contract division, was doing the, rehabilitation of the aircraft and doing the installation of
the technical equipment that was being installed in the airplane. We finally got them
finished there and the crew that, the Army pilots that just finished transitioning the
Caraboo to the Air Force patrol the point and two inch birds, I guess he get a release
while those came in and the Navy transitioned them from their aircraft into the P-2.
Mission training for the aircraft once they were up and flying was moved to Miranda
airport, which was the least full airport near Tucson, Arizona. It had a motel associated
with it so we put all the troops in that and they started flying, training missions on how to
operate the equipment and they’d fly over to Fort Watch, looking over terrain an
electronic range but we could test on their equipment, jamming and intercept equipment
and we get the flight crews and the backseat crew and the back end crew all working
together and they plotted the bit map and they made another parry. Nine months was,
they went into Cam Ranh Bay and the word I got back from them was that they were
pretty effective in the direction finding area. They were not allowed to be effective
because they were not allowed to jam, so they weren’t very effective there, but they did
against regulations and surreptitiously they jammed from time to time to tease the
Vietnamese equipment readers on the ground, tease them into keep staying on the air
long enough for other BF aircraft to find them or also if they, if they were using the
encryption techniques, they’d have a difficulty getting through, they’d tease them out
with a little bit of enemy sometimes, the radio operator would just sit the clear in
frustration to try to get his mentally on.

During that time, when I left the police cab project, I had gone to American
University to take a Master’s degree in political science/international relations. I had my
bachelor’s in political science/international relations, I’d just gotten into Berkeley and so,
anyway, I spent a year at American University and did all the course work and
comprehensive exams necessary for a Masters degree and for a PhD, at that time didn’t
have time to do the dissertation and that explains why I never got around to it. One of the
interesting things at that political school, you kind of get away from the Army, its kind of
fun getting away, when I reported into Fort Meyer detachment that handled records for
military people going to schools in the area, I walked in and one of those warrant officers said man, he said oh by the way, I got something for you, interviewed, here’s your Legion of Merit, ordinarily it was a big deal about Legion of Merits at a parade and all that, but this was handed to me by a warrant officer across the desk, and that was all right.

SM: What was that for?

HV: The work on putting together the aircraft. I was the logistics expediter on call and we had some really severe problems as its advancing, getting all the things necessary to get that aircraft going when, one thing was in short supply, we did have a, a rip pat priority that was very, very high, the highest on the system to get things, if the things were available, but for example, we had, an order to run the equipment in the aircraft we had to put a duratone in each of the jet engines, in the bomb bay at least, and that jet engine had to run a generator, we had to buy the generator, we had been able to procure six generator housing and they had be machine gun and we put a hole in the set speed, that we made, we couldn’t do anything and so we got a message from the people in Ohio who were machine works that were working on those and they were giving an eight week delay forecast and so I went out there to try and squeeze them a little. They would have to get it in soon, and when I got there I had along talk with the general manager, he said they just can’t get truck bays out where there’s a [?]. And he said, look, because we don’t have an approved shipment system in the United States any more, we can’t get quality people, we can only hire beginners and then train them ourselves, and so the only people that can come in that are trained to try to be lay operators usually came out of Europe, we just thought our depression systems. He said I have two guys that are under six feet and he says I just can’t work them the hours in a day that would be necessary to get these things out, and I knew it was kind of a leap and then we talked a little bit more and it was like the time throwing me, it was a true look, so there was a reason for not, I was wearing military uniform, combat boots, airborne, and all that stuff. I’m wearing, went down on the floor and he introduced me to a guy and I told him what we were up against, what we were trying to do and told him as much as I could about what the aircraft was for and told him much about the operation, but told him importance of it and that we really needed support because we could get those things done without
mistakes because if there’s no big, that’ll bid on that particular train. So I went back to Washington, the general manager called me a couple days later and said, those guys are working on it, I don’t know if they’re going to have it done on time. So, in other words anti-war feeling in some places in the United States, but there wasn’t in that factory and they didn’t care about that.

They, after that I was getting towards the end of my time at American University, I couldn’t done eight or nine, I decided I was going to get me assigned to Vietnam anyway, and what I’d like to do is choose my assignment, I explained that already. A couple of reasons for that I think mentioned before, but I had worked for a guy in Panama, and he was then commanding the Army SIGINT group in Vietnam and I had no real desire to work for him ever again, so I decided that would be a good chance for me to break out of the Security group, and to go into from inside of the HUMINT role, and so that’s what I did, I got assigned to MACV headquarters to work for the J-2 branch and I became the director of the document plans for J-2, which was the one that had staff supervision over the Expedition center. The scheme in MACV at that time was for that particular job, the new guy would come in, look at the J-2 staff level, to learn as much as he could about what the documents were and how they were being used, what was the requirement, what was gain, and what should we be doing next and then, when the guys that was running as the American co-director, got the transportation symbol, when he rotated the next stage would be, the other work that the staff for five months because the guy, on the transportation side went home a little bit early so I went down there and spent the next seven months working for the U.S. air a toral document center. That really, was very much spacious down there for the report, very good even to be listened to, the only thing is see what senior officials, senior military officers would thank you and they would give you a commendation, I don’t really sit up where they were, cause I wanted my paper.

SM: Well let me a step back real quick, and in terms of the, obviously you were probably keeping up with all the events that were occurring in between your first and second tours and so I wondered what you thought of a couple of key events, in particular the Diem assassination and the Kennedy assassination, which happened within the same month, November of ’63, where were you during those, and what did you think when
those events took place, especially the Diem coup with Vietnam, but of course also
Kennedy's assassination?

HV: I was either in my latter stages of my wartime assignment in Panama, don’t
know the location, but I do remember my reaction to that. I though it was very bad and I
thought that we should not have to say, in essence, I guess you would say deserted them,
we didn’t supply support when the coup season began and I thought that was a big
blunder because to me, he was a leader enough in Vietnam to be followed and I didn’t see
anybody on the horizon, although my order of battle information wasn’t all that good, I
just didn’t see anybody who was coming along who was prominent enough or respected
enough to fulfill that role, clearly I was not fond of his brother Nhu, or Madame Nhu,
sister-in-law, nor were very many of the people that I related to at that time, liked him
very much, but while they were influential over Diem, Diem was the president and
people knew that, and I hear complaints about that when I was stationed in Nha Trang
from the Vietnamese, who spoke French, wishing he would. So I kind of admired that
they were ruling a country with just material ore, had ore and the United States, the
people out there could take without their plates, then in some countries it’s land of the
gent, but it couldn’t in Vietnam, that kind of thing spread, probably about making job
battalion level new people, the coup succeeded, the war might be won, and we allowed
the way participate in a which way the. The Kennedy thing was just kind of at first,
devastating. I don’t know if it wasn’t the kind of thing you thought very much about in
terms of a President being assassinated it doesn’t happen that often, we don’t have coups,
it’s not something that you might even have a contingency plan for. There were
contingency plans about Diem because there had been attempted coups before. But I
wasn’t any place where I saw civilian reaction to the Diem overthrow. I probably would
have discounted it anyway, because too much of height of the war, people had faith that
didn’t have the foggiest notion where Vietnam was, that gets back to something I said
earlier, I don’t think the government provided leadership on that war because if they did
people would have gone for the fighting for why, and they didn’t. Even more recently
I’ve heard of polls that were taken at the time, and it was amazing how many people, at a
time when high schools provided better education, that there were people who did not
know much about the Vietnam War, except what they read in the anti-war tracts, and stuff being put out on the interstates by the air look and sea groups who were against war.

SM: Now, what did you think when the high profile events took place of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and then the subsequent American escalation and increased ground presence, introduction of ground presence into Vietnam?

HV: Well, I believe the Gulf of Tonkin at the time, I really believed the Gulf incidents took place, so at that time I thought there was a good thing for us because it gave us the opportunity to go and do what we had tried to be doing, I have long held the view that we should never have been there in the first place but once we were there and committed, let the nourishment feed the lucio model head of what we had set out to do and indeed it was good for us once we were there to stop the spread of communism. I always believed, and still do, in the domino theory and I think that we helped to stop that, even today when we create quote winning the war, so I felt that the Tonkin thing was okay, we went ahead with it that’s fine. Unfortunately, Johnson was not the president who really knew how to handle a war. He selected targets in the North and they were stripping targets, they fell off the hood, the balance sheet was generally right, took the Air Force by surprise, its pilots were being shot down and he was told he could only provide gunmen to protect his reactor which meant they had to be locked on by radar because they could react, big iron solution that they do at despot because on headers you look like you’re history of it, kind of redefined what, its just how they kept to his pilot and almost to the point where, if they saw anything, anything at all happening. [?] at the only point he was released, but that’s the kind of war that Johnson was running and he was picking targets in the North, the pilots that I talked to were compact, said it was ridiculous, they would see missiles on the dock at Haiphong and they weren’t allowed to strike them down, and they knew the next times they saw them, they would be coming out back. The Chinese and Soviets would go by phone, then they’d go out to the field and so I guess they were a member of Entry McDaniels, but who bombed and things like, actually the felt was ridiculous, it wasn’t the kind of targeting that would get a reaction from. I thought that the time was an ultra bird, but I thought the timing, before very much too timid, too fearful of, Chinese incursion. I know that’s a holdover from the Korean War, the Chinese came in, had things to it but I didn't think that situation, I thought it was
criminal, I don’t know but. The other part of it, according to people I had talked to would be the [?]. A target might be selected and had to go the White House, and then there was time delay and the guys get on the target and all they’ve done is, they were going to hurry just to the incoming missile, not as effective as they should have been, they’re going to whisper why or they’re going to have come talking, have better timing, more stealth in targets. We made some real blunders there.

SM: During the period from 1965 when the U.S. introduced ground forces into Vietnam and.

HV: [?] ground forces.

SM: I beg your pardon.

HV: Big ground forces.

SM: Right, large ground forces, I’m sorry because of course we had a rather significant advisory presence on the ground already, but conventional ground force units arrived to actually engage in fighting, from that time until you went back for your second tour, what kind of contact did you have with other officers who were going to Vietnam and coming back, and what sense did you get from them as far as the strategy, as it was being employed and in particular that fact that we were employing an attrition strategy, coupled with erosion, trying to erode the North Vietnamese capability to continue supporting war in the South and what sense did they give you as far as progress being made?

HV: I didn’t have, actually between about, let’s say from Panama to the time I finished my back in Fort Spell, I only had peripheral contact with folks coming out of Vietnam. The reason for that is I was in Panama and there weren’t very many people coming back there from Vietnam, and during the eight years, the years we were putting together the aircraft, we were on an Army base which was an intelligence base and didn’t have any combat-arms folks there to speak of, so there wasn’t any traffic through that area and we were light days so I worked out away form there. At American University, I saw very few military officers who had come back from Vietnam, that was ’67, ’68 so I can’t say too much about what was happening, but people were thinking that were coming out of there because they weren’t crossing paths, I could tell you more about
what the students at American University were saying about the thing, but that’s not the
exact same deal. I was at American University when they had the riots downtown.
SM: Okay, and why don’t you go ahead and describe your perspective of those
events?
HV: The students at AU were very, very much against the war, I mean; those
who weren’t against the war weren’t speaking out for sure. The few of them though, in
the class I heard, responded to me differently after I had been there for a while, than they
did when I first got there. When I first got there, I’m another military bum with a
military mind. As people do they got over it, they could see a notion that might not agree
with that person, and so I got every reaction from people there who didn’t know or think
and talk there. I didn’t go out of my way to bait anybody, although people went out of
their way to bait me, at a cocktail party, two of those at MIT. To evidence being very
strong, had a little field there, certain people would talk to me in those few social
opportunities that we got involved in most of the time they were classroom situations, in
the library or home, so the riots downtown were, I guess you’d have to say devastating to
everybody. That further demonstrated my opinions that I had developed in my first tour
of Vietnam concerning the objectivity of the American press. The video cameras were
all over Washington-- and by the way, this happened in Panama, lots of people who were
there knows what happened, same thing—the cameras had come in, they were listening
ear two a day, so like in Panama, we paid kids to throw rocks while they take a picture
and now in Washington DC they didn’t have to pay them, all they had to do was shine
their lights or at night their cameras on people and they would act up, they would begin to
throw things and that sort of thing. You did those kinds of gestures, just because they
were on the camera and its part of my feeling that that’s were objectivity goes by the
board when people get, when you know their responding to the camera and you continue
to read the camera, reflected as the types of general type of action, they just have the
camera. Its almost like watching Geraldo in Afghanistan, dodging bullets with his.
SM: What did you hear about Tet from, not from the media so much as from
perhaps other sources in the military, did you hear anything from official military
channels?
HV: We were briefed on it. I went from American University directly over there, so I was just briefed on it as a part of the out-processing to go on over and I was not in intelligence collection, or a processing activity at that time. If I would have been, I would have been pretty much privy to what was going on, but I was second to my first year student, wasn’t over where the intelligence flow was, so what I got was the briefing that had ample, so when I got there, it was shortly after Tet and I guess that Tet was about 10 July, so it was pretty much wrapped up by then, I had flashback ideas on it because of what the press was saying about being a defeat for us. The briefings that I got before I went over, the military, I don’t recall anybody telling me it was a victory for us, but I don’t think it had been analyzed at that stage to be such, but I think it was correctly a victory for the insufficient amount of [?], like it might have been, if we’d have filtered up to it. The press totally misrepresented that defeat watching, I thought.

