Allen B. Richardson: This interview is being conducted with Captain J.B. Knotts by Gunnery Sergeant Allen B. Richardson at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia. The subject of this interview is a Battalion Raid by the 3rd Battalion, 6th Vietnamese Regiment in the 2nd Division and also the Civic Action Program. Captain, would you state your name, grade, and service number please?

J.B. Knotts: Joseph B. Knotts, Captain, 068056.

AR: What were your duty assignments while you were in Vietnam?
JK: I was the senior advisor to the 3rd Battalion, 6th Regiment of the Republic of Vietnamese Army and the PsyWar CA Advisor to the 2nd Division.

AR: What period did you serve in these billets and where were you physically located within Vietnam during the period covered?
JK: I served in Vietnam from September ’64 to May of ’65 and I served in Quang Tin Province as an advisor and in Da Nang as the Division Advisor.

AR: Would you discuss the Battalion Raid by the 3rd Battalion Vietnamese Forces?
JK: Yes, the raid was conducted on the 14th of January, 1965 as a reaction to intelligence received through civilian sources. The 14th of January happened to be the first day of a period just prior to Tet, the Chinese New Year, in which relatives gathered to clean the graves of their dead and to have their own Buddhist celebrations and ceremonies. Early on the morning of the 14th, we moved our Battalion out in three different groups located in the raid sight, which was on two sides or both sides of a river; got into position to conduct the assault and to cut off anyone who tried to escape. The
raid was quite successful in that we got twenty-seven of the Viet Cong guerillas and
picked up some twenty-three adult suspects. We did not get the platoon commander—the
man we were after—although we did get his wife and children. The reason we didn’t get
him was due to impatience on the part of the Vietnamese battalion commander in that he
triggered the raid before the platoon commander had arrived at his house or home sight
where the meeting was going to be conducted of the platoon.

AR: Did you have any problems as an advisor as far as advising the Vietnamese
forces themselves? Would they listen too you?

JK: Initially, yes. You have to establish a certain rapport or gain the confidence
of your Vietnamese counterparts. I found it much easier to advise their junior officers
such as their company commanders or their platoon commanders and most of them were
quite young and just out of the military academy or had not been commissioned too long.
And as the battalion gained confidence in the advisor, then they would seek out your
advice. It wasn’t too often executed immediately, however, eventually; they would take
your advice and what you wanted to get done would be accomplished.

AR: Could you speak Vietnamese prior to going to Vietnam?

JK: No, I could not. I didn’t speak either Vietnamese or French. If I might
comment on that, the battalion commander whom I advised spoke English quite fluently;
also French quite fluently and I did have an interpreter.

AR: So there wasn’t any problem involved as far as the language barrier was
concerned?

JK: No problem whatsoever.

AR: I understand your unit was involved in a VC mortar attack, Captain. Would
you discuss that please?

JK: Yes. This occurred early on the morning of the 7th of February, 1965; 0300 to
be exact. We came under a very heavy mortar barrage and recoilless rifle fire. Initially,
we weren’t able to determine the location of the mortars but it was rather easy to
determine where they were firing recoilless rifles from. During the course of the barrage,
it was determined that they had moved their mortars against the base of the hill that we
were on and just lobbing the rounds on to the top of the hill and were quite accurate with
them. It was well coordinated with their assault of personnel up the hill.
AR: So they’re quite adept with the use of mortar then? They evidentially received previous training in mortars.

JK: Yes, these mortars that night were very accurate. They were very good with them and they were using either 81- or 82-millimeter mortars at this particular time.

AR: How long did this attack last, Captain?

JK: The attack itself lasted until shortly after 0500, at which time we pulled off the hill. The majority of the Viet Cong evacuated the hill prior to dawn. About 0730, we went back on the hill with a small number of men and virtually no resistance. I think we run into three Viet Cong up there.

AR: So, you were pinned down during the mortar attack itself and you couldn’t take any action whatsoever?

JK: Since they had the mortars at the base of the hill, we had artillery pieces on the hill; our machine guns, our own mortars, and some recoilless rifles, but they being in at the base of the hill, they were masked and we could not depress anything to fire on them.

AR: All right, Captain, would you discuss the Civic Action Program please?

JK: Yes. I’ll discuss this program from the division level, which I served as an advisor to the division PsyWar CA advisor. Also, in serving as an advisor on the division level, I was responsible for coordination through USOM, USIS, and other agencies that we had there such as teams of American Sea Bees who were doing civic action work.

One of our most successful programs was the use of our MedCAP Teams, our Medical Civic Action Program. This was a team sometimes made up of Vietnamese medical personnel, sometimes American medical personnel or a combination of both. In essence, you send this team out to a hamlet or a village; try to schedule it out there and announce it so that the people will come out and receive free medical treatment. We used to send PsyWar teams with the MedCAP teams and the MedCAP would draw the civilian populace out and the PsyWar teams could then talk to them either through the