SM: Well, how did you come about going back to Vietnam, was this something that you volunteered for?

HV: I did, I volunteered for two reasons basically. One as I said was to avoid going to a unit where I’d been before, be working with the same guy, and the other one was that, the way the Army system works you have to go to certain schools, get range the furthest, and I had not yet been to Fort Leavenworth, here I was in Calcutta, and people would have been to Leavenworth and General Command and Staff College, as Majors and nobody wanted a Colonel, so I volunteered to go to Vietnam directly out of American University to stay in cycle so that when I came back I would be back at the time they were forming up the next year’s class at Fort Leavenworth and that’s why I wanted to, they didn’t break people off and spend PCS money, Public Change of Station money, to move them to Leavenworth for that class. We tried to do it, if somebody was in the cycle where they would begin. So that’s why I went back to Vietnam. So it worked, that’s what I did, came back from Vietnam passed through a, I think I went to Fort Bellingham for a little short course and then down to Fort Leavenworth for two week course on sad puppy with family.

It was interesting because that was a place where people had more to say about what was going on in Vietnam and one of the things they say, is visit some of us, a briefing one, the B-52 air populations that our planes tried and while they had less
successful than I thought they ought to, when I was filling in at Night B headquarters,
looking over there two copies each, looking over the documents that were captured on vis
a vis, I began to get interested because at one time when I was at American University, I
did a calculation on the amount of money we were spending dropping bombs in the North
and the mount of money we were spending dropping bombs in those days, one pound of
iron bombs cost about a dollar and so at one point decided that we would be one running
ahead if we just started dropping money over North Vietnam, rather than dropping
bombs, in terms of getting the war over with. Not that I had the opportunity, facetious
interest in the plan so I was collecting any contra documents that would came across my
desk, and I would stick in my desk drawer, and after I’d been doing this for about three
months, Air Force Major came in to see me, said he wanted to state and he asked me if I
would do a sort for him, on all the documents that they get, which showed what kind of
bomb damage the B-52s were doing, so I guess to his amazement and surprise I pulled a
sheet that was sticking out of my desk drawer and said, well let’s see, this one, damage:
two rice pocks and two huts, and that’s kind of the way that I could lay down the law.
This was information from captured documents of course, not from interrogating people
who’d been in them, but it was a kind of a thing that I was sitting in this grear cuddle up
in the middle of this damage because people weren’t there. I remember when I was at
Leavenworth we got this briefing explaining why we haven’t done very well. The
aircraft would take off from Guam and make their flight to Vietnam, they’d had to refuel
and part of the process was better before we followed for safety of civil aircraft, I think,
because they filed a notice to airmen, which said where are the planes would be, when
they would be at what coordinates, that was a public knowledge, so that all airports could
get it and all pilots could read it before they took off. But the North Vietnamese, they
figure an out one, they could tell by the tracks of these guys going to fly, about what part
of Vietnam would have been struck and since they, knew well it was going to be in this
part of Vietnam, somebody could probably figure out what the targets were likely to be
for that particular strike, come back afterwards, so that was the great thing slowed down,
came about, for a while to the firefighter. [?].

It was where that thing came down, our early engagement, never part of
Leavenworth was, seeing people who had been out there and people who were in the
combat arms who were actually out in the mud doing the work, they helped fight during
the war, for example I was fairly senior so I was one of the officer’s section leader, and
my table mate at my section had been out a couple of tours, he was working, in this
conference. He had some really good, beaned him a couple of times when he had these
next people. He said, I can’t get to them, [?]; because he thought it was not polite to kill.
But I think, that’s not the different part, leadership, that what he depicted there was a
ronshell, [?] black, lucid, very effective Sergeant, out of reach, [?], but you felt like just,
the power [?]. And then, one more, I went back to the arnthol station and I took it and it
was Commander of it first, that’s where we sang, little Susie, potential demonstraters,
kind of stole the hearts, it never happened but we planned for it. I remember to say, there
about, just to me it was a very interesting song, it was command assignment O-6
command and I was military and that was always good for morale, and I remember I had
an interesting relationship with him. The deputy that I got, my help was his son, it wasn’t
a place to find him, so I had to sort the times out, and then hand it into the commander.
Now, I had waited for that, being hypocritical, he was pretty calm, he was not a combat
one, he had almost no command experience, he usually didn’t get taken very good care
of, finance officers don’t get command, they have to hold to plan, so his name was Tomly
and I went past him to see what we were doing and his father was clever and he said
another lower, and I used up the dog, and said he took the dog. Be ready [?], good leader,
we [?] in our office, very unusual he said, he could have stormed in, but that’s not his
style at all and next thing you do to it, is very much Vietnamese paper down to its,
pointed, it was an Army Times, earn your times, let’s talk about it, well, for twelve black
marks [?]. He says I hate that, he said nobody will ever believe me, that I got to where I
am because I’m a good officer, everybody’s always going to think that I got to where I
am because I’m black and he was really angry to the point where he was doing things
which were somewhat heard, but that was the measure of a man. It was true. That’s the
way something is, you don’t know the truth, but you better back in, up to our time that I
remember [?], kind of reaction though.

SM: How much longer was it before you went to Vietnam?
HV: That was after.
SM: Oh, I’m sorry this was after Vietnam, what year was that?
HV: It was in ’72.
SM: ’72, I’m sorry, okay.
HV: But we didn’t talk about Air Force, that’s business and ask me about after Vietnam, but we got off on that, but we still have some things to talk about, don’t we.
SM: Oh yes, absolutely. In terms of your arrival in Vietnam and your initial assessment, how, how did it strike you, when you first go to Vietnam for your second tour, what were your first impressions, this huge American military presence now compared to your previous experience, and what were your initial assessments of how things were going.
HV: You’re probably going to laugh at my first reaction. I got off the plane at Tan Son Nhut sniffed the air and I could have, if you’d have taken me anywhere in the world, even on back to, Vietnam, dropped me anywhere near Cholon, the Chinese part of Vietnam, that side, I could have told you where I was without ever opening my eyes, its just a very characteristic smell. That was quite different, we were out initiating action this time and before we were protecting ourselves. In terms of turning up our nose to action, so it was quite different, lived differently in the total [?], the security situation, I moved up to a BOQ in Cholon, went back and forth to MACV headquarters by bus, Danh Chanh there was of course, an awful lot of talk going on about what was in at that time, not any more quote a bank on the friends that lived down range, the anecdotes about what was happening, the generals’ briefing every morning, varied kinds of things which I took at face value, for example, Battleship New Jersey had come up with, working the coast during gunfire, they were fired on the targets and there were many who thought that was just a, kind of a poster type thing to do, send a battleship to that particular wharf. One of my associates in J-2 was, behind me screamed that the, the Admiral he never shot that much. He told General Abrams he was going to have to send a battleship back to San Diego, and Abrams said what for and, the Admiral said for crew change and Abrams said crew change? you mean the crew hadn’t killed, the Admiral said no, we do the crew change before that way, and my friend was kind of looking out the window, he said Abrams just chomped down on the cigar, and with two of his teeth said to the Admiral, if you take that ship, to San Diego, you can keep it, I don’t need it any more. Smaller conflicts between the services, like that, at the time. I don’t know if there, I can’t
remember when the New Jersey actually did come back, it was an important point,
Admirals standpoint, I think it was the probably a little bit irritating to him, that they were
on a different schedule, in our spaces when they weren’t doing that much flying.

SM: When did you arrive in country again for your second tour?
HV: In ’68, I think it was in July.
SM: Now did you think that Johnson’s decision not to run for re-election, did you
think that would have very much of an impact on the Vietnam War?
HV: Yes.
SM: What did you suspect at the time would happen?
HV: Well, the reason I thought it would have an influence, two reasons, one was
that it showed a lack of resolve on the part of the U.S. government which was already
beginning to show very much anyway, but it might have been done elsewhere, had to do
with that, it really was a root crack down, we wanted to get permission, then it would be
do the mission, then it would states clean, not going to handle it, but from that standpoint
it was the right decision, from the micromanagement standpoint it was good, from a
leadership standpoint, did this looks too. Don’t change horses in midstream, in our
system you have to change them, because of the riches in Saigon. Changing horses in
midstream, I don’t think we needed that at that time, what we needed was the government
to be stronger and lead the people, not just the department chief, but our court and get
down the lead the people. The people were leading him.

SM: When the election of 1968 occurred, November of 1968, did you get much
word about how Vietnam factored into the election platforms of each of the candidates?
HV: No, I didn’t.
SM: Were you able to vote?
HV: That’s one of the saddest stories of my entire military career.
SM: How so?
HV: I voted in California, El Dorado County, California, and it was almost
always the case that I would apply for a ballot, the ballot would get to me without enough
time to get it back, twice when I was passing through the State, I haven’t come close,
because I quote ballots and complained about that, and they always got to me late. I
wasn’t voting right, the clerks had control of who got the ballot and who got done out,
but most of the time I didn’t get to vote. So I didn’t vote in that one, but Chinsley I
voted, and when I was in Belgium and Germany and Belgium, Germany I was an officer,
in Belgium I was new, but they had their pay, they wouldn’t, they won’t accept in the
court, the courts weren’t able to do that, so much. A little bit of practice, but its foes not
up, so I slept. But I didn't tell anyway, talking about sources of information, what was
happening in United States was obvious before I was over there and time came when I
had war feelings, it was obvious that it was going to affect the Nixon-Muller vote, not
clear to me at the time if I recall, which way we were going to be and then I had to admit
to you that I had long ago vowed that I would never vote Nixon to lead any office, if in
California and he has used so many dirty tactics, I mean, as a young politician out there,
not to be too personal about it, but he did do some devastating dirty tricks [?] long before
he was out there in California, not very close to him, about eight terms he was going hit.
It was the kind of thing that caught my attention, at that time, when I went to Berkeley
area and learned a little bit more about him, what he did, did the same kind of thing,
another Democrat telling to hang debits, just didn’t want that man for the job doing that
much. The kish and the bed-wetter and he would win, but what are they Thompson with
Ron Waters?

SM: Getting back to the issue and the effects of Tet of ’68, before you went back
to Vietnam and then just after you got back to Vietnam, did you have any
indication that was as much of a turning point in the war as it became, and as it had been
historically argued to have been?

HV: I didn’t think so. I thought it was a wake-up call. I didn’t think it was a
turning point, it was a wake-up call, they got caught there flat-footed. We shouldn’t have,
and we did, but to me it was also a wake-up call that we were trying to do the war on the
cheap, trying to come up with personnel and – last one that got there, I think the last one
that started asking for the higher numbers of troops got turned down I think, because he
got a six black battalions or something like that, but still whoever thought one out on foot
was not enough, but there weren’t enough but I didn’t think was a turning point, I though
it was a wake-up call, lesson learned and lock the room, you better.

SM Well, when you got in country and after your initial briefings and I guess, in-
processing you went straight to MACV in Saigon and why don’t you go ahead and
describe your initial duties and how they evolved into you running, basically, the CDEP program?

HV: Initially, I was in the section that was called the exploitation division, under that exploitation division and Cam Toon, that was my immediate boss there was [?], turned awful incident. He also had direct pinch on children, so he had a collection of those, see that big fumble. So I was focused on the doc points and primarily, that role was dab bumps in the way. I was trying to improve the effectiveness of the documents. The documents came in, and so we had to improve the effectiveness of the collection process, and the identification process of it, of them, and the expedition of the documents back into the exploitation center so they could do something with them, and further, trying to figure out how we could, tailor the output, huge quantities of documents are coming in every day and they’d cross [?] in a huge volume of these that are intelligence information going out. We just, we didn’t want to choke people to death, but that was the entire the good space, but then the volume if you want to keep it down to a reasonable level, we had started, before I got there, distributing product by region or to try to keep people form ignoring good intelligence, it was down in the Delta, and the other thing was to get rid of the volume of the products so they could be [?], first thing I noticed, I was reading other people about every day, the way we’d informed, the English name, not in terms of grammar, but in terms of style, we had created great ability and so I didn’t struggle with that for the five month I was in stamp, didn’t have any success with doing much about the problem. I worked up to, I guess you could call, today people would use the term leverage. I would go around to members of the staff, the operations side of the staff asking what it was they were looking for, and what they thought that we could give in out of the care for talk envelope. Our country documents didn’t have to mean just history, so they’re great for analysis, they do it all the time, talk to a commander of British and tactical, usually, very, very softly, but habit, but they can tell him a lot about what [?], his experience, [?] help him down, which way he’s moving, what are the roads that he likes to use, what’s his medical history, the history of his medicine for his troops, the ability to fight, what’s their food situation. All those things could be derived from captured documents, but they’re not. They’re our history, that’s how some people need that kind of thing in order to develop their own advanced plan, that’s what that called looking
back, to stand for, find out who they needed, what they needed, and then feeding that
information back down to the document exploitation center so that they wouldn’t reject
documents, that might be useful then funny, with a different fact they weren’t. With the
thousands of pages coming in, someone would go through and kind of sort them out, just
where they came from, what the interest was, if there was a garbage stuff, they’d toss
them out. Some of them they would just give some things, just what we’re thinking
about, some of them they'd give full translations. Well, they needed them all there, at the
exploitation center, but that’s what really warranted a full translation, what could be
done, in some other form to set up smily the consumer. In terms, lets say a hospital was
not burdened, that happened all the time, Vietcong would get into a hospital, [?] usually
they’d ask, if we knew we could get rid of them, so we get those in, so I talked to the
people on the medical J-tours that I go on about what it is they want from C, and then I’d
pass that back to them, which was essence we’d still leave in it the trash sign, it just kind
of look like, same old, same old, not the previous batch so that’s the sense we learned to
work well with the staff. But that work was important to me when I became the
American director of COMSI, we had two directors, the Vietnamese director and the
American director because having had the opportunity for five months to look over the
product and nit pick it, through there all the might make it, what might be approved,
being in a position to run it when we got time to it, to do things that I couldn’t tell the
previous director to do, but I could do myself, so shortly after I got there, I started to end
those kinds of things. One of the first things you do when you take over a town, I didn’t
walk around, look, see what its like, talk to the people, and try to get them to know you
and you to know them at that point. You’ve have to be de-famished, and English might
dent a little switch, but I believe that they’re doing good, we had a building that we joint
general staff compound, it was just a hundred yards or so from, I know you guys are so
sick of the, [?] and I was this type of [?] and we were least expecting it, [?] at least I
won’t handle it, probably, gave them that compound. Our building was shaped like a
square doughnut so to speak, it had a big rectangular courtyard in the center, and in that
courtyard they had stolen and a large village that should have been just the trees and so
[?] . . . [?] something there I’d never seen before, it would be right there, interesting,
right there. You tell me, [?] so I called the thing over there. [?] I have a couple of them,
Vietnamese military, what’s wrong, it looks pretty normal. Well, if that [?], its not
Vietnamese. [?] There’s not enough toilet paper, telling you toilet paper, the nearest in
the woods was on the [?]. [?] We had, looked pretty clean, but there were [?]. [?] getting
enough toilet paper so we could put a roll on every desk, getting a clean coroner, make
sure all the plumbing worked, that type of thing, got all that, everybody had a roll of toilet
desk and nobody had to steal one. I wanted that, I could stay clean [?]. It was good and
kind of odd, but they seem to be [?]. Senior Vietnamese guys came up when I was
going ready to leave and said that was one thing they thanked me for the most were the
picture, wasn’t saying much for me, it was really, that was [?] in their culture that the
military brought there the big this land, but not, the most important had been going and it
tore the product. The Vietnamese language, [?] I didn’t speak it, Vietnamese language
was imprecise so the reason that I would read through the captured documents twice, and
I’d read about three or four paragraphs [?] that was to [?]. Mine would be [?]. They’d
write up in several different grids what they were doing, forms, vocabulary to express the
more precise duties that they were trying to put across and so I got my operation [?] and
we decided that we would do a team thing, and we would put an American soldier who
was Vietnamese, still there?

SM: Yes sir.

HV: We put a Vietnamese soldier on, I think one hundred percent of this
Vietnamese, with the Vietnamese translator and they worked side by side. The
Vietnamese needed linguists, to be able to translate the nuances of what it was and get it
into a situation where we were publishing the idea that was being put forth, not the literal
translation. The American would work with this Vietnamese counterpart to check to see,
yes, this is the right translation of that Vietnamese the way the American understood it,
and he, made a [?] that was dated English, he’d put that into the finished product, and it
cut way down on the volume of, because its so much repetition and we got it going and it
was working well, cut down on the volume of the paperwork but didn’t cut down the
volume with information and it vastly improved the feedback on the, vastly improved the
utility of, these people would stay awake long to read them. Before that it would just
belay their tears, and you get to the point where you’re almost rejecting what you’re
reading because its so blind and so that made a huge difference in the bureau. They’d
been more and more, reflecting changes I made, one of them and the other change I made
was that we were getting hardly anything or any documents from the area where the
Korean were assigned to areas of responsibility, the program divisions, so I would field
visits to see if I could perk them up on getting the documents in, doing the documentation
on each piece, writing a tag and, where they found it, who they were, and at what date,
place, if they knew the identity of the noted Admiral, write it down and take it down
expeditiously to their channel, to us. In both cases there was, there were T-2s saying,
well you know, we never get anything back. Its work, he’s asking us to do work but we
never get anything back, so I went down to the old MAAG compound where ROK forces
Vietnam was supposed to be living, and had a chat with the Korean J-2, about what we
could do to solve it, and so he invited me out to dinner, downtown, we had a nice, lovely
Chinese dinner, my first Chinese dinner where I had sea slugs for dinner, tasty enough,
anyway, so the final result of my donating was he would provide me with three trilingual
Korean soldiers, Korean language, English, Europeans and I would house them in my
place and we (?) would put out a Korean language document of the CDEK product, the
ones pertinent to the area of operations for the Koreans. That worked very well. The
Korean soldiers were super, and they had no desire whatsoever to leave the circumstance
which they were working for me, and go back to their barracks. Because what I had to
do, I had to find them a place to stay, so I just spoke to men, put a bachelor enlisted
quarters that we got, which were, compared to the Koreans, its like going to the palace to
live and I also, in order to make their lifestyle commensurate with the lifestyle of the
Americans who were there, I ate with some of them, at the BOQ. I paid them an
additional amount of money so that they could pay their mess bills, so they could paid
their laundry bills, which only American paid, so they were living here and having their
laundry done and getting pretty good meals, transported back and forth to work everyday
and good conditions at work, so they really were motivated to do good so they could stay
there, and they did. The Koreans, were not any problem, I guess the measure of the
appreciation for it was, but the president gave me the Military Merit decoration for that I
think.

SM: Now you mentioned earlier, in terms of streamlining the product that was
going I guess, back to the headquarters, MACV headquarters, and being read and utilized
for intelligence purposes, what was the turnaround time, typically, from the receipt of the
actual captured documents to a meaningful product, that could be utilized by decision
makers or military planners in Vietnam?

HV: Some units have stuff in right away on captured roses, maybe not on
operations, that would wait until they got back or something. It wasn’t very much field
expertation done, a cursory view if they had any, but they had to be done and so generally
they came back the expeditiously as they thought they could without attributing too
much. And it would come into us, an area that would, it mixed all the documents we had,
it was kind of like an inventory control situation, they’d come in, evaluate the documents
and put those in the various piles to be worked on by the translation branch and try to
prioritizing in terms, of hot stuff, urgent information, time sensitive and also segregate
out that which was not particularly useful and segregate in those things that could be
useful and that would go to the translation branch, and they would do their business and it
would go into typing and typing would do the translation, the English or Korean onto I-
Tec platemasters which would go directly to the printing press, and these would all be
followed by the original documents, when they got old they, operation branch where they
would do the printed coming. Those documents would be filmed along with the
translation, along with a punch card to use code existent, identify the very zone so we
were interested in went where, what captured, something on the subject matter. And it’d
be printed off and go out with full club the next morning, making courier jackets. The
target was twenty-four hours from receipt to getting into the courier traffic. I won’t say
everything made that because it didn’t, full translations took longer. A full translation of
one that was thought to be time sensitive would make it at deadline. The other ones
would take a while. One of the results of the change in readability of it, was that I got
some requests, how why don’t you give me more of these forms, well, put some more to
me, I had three groups that asked for that, just wow, and you know, the whole thing, and
right away I had a distress call, cut it off, cut it off. It was too much, so about that time
our four o-clock in the morning clutter was about the size of the Sunday New York Times
as far as the in script of those, not including advertising and such, but it was a huge
document everyday. I think the typing pool was twenty-four hours, if you put a little bit,
if you put a[?], and I think the document information center total was probably about
three hundred people. A lot could be done in twenty-four hours, it was a twenty-four hour operation. I had three Cambodians that occasionally got those kinds of opportunities. It was a monthly between the Cambodians and the Vietnamese and it goes back to the opening hostility between those two peoples, but we managed it.

SM: How did you, I guess, engage in some kind of verification that the translations were accurate and validation that the translations were accurate or was there any way to do that?

HV: I think the way I did it was having the American linguist working with the Vietnamese one. So it was actually kind of, the product was validated between those two people as being an accurate depiction of what was being said.

SM: So it was never complete reliance on a Vietnamese translation that is translation by Vietnamese person?

HV: Not completely, right. There was before but when I teamed them, the Vietnamese got [?] translated into English, and the American would read it over first thing in the process, during that he would read the Vietnamese. So if he read the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese guys translation to English didn’t look right, they would have a discussion, make a point.

SM: Was it ever discovered that, what was the mechanism of betting the Vietnamese themselves, the Vietnamese that you hired to make sure that they were not sympathetic, I guess you can say.

HV: I really have gone by the [?] so we didn’t have much input in, I don’t know we would have.

SM: So the Vietnamese government told you, these people are reliable, they’re on our side?

HV: Yes. Well, and there were other incentives there like you had to have a pass to get on to the compound and they were pretty sensitive about dry pivoting, so this after write that. Actually, my counterpart was not the senior guy, the Vietnamese director of the SECV, as the senior Vietnamese army officer in our grouping, so if we had any problems we would go to him to get it solved, day to day problems like the, I don’t know what it is about the Vietnamese women, but all of that worked for us seemed to be beautiful, whatever that meant. I still think that today, but occasionally, actually too
often, it wasn’t with cover, get to our building in tears, the deputy’s supervisors would
come and tell me we’ve got soldiers on the gate that are harassing whoever coming
through again, calling them America’s whores, so I would say to my counterpart, why
don’t you get out there and put a stop to this. I can’t cause that’s the job of the regular
[?], so the first time I went over, talking about it with them, and then somehow I’d be
wrong about that. He’d tell them there was [?]. But, sure you did, you better [?] but half
of that I [?] asked my counterpart if he’d go talk to the Colonel, see if he could get him to
shape up the guys at the gate, but it was really the borderline, sensitive to begin with and
work there. As far as the guys on the gate were concerned, they were working behind
locked doors with Americans, no telling that.

SM: What kind of mechanism were in place, for instance, to make sure that none
of the translators, the Vietnamese that is, that were translating and typing, were VC
themselves?

HV: I don’t think we had any on our side, but the Vietnamese had a counterpart
to our counterintelligence so I don’t think it happened while I was there, but I would
suppose that if they discovered that Miss Young’s brother was a Vietcong agent that she
would have been under surveillance or questioned or privately. I don’t think it happened
while I was there, I think that’s probably what would happen. There were other kinds of
things, that were that kind of came late, I and my boss over at J-2 were called to go down
to the Art Menecine to talk to a Colonel, who happened to be chief of station and he was
livid because we had published a document which identified a safe house and he was in
about capture there, and so he insisted that we give him higher approval on all of our
products and I told him, that’s not going to happen. There was Lieutenant Colonel
DeKirkham and I looked at my boss and he says, that’s not going to happen. We’re not
going to delay the product so you can go over it to protect one of your dominos, name
somebody in there, there was one of his agents. And it didn’t seem imagination, just
named and association on the location and he was concerned, if that got into the North
Vietnamese hands, they would put one and one together and come up with two, next to
the fact. It was a logical concern, but his solution wasn’t logical so it wasn’t acceptable,
so that’s almost ended with we got anything right. And I was suspicious of it, it looked
like it was blowing color on his covers, but I would make sure that the document got to
him, so he wasn’t going to get [?], but that’s kind of the way it was. The other thing that
was in those captured documents that I found, particularly interesting were the personal
diaries, South Vietnamese soldiers and North Vietnamese soldiers, I gather. When they
were due a reward of some sort, they had to have a military coronation and those guys
getting awards would get their awards and the award was quite quick, was recorded into
the journal in a ballpoint pen, because it was, I guess the culture that to keep a personal
diary, so we sought those things out, we waned those diaries because quite frequently
they would be written, the latter portions of their diary would be telling us the story of
their trip down the Ho Chi Minh trail and we liked to be able to make some correlations,
what the extent of the trail was, and what the capacity of various portions of the trail were
and where the resupplier and restation areas were along the trail, so those were pretty
important. Lieutenant only needed, [?] transcript upstairs in [?], but they weren’t all just
military information. One of my favorites, that I have around here someplace, a
translation of it is a diary of a man who was very literate and very, very poetic and the
romantic one night stand and he wrote very well and he described his trip and stopovers
and very readable preyed upon, waved, particularly good at descriptions, like good
authors are and the last entry in his book was, and this was taken from his Bible, the last
entry was we are going in to attack the Americans tomorrow and I do not know care if I
die, I hope my comrades will return this diary to my parents. And that may have
happened, but it didn’t happen before we left because the diary, as all captured
documents with a few minor exceptions, all captured documents brought in, were the
property of the South Vietnamese government so that’s why if we wanted to keep our
copy and put it on the microfilm and so once we had finished with that it would go to the
Vietnamese archive there in the same building and unfortunately the archive was not air
conditioned and in your business you know what that does, so they were probably in the
process of deteriorating. Now, I’m talking 1969, so by ’75, that’s a few more years on
those documents but if they came in to get more stuff they posted and destroy that, and I
don’t know why they would bother, the North Vietnamese got it, and so they may have
done some of that returning. I kind of doubt it though, but that was [?] and I would have
suggested at some point in time that we can get our hands on those, that housing was, or
what ever it is.
SM: Oh, the CDEK collection at the National Archives.

HV: Yes, even if we couldn’t get them I hope to get the National Archives or the Air Force Academy to do a run on those items, and just pop the diaries out and those are part of the Vietnam Center trials, give to the current Vietnamese bidder, the people, the people first.

SM: Certainly something we can talk about.

HV: Yes, so from a personal standpoint that see they, I was living, when I first got there, in a BOQ in Cholon and it was relatively good place to stay. One of the more spectacular things one of us fingered, one night I was listening to Armed Forces Radio, and they were playing the 1812 overture and I don’t know whether it was by design or by chance, I suspect it had to be by change, but at the time the cannons were to fire, was an Arc Light strike with them, hearing of Saigon so the thousand pound bombs will do things that ordinarily cannons do for the 1812 overture in Saigon that night.

SM: That must have been a bit surreal.

HV: It was. Surely, the Air Force didn’t coordinate it, disc jockeying, but it was one of those very [?]. The other thing that I did though, the CDEK make leaf where I worked, was not for me a twenty-four hour operation. When I went to CDEK that was a twenty-four hour operation so I took their supply room and eventually and I had the PANE come in and install toilet facilities in it, put an air conditioner in it, it was already air conditioned, I just had them convert it into a BOQ one, so I just lived there in the compound. I’d go out for breakfast, there was a little cantina there in the compound and I’d probably go up to the BOQ sometimes for the down and for lunch and dinner sometimes, chow and munch but I always ate a fourth meal. I was only getting about four hours sleep a day, which was all I needed because I was, my body said sleep, I’d sleep, just sit down and usually about the longest I ever was in bed, give a night was about an hour and a half. The other times it would just be during the day or early evening or early morning, whatever, sometime I would just fall asleep and I figured since I was sleeping only when I was tired I was really getting some quality sleep and it worked out fine because I was only getting about four hours a night, but I did eat [?] and my fourth meal was always company meal, it would be, what they called C-ration, I ate that, but it was a useful thing to be there, very useful in terms of leading the people who worked
there, and it was not uncommon for somebody to knock on the door, need to talk about
something, and I was there. I thought that worked out quite well.
SM: While you were at CDEK, did you ever get any indication that the
intelligence you were getting had been compromised in any way?
HV: That we were getting?
SM: Yes, the intelligence, for instance, after, you might receive a particularly
interesting and timely piece of intelligence, put it through a rapid translation, get it into a
report, get it up the chain of command, so it might be exploited for some, perhaps tactical
purpose only to find that it had very quickly become out of date for no apparent
explanation.
HV: We had some suspected documents that we thought were disinformation
documents. We had a map with a battle plan, deemed to be disinformation, that it turned
out that it was not, so it was not exploited because it was though to be disinformation,
turned out to have been a good battle plan. That was before I got there, and that battle
plan was part of Tet.
SM: How about while you were there, any disinformation or otherwise suspect
intelligence?
HV: Yes, we always had that and usually it had to do, usually the clue, one of
the translators would come out and say, I know this officer, who penetrated this last
month and that doesn’t look like his signature. They became very adept at noticing
things like that, saying this doesn’t have the right stamp on it, so they’d go through other
discretions and it might be another report on it as suspect, so [?], make your own
determination. It was not uncommon for somebody to question that. I had a more legal
case similar to that, where a Vietnamese Lieutenant Colonel, who was a G-2 in his
division, came angrily into my office, telling me where we were printing the wrong
interpretation of the document, that the document should be telling us that they needed to
have an Arc Light strike, that was quite a conflict on that one, and it got involved with a
couple higher echelon folks, as between our interpretation of the document and his. It
turned out that we won the day in the court. It was, I call it kind of disinformation, what
he was after was the Arc Light strike, Arc Light strikes were prestige items, if the G-2
could get one in his commander’s area of operations he got a brownie point for that and
so he was trying to interpret the document in way which would say that there was going
to be a target there, that the B-52s should strike and we were saying, no, and as I recall
that was a bit of disinformation that another Vietnamese spread, our guys didn't think
they could vouch for the authenticity of the document itself. This guy was ordered to pull
out the interpretation, rather as arguing the interpretation and they didn't think they could
vouch for the authenticity of it anyway, so he didn’t get his Arc Light strike and we
probably lost a friend. But there was always, you have to be able to compete for those
things, but there’s always a suspicions, almost to the point of paranoia on some of that
stuff, so we would go back, if there was a question on the signature, we’d dig back in the
archives, see if they could find something else on that guy and do a comparison on him,
on the stamp. You saw the stamp [?], know they had it on a stamp.

SM: Yes, sir. Yes, the carved wood stamp.

HV: So, maybe if the stamp wasn’t quite the same, it would. In fact we saw it a
lot of the time, that it was supposedly bore a particularly echelon and the stamp was not,
well, now, whether it was done to misinform us, or whether it was done for some internal
political reason in that particular organization, it would be hard to tell.

SM: I know you’re aware, one of the really controversial issues in the Vietnam
War became the body count and the enemy order of battle and I was curious how much
of a CDEK catch was used in terms of formulating an enemy order of battle, an estimate
number of enemy soldiers available and how effective was that?

HV: In CDEK input was very, very large. Now, in terms of the effectiveness on,
we weren’t analyzing, we were analyzing documents so whoever got a document which
showed some order of battle information in it, would stick it into his larger effort on the
order of battle and so I don’t know how much of what we provided, whether it was ten
percent of what they were doing, five percent, or no contribution except validation, which
could be two, if they got a prisoner report, what we gave them may say the same thing,
just may be validating what the prisoner had to say, so a huge amount of that. The
dineries played a role in that too, because they sometimes identified in the unit, and that
was always a switch, always a switch. How can you get a little by a lot, the hospital
records would sometimes show up too, these guys would suffer illusions. Hospital
records, they told you it was a pretty grand invasion, analyst could hold, pretty good
indication what their logistics problems are, so yes, I would CDEK with its history but it’s the kind of history that allows somebody to build that order of battle plan, and I can’t say whether the end results of that order of battle displayed are taking up lifters, I call it a lift ball. I can’t say that we had a little of input too then, made a lot of input to their order of battle calculations, can’t say that. You have somebody, ask somebody on the analytic side for that one.

SM: Right. In terms of the CDEK documents and reports that you were able to send up the chain of command and to the various command, would that include that you remember, actual enemy estimates in terms of the number of men that might be available to the enemy in a specific location, that kind of stuff, would it get that specific at times?

HV: If it was written into the document, it would be.

SM: Did that happen very often, because of course in the United States we take precautions to inform our soldiers not to write that kind of stuff down, lest it fall into the enemies hands.

HV: Well, as a matter of fact when I was in Vietnam, at that time it was still against Army regulation for me to keep a diary and for that very same reason so, no the information that was in those things, I don’t know about a, yes, I think we had some occasional battle plan come in, which would identify the units to be involved, but that was only now and then actually. I told you about the one at Hue, where Spec-4 Minnoch got that kind of information passed on, not in captured documents though. I don’t know, by the way, as an aside, on this business of Americans not keeping diaries and things, they’re talking today about taking action today to get every soldier a dog tag that gives all that kind of information. I can’t imagine what’s in the minds of people dead, having been on the other side trying to figure out that kind of thing, why would we allow them to capture a prisoner, take a murdered body and run it through their scanner and tell them all they needed to know about this guy and his family and his medical condition and his page unit. They’re even talking about putting that in as subcutaneous implants.

SM: Oh really, okay.

HV: Yes, well I have that in my dogs, my dogs have it.

SM: Tracking, like a GPS tracking thing?
HV: Yes, well it’s an implant in the dogs and when I take them to the vet I’ll ask
them to check it and see if it’s still working and when he puts his reader on it, it gives him
my name and telephone number.
SM: Oh cool, okay.
HV: So if a dog’s lost, it does that, I think checks them for the hip, seems to me
every one of the offices with it, that’s their head long scanners, and I think they check
them, unless they know the dog in person. A strange dog, check her.
SM: Well, in terms of, I’m sorry go ahead.
HV: No, I was just saying that the diaries determine to us, that’s why we should
refrain from doing anything that would give that kind of importance to a future adversary.
The other thing that was happening there that kind of influenced the U.S. effort and I
think also influenced the subsequent military situation. This place down on the coast
called Long Binh depot and, when McNamara was touring the south, this was before
1968, before I got there that is the say, he had got real worried because of so many ships
standing off coast waiting to get into Saigon port and Saigon port was kind of limited so
for the time they were unloaded ship, hundreds of loading ships offshore, waiting to come
to port and ships in those days were charging about four thousand dollars a day to merch
and there was even a little corruption going on, sometimes a ship would come in, report
in to the port that he was there waiting to be called in to offload, once he reported be
there, then he would leave to go ahead and distribute the rest of his cargo throughout the
South China Sea wherever he was going, maybe even over to Saudi Arabia and he’d
come back and he had time to do that and he was getting four thousand dollars a day for
doing somebody else’s work, but he was getting it from the U.S. government. Anyway,
McNamara decided that was too much to pay, so he ordered rapid promoting of all of
those ships, so the way the did it, they pulled in, offloaded those ships onto trucks, the
trucks did rapid turnarounds to Long Binh, put the stuff out in the field there, lost total
inventory control, nobody knew what was going, by the time I got there, nobody know
what was at Long Binh. All those ships unloaded, the manifest wouldn’t match with the
property. The property went into an ARVN depot and no inventory control, so such
things would happen. That needed one of these two drawer safes, combination lock, I
send my supply guy down there to get me one. He came back, he said I couldn’t get one.
I said why not? He said, well I went in, the guy told me, I gave him the requisition the
guy told me, right in the yard, if I could find it, I could have it. He said, I went out in the
yard. I had a crate, had two safes in it, went back, the guy said, either take two or you
don’t take any, so he took two, so I gave one to my counterpart, but every time he went
down there that was what he was told to do. You go out and if you can find it, bring it
back and you can have it. And so there were all kinds of things that were there, that were
not available so to speak, to troops who needed it, so when it wasn’t available there, it
had to be re-ordered so sometimes it was going to be air shipped in, but it was sitting
right there, but nobody knew where. At one time, my supply person came back and said, I
got the calendars you wanted -- you know those flip-over desk calendars, you see on all
the government desks—he said I got the calendars, I’d asked him to get two hundred of
them, and I said okay, just distribute them. He said you’d better come look, so I went out
and looked and he had a crate that was about ten feet long, about four and half feet high
and wide, all loaded with these calendars for that year, and I said what is that. He said,
well I think they’re the calendars for all the MACV. He said, well you’re a horse trader,
that’s trading material, go use it. But that ridiculous part of the war effort, huge efforts
made to supply the needs of law enforcement, and it was lost after shipping it into the
area because of the, among ships rapidly losing, even whatever four thousand dollars per
shipment would have been cheap compared to the value of the equipment we lost, and the
other side of that coin was all that stuff was up there. South Vietnamese didn’t know
what to do and so the North Vietnamese had plenty of time to go through it and the parts
and things that were shipped.

SM: In terms of CDEK catch and CDEK materials, was there ever an opportunity
or ever a specific battle that you remember that was heavily influenced by CDEK
information that you guys provided?

HV: No, and I don’t know because I never got any feedback that way.

SM: While you were in country, you were there during the battle for Hamburger
Hill for 1969, weren’t you?

HV: I don’t recall. I don’t know, what time in ’69 was it?

SM: I want to say, sometime in May, but I’m not positive.
HV: Well, I would have been there at the time, but I don’t remember our relationship to that. I was kind of in a hole there, you might say, living where I worked twenty-four hours a day.

SM: You mentioned that you couldn’t even leave without some kind of an escort?

HV: Well, I couldn’t leave Saigon.

SM: Right, you couldn't leave Saigon.

HV: Because of my assailants with the sieging business, the clearances that I held I was restricted to Saigon, unless I had to refresh and leave, I could ask for and get permission to leave Saigon, but if I left Saigon I was not allowed to stay below core level overnight. I did a couple of times, but I wasn’t supposed to. That was a personal restriction, it didn’t have anything to do with CDEK, so when I went up to see the Koreans I had to just, either get back the same day or stay overnight and [?] and had to get back to Saigon, and I didn’t do a lot of travel, like I did the first time. What I find is kind of interesting, in Saigon, but we had a come down that I lived in when I was still in the Q, put a wall around it, and the sixth floor was a restaurant area, and one day somebody arrived by, through a hand grenade at me and the guard at the gate. He was protected by a concrete barrier, but the grenade went off and a few of the new people there, in Saigon, you knew just about, the new people got up to rush over to the edge of the building to look down and see what it was and the old people were grabbing them and pulling them back down into their seats because so the general typing to set off the bomb and draw a crowd and that’s how it sets, the second one didn’t go off. Later on one, satchel charger thrown over the wall and I was [?], somebody could kill me, just jumped out and gave me the left hook [?]. And the other incident that I recall when [?] against the BOQ was, the guys were riding the bus into MACV headquarters and the bus had screen wire on it, so nobody can throw hand grenades in, and [?] on a wall came by and one of them had what looked like a pole radio antenna, the antenna was hooked over, he reached up and hooked that over the screen wire and low back took off. He had something next to the window that just was missed by looking at it and the guy who was sitting on the aisle and just reached over with his finger and lifted that antenna and pushed it out, so the bomb dropped to the ground. Somebody else told the driver to take
off and he did, and the bomb went off behind the bus, but it was a close call, a cruel hand, fate has a hand on that one.

SM: In addition to the grenades and those types of bombings, were there any artillery or rocket or mortar strikes?

HV: Yes, not near the BOQ when I was there, we had a map under that is see that, that showed an infiltration coming into Saigon, it happened to pass through the cemetery which was right across the road from the BOQ, so we passed that along to the local Vietnamese security people that kept track of them. The pivot, lots of attacks that came in closest to where I was, were aimed into the Joint General Staff compound, trying to get to Vietnamese headquarters I guess. None of them got close to the building that I had, they were close enough to feel it, there’s only a debt lodging, but not enough to do damage. We did have an exciting time one day, one of our helicopters crashed. The entrance to the Joint General Staff Compound was a traffic circle outside, on one side of the traffic circle was a hospital, other side was JDS, and you get over a little further and that was the helicopter pad. The helicopter had taken off the helicopter pad and come over towards traffic, it must have hit some wires or something, track them upside down and crashed, all the guys died. I rushed out there when I heard the helicopter crash. It was painful to see, people coming out of the aircraft but nobody in the plane. The scuttlebutt was that this often happened that nurses would someday want to go to the hospital, so the guys in the helicopters would make a pass, to get a good view. If that were the case this time, it would have turned out a big mistake then.

SM: Were there many American women working in CDEK?

HV: No, there were I think, in the BOQ they had about four hundred people out there, there were three or four women, all the rest were men. Its kind of strange, that I don’t know strange commentary on our society that two of those young women could go up to the mess hall for dinner and sit at a four man table by themselves and men wouldn’t join, whatever it was, fear of rejection, or something, or fear of being ribbed later on, just very strange, but those who lived there, nurses lived in hospital I guess, those who lived in the BOQ were the crust, people then.

SM: Go ahead.

HV: I felt that we betrayed our workers and friends in Vietnam in 197 . . .
Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Colonel Hal Vorhies on the 6th of May 2002 at approximately 9:40 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Colonel Vorhies is in Arlington, Virginia. Sir, why don’t we pick up today with a quick discussion of some specific materials that might have been captured by CDEK and reviewed by CDEK while you were there as commander, and I was interested in learning about any kind of training materials that came through CDEK while you were there?

HV: Yes, actually I saw quite a few. The one that was most striking was a set of sixteen millimeter movie film that had been captured, at CDEK we didn’t have to the tools to reproduce that but the Air Force had lab that they used for gun cameras and things like that, and they reproduced the film and I had, at CDEK when I left, I think we probably had maybe, fifteen or twenty fairly large reels and among those was a film on how to engage enemy i.e. American or South Vietnamese aircraft with small arms fire, and it showed people in the field and their training exercises, putting up essentially a wall of steel, instead of teaching their people to aim at the aircraft it seemed, what they were doing was getting everybody in that particular group to just start firing automatic weapons, what amounted to into the aircrafts near path, so yes, that was the most dramatic of the training literature if you want to call it that, that we got, but we also got quite a bit of political training literature. They way they mentioned that was as emulation campaigns, these were politically motivated, trying to get people in the right mood, doing the right thing, and training in the organizational structures, one humorous one that I recall was the definition of a three man cell, a three man cell is composed of two to five people, so the humor stays in the memory, not everything else does, I guess, but anyway, so yes, there was quite a bit of that kind of stuff which was largely, I don’t recall a lot on military training, that is combat training or training in intelligence collection skills and things like that, there was a lot of training on political aspects of it. I suspect, I may be wrong, but I suspect maybe the reason for that is that just about every organization that any Communist military group has what is sometimes called a political commissar, and one of his jobs is to keep the training going on their Bible, what their political culture is about and what the politics there are. Oh, yes, there’s quite about of that in the piles, I don’t know where the film is though.
SM: I was going to ask you that, if you knew what happened to that film.

HV: I really don’t know. I suspect that when the Air Force made a copy of it for us, they made a copy of it for themselves so, and I don’t know where the original was, technically the original of those captured films should have gone back to the South Vietnamese government, but I don’t know if they ever did. They may have gone to Be Nua, I don’t think it ever came back into CDEK, may have, but I don’t know. The other films that were included in there by the way were propaganda films like pictures of the Australian Communist journalist, Burnet, if I recall his name, triumphantly going into some of the Vietcong and North Vietnamese camps. The Caucasian guy being fettered in their battle areas so to speak, it was kind of unfortunate, the only correspondents viewing the other side of the war were guys like that. Otherwise from that I can’t recall a wealth of training material.

SM: Now the training film that taught techniques of engaging American helicopters, was that somehow translated into some kind of a brief that was then disseminated through to all the American and Vietnamese air units that might encounter that technique of fire?

HV: I don’t know. What I do know is that we did not do that at CDEK at the time. I don’t know when those films came in. They came in before I got there, so I’m not quite sure how they were exploited at the time, and I didn’t look back in the history on it, a little anecdote on maybe the why of that. I was talking to a friend who was a helicopter pilot and one of his first experiences with near death when he was there was when he landed in a landing zone and a North Vietnamese soldier, was in the grassy area, he stood up he said took dead aim at him, he could see him down the sights, up and down the barrel, and the VC or North Vietnamese, whichever he was, then pulled off the head of the aircraft and fired as if somebody had taught him that the way you hit an aircraft, in flight is like duck shooting, aim in front of it and he said the thing that saved his life of course, was his door gunner nailed the guy, but the guy had been taught apparently to lead the aircraft and nobody told him if the aircraft was sitting still just go ahead and fire at it. Anyway, that was his first experience as a pilot. So, I don’t know what happened with those films as far as exploitation of them goes.
SM: Do you know what time period that was when this gentlemen encountered that incident with the enemy soldier firing at him?

HV: No, I don’t. It was, I think it was pre-Tet. It might have been quite a time, I’m pretty sure. But I think it was before Tet.

SM: Was he hovering, or was he actually landed on the ground?

HV: He was sitting still.

SM: He was on the ground sitting still?

HV: Yes. Like was always the case, the rotors were going.

SM: Yes, right he could have picked up at any moment but if he was stationary on the ground, when you were working with CDEK did you ever get an indication that there is always a very heavy emphasis when discussing intelligence and counterintelligence aspects of the war, to focus on Vietcong infrastructure and Vietcong infiltration of the Vietnamese system and even certain aspects of the American system, but what about South Vietnamese infiltration of the Vietcong, did you ever get any indication, that you can discuss that the South Vietnamese government actively used South Vietnamese agents to get into the Vietcong ranks and report back intelligence and perhaps even feed stuff to CDEK?

HV: No, I didn’t, specifically, they way you pose the question, infiltrating the Vietcong ranks, but that reminds me of something, I told you that something was wrong before, we were talking about Phoenix, let me correct that. SOG was in existence at MACV when I was there, so MACV SOG was there, and one of the guys that was in our detachment, Nha Trang was a part of MACV SOG, something, back to the business of infiltration, one of our tasks in going through the captured documents was trying to be very alert to any reference to a certain set of words that would have been associated with the South Vietnamese attempt to infiltrate agents into North Vietnam, now while I was there, during that year, I never saw any references to that set of words, but I know that there were efforts, and they were described to me as being, pretty much failures of putting agents into the north. One person that treated that three man cell situation, new guy to the block, and if you’re not in a three man cell then you’re immediately suspected and his ineffective way and then of course the technique of that is however many people there are in that three man cell, each is responsible of the other members of the cell, so if
you have a bad apple in that cell, then all of the members of the cell would be punished in
some way, probably severely, so it was very, very hard to infiltrate that type of, I guess it
was developed by the Communist system, controlling the cease fact. But anyway, all the
information I had on those guys was that they were not particularly successful. On the
other hand in that business, the successes are not advertised, so.

SM: Right, you only hear about failure and typically because it becomes very
public failure very quickly.

HV: Right, if you advertise your successes they would become failures, so you’d
be hard pressed to come up with a statistical time that says half of them failed. With the
information I had, all of them failed, and I’m sure that’s not the case, just intuitively,
nothing though that I can recall going into a Vietcong apparatus, except that one might
have to make the assumption that MACV SOG was doing something.

SM: Do you remember what those words were that you had to keep an eye out
for?

HV: I think it was secret sword or sacred sword.

SM: I’m sorry, would you say that again.

HV: Secret sword or sacred sword, I don’t remember.

SM: Interesting, now MACV SOG, did you have very much open interaction
with members of that unit?

HV: Of SOG?

SM: Yes, of SOG?

HV: Only on my first tour, none specific, not on my second tour with those
people that are – the first tour was only a relationship with a guy who was in the
detachment and that wasn’t, had very little to do with what he was doing, relationship
was more or less as a member of the same detachment, wasn’t an operational
relationship.

SM: Was the expression, “bury them cocktail” used at all while you were there?

HV: “Bury them cocktail?”

SM: Yes.

HV: No, well not around me.

SM: Do you know if that technique was ever employed?
HV: You mean truth serum?

SM: Well, there’s the truth serum reference, but also, I’m not sure if its true but I was also told that it also refers to the purposeful leaking of information using a specific words or a specific expression, kind of like what you’re talking about the sacred sword or the secret sword, where if, when that comes back in through intelligence channels, which would of course include CDEK, if this particular intelligence came back, using these particular words or this particular series of expressions, then you would know that it came from a particular source, basically a way of vetting our or potentially finding if you have any kind of intelligence leaks or if you have a counterintelligence problem?

HV: No, I was not aware of anything like that in CDEK looking for that kind of thing. As I mentioned once before, I was asked at one point for pre-publication review by the organization that was kind of trying to get the clandestine agent type things going, but that’s the only thing. I was not ever asked to look for indicators of that measure.

SM: I was just curious, to go back one more second to the gentleman who, the pilot who encountered that Viet cong or other soldier who apparently, led his aircraft even though it was stationary, was there ever any speculation that perhaps he did this on purpose?

HV: No, I think the pilot was convinced that since he was looking right down the barrel of his eye, the only thing that would have convinced that soldier to lead him was if there was another target over there, or if he had a sudden attack of I don’t want to kill this guy.

SM: Which is what I would mean, he intentionally missed.

HV: I doubt it. I mean it would also be a sudden attack of I want to commit suicide.

SM: That too.

HV: Since the aircraft was on tough it, if he had shot the pilot and dropped back down, he would have been safe at least for the moment, having pulled off and then fired, he was, not only did the firing alert the door gunner a little more, but the pilot made up and able to, just into the thrust at that moment. One of the things that, I had a little contest when I was there before. The operation of the interrogation unit in Saigon, I had received some adverse information on techniques being used, I went over and kind of
reported that and, it caused problems within the community for a while, I became kind of
an internal whistleblower so to speak. It wasn’t anything particularly serious. It was just
about, coercion technique, rather simple actually, that is over salting the food and then
deprivation of water until somebody talked, but there were other, it wasn’t that serious
stuff, would have been potentially.

SM: When I mentioned bury them cocktail, you brought up truth serum, was that
ever used to your knowledge?

HV: Not as far as I know, it’s sodium penathol anyway.

SM: While you were going through training and when you were going through
your various commands, the techniques of interrogating a captured prisoner, did they ever
bring up the issue of torture, and if so, how?

HV: Just in general military training, torture came up with a thou shalt not
admonition to it, and the thou shalt not admonition was based partly on the theory that
any information you get at that time is whatever the guys thinks you want to know in
order to save his own life, whether it was true or not, unless there’s some corroborating
evidence, which could happen, three or four guys captured, you tortured them all you
might get a straight story, but you might find out which ones were not true, but anyway,
that was a thou shalt not do it and it may not be productive in the long run anyway. But
nothing like the kinds of thing that our guys went through in Hanoi.

SM: You mentioned the 60 mm film, what about audio recordings, ever come
through CDEK?

HV: I didn’t see any. Actually, when you get down to it, audio recordings
probably would not have come through CDEK, they probably would have gone through
the prisoner interrogation unit, because they were the guys, my guys that I had, the
American military were more trained in the language, not so much trained in the spoken
language I guess you would say. So it’s be more likely that they would go to an
interrogation unit or exploitation. Its kind of like in the SIGINT world, a lot of people
are trained as linguists, but they are trained to listen, not to speak. I mean, they never
speak, they just hear. They may have to hear the talk and translate that. The same way
with our Morse intercept operation, some of them get highly skilled and can copy down
very, very fast, line in the bush. We used to get in Latin America, super speed Morse
action. Our guys after they’ve been there for a year or so, could master it, but they
probably couldn’t send a message, they weren’t skilled in the key, they were skilled in
the hearing.

SM: Well, was there anything else that you would like to discuss with regard to
your second tour as Commander of CDEK?

HV: No, I don’t think so, I think we pretty well covered it. Post –second tour, the
one thing there was to me, the most painful and the most dramatic and lasted the longest,
choked me up to the point where I couldn’t even discuss it with anybody was the fate of
the wonderful people who worked in JJS compound for the Americans and for my case
particularly those who worked for me. It was quite clear from just the way they were
treated by the South Vietnamese troops, I mentioned some of the women were called
whores for the Americans, it’s highly probable than any Vietnamese who worked for the
Americans in the intelligence business had a slim, slim chance of surviving after the fall
of Saigon, and if they survived they had a slim chance of having any sort of a life that
wasn’t anything other than terribly painful. I would think that the re-education camps
would have been a soft touch for those people, if they had been privileged to have that
treatment rather than whatever they might have gotten and the unknown I guess, caused
severe pangs of pain for me because I just didn’t know, really whether they could have
been identified, I’m sure they could have been, because there would be other South
Vietnamese who would identify them to save their own hide, I suppose, and I never
found out very much. I knew a couple of the senior guys that I had worked with before
got out of the country with their families, but the people that worked for me, very few of
them had any money, they were very smart though, most of them and there's the
possibility that the people might have gotten out one way or another with somebody else,
but the make it that pretty slim, that is to get themselves and their extended family out,
extended family would have been an important capture for the North Vietnamese as well.

SM: Do you know if any of them made it out before the fall of Saigon?
HV: I don’t know. I don’t think so. Well, I shouldn’t say that, I just don’t know.

What I do know is that when I was there we tried to develop, I started anyway, trying to
develop an evacuation plan for those folks. I don’t think I was alone in that, I know I
tried to do it, and rumor was an evacuation plan was not developed before I left, I found
out from a colleague who was there after I was, a plan was developed and then in the last
days when it would have been, if done properly, would have been executed, then the
people would have been evacuated. That was not done, so since we abandoned those
people to the tender mercies of the North Vietnamese.

SM: When you left Vietnam, after your second tour, at the end of your second
tour, what did you think about the U.S. effort, where did you think it was going?

HV: I felt we were going to pull out. That’s just what gave me the stimulus for
trying to get an evacuation plan going. I just didn’t think we were going to stay there and
I felt that they were going to be in tough shape if we left, and at the time I had no idea
that the Congress would cut off support for the South Vietnamese military. I though that
would go ahead anyway, but even at that, once we left I felt that we had to have some
sort of an evacuation plan in existence, even if we had to fly in to get it, to execute it. I
was not saying one at all, that we were going to stay there long enough to save Saigon
from the north, and it would have to be done by the South Vietnamese and as I think most
people who been there know, they were pretty competent, but you can’t shoot if you
haven’t got the ammunition and things like that.

SM: What did you think of the Vietnamization program that Nixon instituted?

HV: The people are capable. It would be kind of strange not to set them up on
their own two feet, in fact that’s what they were there to do, we were there to establish a
situation in South Vietnam that would allow them to defend themselves and to, even
further democratize their government, and that being our objective, it would be kind of
idiotic to think that would happen without giving them the capability to be self-sufficient.
Certainly, it was not in our best interests to have a plan, which required us to be there
forever, so yes, good enough. I’m not talking about the way it was implemented, I don’t
know that much about what the specific efforts and shortcoming were.

SM: But the concept?

HV: The concept was fine and talking to others, the Vietnamese performed very
well, so often, there’s a selective perception about the performance of the Vietnamese
and the one that I heard most when I came back home was almost as if the Vietnamese
army was like the village guard units, instead of the organized military forces.
SM: What about, where did you go from Vietnam, what was the flight like back for you, and where did you enter the U.S.?

HV: The first time I came back it was kind of an interesting proposition because I flew to Manila and since I had my family with me, we got on a seagoing vessel, we got on a ship and came back. First we landed at Point Wainindi because there was a battalion on board that like to get off there, and then we went into greater Los Angeles, got off and came back. The second time, I came in and we landed at Travis and so it was just, everybody greeting everybody else there and it was unremarkable because there were no demonstrators there.

SM: Being an Air Force base?

HV: Being and Air Force base, yes.

SM: Now as you continued your travel, on I assume civilian aircraft, or did you continue through on all military?

HV: No, as a matter of fact the aircraft I flew from Vietnam on was a civilian contractor.

SM: I’m sorry I meant through civilian airports.

HV: Yes, from then on I came back [?].

SM: Did you encounter any kind of hostility as you continued your travel through the United States, through civilian areas?

HV: No, I did not.

SM: You were in Class A uniform, I assume.

HV: No, I don’t think I was traveling in uniform at that time.

SM: Oh, you were not traveling in uniform?

HV: I probably wasn’t. I just don’t remember it, but anyway I didn’t have the animosity. I mentioned earlier to you my later encounter in San Diego, out in Los Angeles with a clerk in the airport who just wanted to tell me or show me how much they appreciated what the military was doing, but that was a different trip.

SM: Yes, sir. What was your next assignment after Vietnam?

HV: I went to Fort Leavenworth, which was my intention, to go over there to go to the Command General Staff College, so I spent a year there, and, well not quite a year, attending that then went to Fort Dillons for a really short course in military intelligence
type operations, meant as the SIGINT type operations and then from there I went to
Arlington, Virginia to take command of Arlington Hall Station, which was the home base
of Army Security Agency. From that I transferred out to Red Hill Farm Station which is
out in the suburbs of northern Virginia where we had a material support command which
was kind of a special group of material support for Army Security Agency, separate from
the normal Army logistics organizations, as we usually had separate requirements, little
things like in Ethiopia when Highly Sallassy needed some parts for his American car,
we’d buy it and ship it out to the field station there, and then take them down give them
to his troops so they could put it on his car, that kind of stuff, kind of keeping things
sweet with the local host nation for linking intercepts we had at that moment in Ethiopia,
it was in the Air trio at that time, Park, Ethiopia.

SM: Now when you first went to the ASA, after your attendance at MI course out
of Fort Devins, when did you arrive in Virginia at ASA headquarters?

HV: This is my second time there of course, actually it’s my third time, but
anyway. Around in, I think it was probably in, in ’71, so it was probably early ’71, or
late ’70, maybe late ’70.

SM: When was your second time there again?

HV: Second time in Vietnam?

SM: No, your second time in ASA headquarters?

HV: I was on an extended TDY from 1967 to ’68.

SM: Oh, that's right, when you were working on the special project with the
aircraft. When you were there for your third time, to your knowledge was the ASA
engaging in any kind of surveillance, continuing any kind of surveillance of anti-war
demonstrators?

HV: Not while I was on the staff as far as I recall. I would have to get the times
down, but I wasn’t involved in it, that old old, when I was there that second time, that
third time actually, as the commander of the station, I was not involved in Army Security
Agency operations because I was kind of the landlord for the headquarters, and the
headquarters troops and all the things that go with that. Then after I went out to material
support command and was there as the deputy commander for about a year, and then I
came back to Army Security Agency headquarters as the deputy chief of staff for
logistics, and then following that I moved over to be the deputy chief of staff for
operations, I should say when I was at logistics, I was the assistant deputy chief of staff,
there was a Colonel who was the desk logger and I was the assistant and then I moved
from that job, after a promotion moved towards being the deputy chief of staff of
operations. Now during that time, while I was there, in that job some Senate staffers
came over and spent a couple of days with us, they were questioning us on Army
Security Agency activities in Chicago, you know before that, at the convention as to what
was going on, what Army Security Agency was doing in support of law enforcement
people, you know as an Army unit we couldn’t do anything to enforce the law, but as a
collector of intelligence we could pass things along to the police if we had anything to
pass. I wasn’t there so I was not truly aware of what our activities were in Chicago, so
I’m not quite sure, all was I getting was the questions asked and then most of the time I
had to say I don’t know because I wasn’t there. But it was a couple of days of
interrogation, me and others, lots of note taking, but I never heard the results of their
nitpicking. I didn’t know there was a particular problem that I faced later, well, I meant
to came from desk ops, after ASA headquarters I went to National War College and then
following that I took command of the Army Security Agency group 504, Army Security
Agency group headquartered in Savannah, but that had a company sized unit with each of
the divisions of the Army, that included Hawaii and all the divisions the continental U.S.,
detachments in Panama and in Alaska and I had two battalions that supported two corps.
Well, in order to keep these units job skills up, it was required that we tried as hard as we
could to get active missions, real world missions, instead of just playing games and
training, which we had to do anyway, we had to do some of that, but we tried to gather
together as much as we could an active mission and we had to, this was quite an exercise
in order to get those. Before NSA would agree to give us an active mission, they wanted
to make sure that we would be there, in other words, they were very much against giving
us a mission, then having us pull out and go away to do something and then dropping that
mission by the wayside, so one of the things that we had to was, I had two airplane
companies in Texas and part of the things that they finally ended up doing as part of this
exercise and training a real world mission was working the drug problem, but it became a
real, real tough one, and just the, you might say, the accounting for a mission and how
you would keep on a mission or drop a mission is against the law for Army Security
Agency or NSA to intercept with any communication or one party of the communication
is a U.S. citizen. So, I’m not sure when that law was written, it might have been written
after the Shinco demonstration, so we were working the drug program along the southern
border of the United States, it’s kind of tough to know whether the Gonzales and
Rodriguez that are on the telephone or a radio communication, whether either one of
them is an American citizen or whether either one of them is based in the United States as
a dealer. It makes it very tough, but nonetheless the mission was important because these
people were running drugs and our role was to pass that information on to the centers,
which were responsible for guarding the border.

SM: When you were, and this occurred while you were the chief of staff for
operations?

HV: No, this occurred, I was into it most heavily when I was commander of the
504th group, because those units were my direct responsibility.

SM: But during both periods when you were both the chief of staff for operations
and also when you were Commander of the 504th, what were the legal issues and what
kind of briefings or what materials did you receive and discuss regarding Pas A
Comitatus and the role of the U.S. Army in the Continental United States, on U.S. soil
involving Americans?

HV: It came up most directly for me when I was commanding Arlington Hall
Station because at that time I had a military police unit at the post and we were, we
thought possibly targets from anti-war demonstrations outside our fence, trying to breach
our fence and so it came up very directly on that as to what our role was, and at that we
had some serious, detailed conversations with the Judge Advocate General as to where
our authorities were, and what our restrictions were and in a sense the same thing
happened with the Thesda wall, not Pas a Comitatus but who you can intercept and who
you can’t and once having done so, if you’ve make a mistake what has to happen to the
documents pertaining to that intercept, like if you use toe print. That’s really kind of a
thread that goes through military training in general, Pas a Comitatus has always been
something that the military is very, very careful in wanting not to violate that law. Its
almost, not quite, but almost as pervasive as all of the instruction you get as a military
officer pertaining to the role of the military under civilian authority, very, very strongly
imbedded, so strongly imbedded as a matter of fact that when I was in Europe, my last
tour over there, talking to people who were sent out into the former Warsaw Pact nations
on a military exchange program an done of the big efforts was to try to convince those
people that a military can an do work under civilian control, as it does in the United
States. But none of them out there had ever experienced that, and it was a big effort but
it was kind of embedded into our military structure to the point where we were exporting
that as much as we could into other states, because our feeling was and is, I think, that we
don’t ever want to have those states develop military states, we want always to have the
military under civilian control and hopefully that would make them better members of
NATO, but is something that is embedded in the military training all the way along and
there are people who have been in the services, particularly officers understand the
amount of money that’s spent, and the amount of time that is spent in training in, not only
management but maybe more importantly training in what leadership is and how to
accomplish it, and what the constraints are upon the leader and upon the manager. I don’t
think anywhere in civilian life is there as comprehensive a training that goes on
throughout a career as it does in the military. The closest thing these days to it, I guess is
sensitivity training, seems to me it really has to do in the civil world and in the military.
Its just so pervasive in the career, after I was committed to the 504th group I was tasked to
join the study group that was operating for a chief staff of the army, and the name of the
study was Review of Education of Training for Officers, and it was headed up by
Brigadier General Benjamin Harrison, a direct descendant by the way, and it was
composed of Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels and we were looking exactly at that, the
education and training of Army officers from the time they come into the service till the
time they retire, and a part of that discussion, part of that looked at the aspect of what it is
we should be training these people to be, and how much would be the leadership training,
what was the content of the training and were we doing that with our Command General
Staff college, with our service academies, although we looked at the service academies
peripherally, and got in to the aspect of professionalism, what is professionalism, and the
contrast that exists today between professionalism and careerism and the unfortunate fact
that careerism seems to be winning. We really got into that, and that was where I think I
got more of an overall view of the continuity of training that existed within the Army and how little things impacted on everybody. For example we had a problem in the Army, years ago, where combat-arms officers didn’t have enough opportunity to advance because the pretty thick structure in terms of how many divisions there are and how many people are in those divisions and how many Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels, Majors, Captains and things, so what do you do with the combat-arms officer to allow him to expand his career and advance to keep him a member of the Army and keep his skills. One of the things that was required, that everybody was required to have, was required to have a secondary MOS or Military Occupational Specialty, well that meant that you’ve had an infantry officer whose secondary MOS was as a finance officer or something like that, or operations research analyst and so that meant that everybody had to have a secondary specialty, not just the combat-arms, but everybody else, intelligence people as well. What that failed to take note of was, that there are certain skills that you have to stay in, you cannot get out of them, you’ve got to stay in them to keep your skills up, one of them was linguist. You can’t be giving a guy a three year tour, who’s a Korean linguist, give him a three year tour in Ethiopia and expect him to keep up his skills and then return that to skill, or even more severe a, foreign area specialist, who has to have language and as well he has to really be into that culture and history of the country or area where he’s a foreign area specialist, well you can’t do that if you sign him out of that area, he doesn’t have access to the local papers any more, so what was good for the combat-arms officer was devastating for shifting of the career fields, whether it be chemical engineer or a linguist or an area specialist and to a degree pilots, who had to get out of the cockpit and go do something else for a while. That was devastating to the skill levels of some of those people, so we would depend and read those studies and how we might try to get around those constraints for trying to make a one-size fits all solution like having a secondary MOS, and still have all of those org and umbrella things that have to be trained, like cell leadership, leadership in general, Pas a Comitatus because we all faced it from time to time, wasn’t a little bit one time or another, either as a doer as an observer or as an advisor or a staff member.

SM: Those problems that you mentioned as far as, like for instance, basing on a linguist or a foreign area specialist, certainly those reflect this mentality in the military of
rotating people around every two to three years and that certainly was very prominent in
the ‘60s and ‘70s and continues to the present. This particular group that you were
discussing these issues with, did your conclusions ever come to maybe changing that
notion, that maybe its better to keep people in a unit for a longer period of time to create
more cohesiveness to allow for a specialty focus, things of that nature?

HV: Well, we looked at it, but there's good reason for those rotation plans, what
was important is to maintain for everybody a sense that they can have a full career and
that full career might or might not be sitting in one job forever. The likelihood of
promotion, making a little bit more money for your family as it grows into college age
and things like that, all have to enter into that as trade-offs. It does happen in the Army
in some of the specialties, like in the medical. I know guys who are assigned to Walter
Reed and been there for years and years, mainly its because they are a specialist in what
they do and that’s the place to be.

SM: Yes, but that doesn’t happen in the combat-arms or most of the branches?

HV: No, it can’t happen in combat arms. What can happen in the branches where
like, particularly intelligence work, an effort can be made to try to smooth out some of
the problems on that, by assignments and maybe repetitive assignments to the area, but
on different jobs for example or one of the solutions the Army has always had on that
score, transcends all of it is the warrant officer program, a guy can go into warrant officer
program and be a specialist for all his life, just about stay where he wants to be, at least in
his skill area. The fact is for a while, I think it was, against Army regulations, assigning a
warrant officer outside of an area, so.

SM: But in terms of the actual percentage of warrant officers, the number of
people in the service who are warrant officers, they’re a distinct minority, no?

HV: It was until the aviation program came about, and then there was a lot more
warrant officers at that time because they were the pilots.

SM: Right, 19-year-old guys.

HV: I’m not sure we came to a solution that was ever implemented on that score,
but it was a, I think the report that we rendered was very valuable, that as many reports
that are valuable, implementation becomes an important factor and there are some
terribly, terribly parochial views along the way that would get in the way of anything that
would cause any major changes. About that time, the Army Security Agency was being
looked at as a nasty thing, because it was a stovepipe organization, all Army Security
Agency units were under the command of the head of the Army Security Agency and
when I was, in the 504th Army Security Agency group, and I had units in every division,
those units reported to me, they did not report to the division commander and I’ll tell you
that made division commanders, some of them, very, very unhappy. The one that was the
most unhappy was the commander of the division at Fort Lewis, Washington when I first
took over, with how and what to do. He was really unhappy so I went out and had a chat
with him, a very respectful chat I might add, to see what we could do to overcome some
of this problem, and it became apparent that the problem was more of structure than it
was of substance, the commander was Volny Warner at that time, and so I, I had my
meeting and I said well this is my company here performing their mission in support of
you, and he says I don’t know what the mission is, but they’re not under my command
and I want them under my command. That’s our, that too at the time when there were an
awful lot of people who would not accept a Special Intelligence security clearance
because it was very, very, even hard on a combat-arms officer, to have access to that
information because it then limited his assignments, geographically, so there were an
awful lot of people who didn't want one. When I was in Vietnam the second time, the
divisions had a lot of people who were combat-arms officer who didn’t want to have
access to special intelligence, as I told you before, when I was in Saigon the second time
I had to have permission to go out of town, and then couldn't stay below Corps area, well
think about what that would do to a combat-arms officer who wanted to be a commander
of a battalion or better and national hierarchy didn’t want him captured, so one of the
reasons for having the stovepipe organization was you kept all these people in control,
that have those kind of clearances and kept better track of them, and they understood
where they were but that was part of their job and they couldn’t come up with these
things about well that limits my assignments, but it certainly could limit the assignment
of a combat-arms officer.

SM: Now, were you able to strike a compromise with that commander with
regard to the role of your unit under his charge?
HV: No, I was not able to. He was just hard over in his ways. Not long after that when I was on the riddle study group I got, I was some kind of a presentation and the comptroller of the Army was there, Soström was, I think, at that time Army Security Agency was going to be brought under, the Army was going to be eliminated as a major command of its own in that sense, and this whole fight was going to disseminated, done away with. That already begun when I was the commander of the 504th, so anyway I asked him about what the sense of that was, and he said well, the commander of the post should command everything on that post and he shouldn’t have the stovepipe organizations, so I said what about the hospital? Well, that's different, every post had a hospital, the doctor head of that was a medical officer and he was under command of the Army Surgeon General but he wouldn’t accept that as an analogy, he said, well a commander doesn’t have to know anything about what goes on in the hospital, and the hospital’s in support, but Army Security Agency was a stovepipe organization and it shouldn't be, so anyway it was essentially done away with, I believe at the time he was at Bill Royal, he was a former Signal Corps Officer, had become the deputy at Army Security Agency and his task was to form the successor to that, and it essentially, SIGINTers would begin to lose any clout within that organization and the HUMINTers kind of ascended to it, if you wanted to have a successful in military intelligence at that time then you really had to shift out of the narrow field, being the SIGINT into a much broader filed of being an intelligence officer in general, a generalist more than a specialist, so there was kind of, what was happening at that time after the Rétò study group that I was on, I came up for reassignment as that was winding down and I was offered two nominations, one to be a executive officer for the director of the National Security Agency, who at the time was Bobby Ray Enmon, a Navy admiral a Vice Admiral and or go over to Stuttgart, Germany as the deputy chief of National Security Agency, Europe and so since Enmon was an Admiral I decided that I would opt for the job in Europe, it was kind of an interesting challenge, it was changing, the chief of NSA Europe had been an Army general officer and Enmon was changing that and putting a senior civilian, a GS-18 in, as the chief and the deputy which had been the civilian now became a military and that was going to be me, so it was an interesting challenge and actually a very, very smart move on the part of Enmon to make that change because NSA
Europe then became a much more dynamic place. In the past, the generals who had been assigned there, had not been particularly NSA people, they were just Army guys that were put into that slot and what happened when he changed it to putting a civilian in the spot, the civilian was an NSA guy and he’d been a corporal or specialist on the border during the Czech uprising and he had risen in the Army to the fantastic grade of Sergeant, decided to become a civilian with NSA and he went through the civilian level all the way up to GS-18 and he knew the inside workings of NSA and so when the J-2 at U.S. European command wanted some support from NSA and he wasn’t getting it, he’d go over to Dick Lord who was the new chief of NSA, and Dick knew exactly who to call back home, back at Fort Meade, and he’d get the job done and it was working really, really smoothly and nicely. My tasking from Bobby Ray Enmon and then when I went over there I was to keep this civilian in line, make sure he understand the military structure in the field, he understood it intellectually, but understood the things and how it works in the field and do further support in terms of providing greater support to the military operations people which was Enmon’s focus, NSA was providing its product to the top people in government and he felt it wasn’t doing enough to provide its product to the guys infield, the military guys who were facing problems day to day, so his effort was to increase support to military operations and that’s the way he did it, and he did a very good job and it happened.

SM: Now, were you actually using the NSA as part of your title, was that open knowledge at that point?

HV: Yes. Actually, the full title was National Security Agency Central Security Southeast Europe, came out as NCEUR, as it ran, yes it was, however during that time, the Beyer Manhof time, and other activities, brigade, became their terrorist activities, that was when they tried to kill Alexander Haig, the head of the U.S. Army Europe, Chris Crozen, so there was a little more effort than, to go a little bit more into the not-so-public or visible role. For example, three star generals at that time in U.S. Army Europe, it was U.S. European Command, the license plates on their car had three zeros on it, two two-star general had two zeros, Brigadier had one zero and so about that time they decided to change that, quit identifying the senior people so strongly so the terrorists might really get at them. In my case and in Dick Lord’s case, what they did for us was, or we did for
ourselves, we got blind German plates, these were German plates that were issued
blindly, there was not record of who they belonged to so nobody could back trace the
license plate on my car or on Dick’s car. He lost his three zeros but he picked up a
German license place so when he was driving around his, what did he have, he had a
Mercedes I guess, it was just another German car, and so was my car just another German
car and that time I changed from riding back and forth to work in uniform to riding back
and forth to work in civilian clothes and changing and wearing the uniform while on the
job and then also at that time, started carrying a personal firearm.

SM: How about the vehicles, were they armored at all?

HV: No, of course his wasn’t either. They decided to issue an armored weapon
to certain other people which was, that is the saceur, I think the deesen and deputy chiefs,
the deputy sack door, deputy commander in chief, of U.S. European command were
given armored cars, as were the head of the component commands, when Fitch Carson
was attacked. He and his wife were in his car, they lived off post in Heidelberg and the
terrorist fired a RPG, rocket propelled grenade, at his car and it hit the trunk and exited
the car and shattered glass from the rear window on General Carson and his wife and the
round exited the car without detonating and hit a building and then detonated. That was a
case where the terrorists had not gone through proper training program.

SM: Right, set the detonating mechanism properly.

HV: Yes, there’s a setback on that to keep it to go off too close to the firer, and
he was too close to the car.

SM: Well, it’s very fortunate.

HV: Yes, but Carson moved right onto post, right after that. He didn’t stay
outside much more and he also became very, very careful on any outside information on
where he was going to be at any given time. I had to have a meeting with him, not long
after he’d moved on post and I was going to be demonstrating some equipment that NSA
was developing, so I had the equipment sent up to Camel Barracks at Heidelberg, and
through Crozen’s office, I thought, for meeting with him and they said well, you be here
at ten thirty and sometime during the day he’ll come by, so he was not letting out being,
hour by hour information, even on secure phone to me.

SM: Well, better to be paranoid, than to be.
HV: Well, that was the problem when I was in the Hay-hey cab, he followed the same route all the time, I mean not once were they set up that that mine, just him. It was because he was following the same route actually, but at least he could have varied from day to day a little bit.

SM: I had a couple of quick follow-up questions about your time with ASA, and was there much interaction between your offices, when you were working in various areas of the Army Security Agency and the CIA, as far as like liaisons and things like that?

HV: Well there was, but in the sense there was a feeling of competition there. When I was in Panama, we had some big problems with CIA in the SIGINT business, they wouldn’t share, they wouldn’t share raw intercept, they would only give us their interpretation and I guess this probably got back to some competition at the national level. When I was in Vietnam I had some real trouble with the CIA people, they were taking my CDEK product and publishing it as their own. My feeling was they were sitting around in their cars in Saigon, and supposed to be doing some intelligence collection and they were using my product and putting it out as their own product, as if they were actually doing some work, so I’m not sure that there was a great spirit of cooperation there among any of my cohorts. We both had our jobs to do and we didn’t take tasking from them, we took our tasking either generated by the supporting command, I mean if the supporting command wanted something they would task us to try to collect against that, or we would take it from the NSA and if the CIA wanted something from us, my presumption is they would go through the supporting command and we wouldn’t necessarily know who asked for it, or they would do something at the national level. I don’t think there was a great spirit of cooperation, in fact as I said, competition and in some cases, animosity because of theft, don’t attribute the collector in your report, just go ahead and report as if you’d collected it.

SM: That’s interesting. How about the DIA?

HV: DIA? Same sense in terms of collection, DIA though was more a natural to provide help to us, in terms of their product. Like I mentioned before, I think the absence of gazetteers, or did I say that?

SM: Yes, sir, you mentioned that, you did.
HV: You guys ought to have some good gazetteers too, not only just current names with names that were in existence when the French were there, the change to the Vietnamese on the Vietnamese softer and softer, on the Vietnamese now changed again because of the North Vietnamese. It’s really important when you’re trying to nail down a reference to a village, to know what other names that village went by, and what it really do and that kind of stuff. Anyway, that’s the kind of things that I would have to call, is intelligence aides, aides to the analytical process that the DIA has a bunch of them, but they didn’t task, as far as I know, they didn’t task us in Vietnam, except maybe the tasked J-2 and the J-2 in turn tasked us to do certain coverage or something like that.

SM: How about CID?

HV: CID? You’re talking criminal investigation, or CI, counterintelligence?

SM: I’m sorry, well first the Criminal Investigative Division, and then Counterintelligence Division.

HV: I don’t know that, same thing.

SM: Well especially for instance, down the chain, you mentioned earlier that part of the responsibility that your command, you had, was to, if you did uncover illegal activities to hand that material over to appropriate law enforcement officials. That I assume that also included the U.S. Army’s Criminal Investigative Division.

HV: Yes, with the constraint of no intercept from an American source, so.

SM: Which would actually make it very hard to share it with them.

HV: It makes, if you’re sitting in an overseas location, like in Europe someplace and you intercept something which involves and American in Cagedilly, like Coveich, that’s certainly reportable, but the more important constraint is if doing so compromises the source, then you don’t do it. Its one of those decisions you had to make, how do you provide this to the law enforcement guy without it showing up in court someday and telling the world where he got it.

SM: Pretty hard to do, and how about counterintelligence then?

HV: Well, that stays within the family so to speak, so that kind of stuff, maybe a good example of that is at the national level, the Verona papers, having to do with the Rosenberg’s, you can say that is counterintelligence.
SM: While you were going through your various commands after Vietnam, was there anything in particular that you had taken away from your experience in Vietnam that helped you as a commander in these later positions?

HV: I think so, you know, today they would call it being more influenced by variations in culture. I think truly my outlook on life, my outlook on people, my outlook on leadership has been influenced by, in my early years as a Lieutenant having an operation in France, where I had French employees working for me and living in a European environment. It helps give an understanding of different perspectives that you ordinarily wouldn’t have encountered before, and have a respect for different perspectives and being able to do that without changing your value judgments, and certainly that’s true of my two tours in Vietnam is getting a feel for dealing with people who are not the same and bear in mind that when you come in the Army like I did, in California and got into the Army and I was dealing with people I’d never experienced dealing with before. When I was raised, in the town I was raised in, they go to the book ration, a black person was not allowed in town I was at, so I went all through high school without ever really knowing, I knew Asians, but I didn't know any black people, until I went to the University of California at Berkeley and then that was a level, in terms of economic level and intellectual level and that sort of thing, the black person that I knew there, which was entirely different to the black people that I met when I came into the Army. That was different than the white folks that I met in school were different form the Appalachian poor I met when I was in the Army, so those cultural experiences I had not had when I was being raised in California, that I gleaned after I came in the Army, from that standpoint I found American culture, which expanded when I went into France and was meeting French people and Moroccans who, I mean Algerians who were living in France and some of them were poor, so quite a different perspective comes in, and then Vietnam, the same way, but different cultures there, both the Cambodian and the Vietnamese that I knew while I was there. So, yes it influenced me, I think quite strongly, kind of subtly, but nonetheless pretty strongly when I went through the remainder of my career and even after that when I went back into, after I retired in 1983 at Fort Payne, on May 1st by the way, well they had a big parade in Moscow in honor of my retirement. Anyway, going back, the company I work for sent me to Belgium, I lived in Belgium for seven years and
there’s a kind of a diverse culture there, a country that has three official languages for example and a lot of animosity amongst the people there between the Amots and the Wallowas, I never experienced much of the relationship between the German speakers and the French and Flemish speakers because I didn’t stay much in that part of the country. You grow, I guess, when you experience different culture, you do grow. I actually developed, I think a, purge this pertaining to Asians, I almost uniformly looked on Asians with awe and respects. Amazing since I was growing up during World War II, Japanese appear to be about head and shoulders in our national propaganda during the war, but then I had Japanese friends when I was growing up to, who were relocated to the relocation centers where the Japanese off the west coast. Did you ever stop to think that we didn’t move any Japanese out of Hawaii? The rationale for moving them off the west coast was security, and yet we didn’t move any out of Hawaii, interesting.

SM: I wonder if it was that cost prohibitive issue.

HV: No, I think it came out at the end that the big reason for moving the m out of California was the agricultural competition. They were very competitive with farmers in California, Japanese ran truck farms and vegetable farms that were just terribly efficient and in speculation afterwards that was a big part of the move to get the off the West Coast, pretty unfair when it boils down to move them out. And we lost in a sense of separated form some good friends.

SM: What were the most profound effects of your experience in Southeast Asia on you personally?

HV: Most profound effects what?

SM: On you personally, not necessarily relating to your career or in command positions, but just as a person?

HV: On the Army career?

SM: Well, more specifically your experience in Vietnam? How did that experience affect you most as an individual?

HV: I don’t know. That would require more deep thinking than I’m allowed to do in this short course. It did obviously, but I’m not quite sure I would know how.

SM: What do you think about, looking back on it now with hindsight all the other experiences you have, what do you think about the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia?
HV: Well, I think that our objective was good. We needed to contain Communism. I think that was worth a fight and I think the domino theory has been shown to be a good theory, that we had to stop the spread from across borders so we had to confine those borders as much as we could. I think we actually treated the war very poorly at home, hindsight is pretty good there, we just did not bring the population along with the war effort. The South Vietnamese had the beginnings of the democracy with Diem and we kind of let that one go. It had the beginnings of a military force that could be a national force and protect them, and we let that one go. We had a need to have more troops there during the time we were actually engaged, and we let that one go, but I guess all of it because of the lack of bringing the American people along, lack of leadership back home and I guess, selling the war to the American people and when duplicities were uncovered that didn’t help with the Tonkin Gulf business, which was kind of, you might say a left-handed toll trying to get U.S. support but you do things like that they come back rather heavy as that one did. Bad leadership and I think the lesson there has been somewhat learned over time, an example is the Persian, President Bush and the way he conducted the war, our little short war in Iraq, where he gave them a mission order and let the military handle the accomplishment of that order, didn’t try to micromanage the war like Johnson did. Maybe Colin Powell was a little bit conservative in insisting that we have a really good build-up before we started the war, but one cannot say that was a failure because it certainly wasn’t. It worked out very well, which is typical of Arnold.

SM: Where there any other lessons that you think we should take away form the Vietnam War experience, both militarily and politically and perhaps even socially?

HV: I guess maybe we’re beginning to feel something we should have taken away from Vietnam and didn't and maybe are now and that is, there is good in this world and there is evil in this world and we have as a people, kind of neglected to recognize that there are evil people and you cannot deal very easily with evil people and still have peace, signing documents with the people first, doesn’t necessarily mean rely on peace. That’s a hard one to understand, but maybe we’re beginning to understand it a little bit more since the 9/11. Maybe we’re beginning to understand a little bit more, I hope we are in the fragility of anything clothed in Arms Control Agreements. Agreements are easy to sign and easy to not follow and we learned that the Soviets didn’t follow them.
and we learned that, more evidence all along the way as it comes out. You certainly
know that any agreement signed by Saddam Hussein had not worked out very well and
the news cycle of the day concerning Israel and America kind of brings that same thing
home, so I guess those lessons are here for today, but maybe gone for tomorrow. We
don’t seem to carry history very far in the future, as you people know in the Center up
there, the history of Vietnam is disappearing in our schools and there are few efforts to
bring it back. Some of the people who were there at the Conference, who are now
teaching the history of Vietnam War, I hope it’s the history that isn’t screwed up with
political correctness, but actually tells the story as it is, successes and failures. That’s my
rambling.

SM: Well, was there anything else you’d like to discuss today?

HV: Yes, I would like to make a couple of suggestions, if you haven’t already
done so. I think Major General Joe McChristian is still alive, do you know him?

SM: I have not met him, no sir.

HV: Okay, he was a J-2 under Westmoreland. Now, I saw him a couple of years
ago at one of these annual Intelligence Balls, he looked [?], he might still be around. I
don’t know him personally, I just met him there because I saw his nametag and
introduced myself, but he was responsible for the establishment of the combined centers
in Vietnam and for CDEK. He brought in one on his Lieutenant Colonel’s said he had
confidence in by the name of Hank Ajima, and he really set up CDEK in ‘65, I think.

SM: Hank Ajima did?

HV: Yes, under the direction of McChristian. J-2 when I was there was Bill Potts,
last time I saw Potts was a couple years ago, he looked sharp. He by the way, he was the
J-2 for Great Abrams, they had a relationship, they were Abram, I think World War II
commanded a tank battalion and Potts was in that battalion, and the legend as I heard it
was that Potts saved Westmoreland’s like one time and Westmoreland never forgot it.

Potts was a pretty capable officer. He had been, I believe he was the deputy commander
of Army Security Agency for a while, might have been the commander, I can’t remember
now and then when he went to Vietnam, was J-2 for Gray Abrams when I was there.

Both those people are resources. McChristian by the way wrote a book in the Vietnam
studies series in the and.
SM: His name is familiar.

HV: There was some of the stuff on the intelligence collection that he was writing on intelligence, in fact the title of the book as *The Role of Military Intelligence, 1965-1967*, and it did say the Department of Army Publication.

SM: Okay, I'll have to look for that.

HV: And otherwise from that, I appreciate the opportunity to provide my rambling thoughts to you.

SM: Oh, they weren’t rambling, this is a very good interview. Thank you sir, I appreciate your time.

HV: Well, it was indeed a pleasure to bring those memories back.

SM: Let me go ahead and put an official close to the interview then I want to discuss just a few things with you. This will end the interview with Colonel Vorhies, thank you again.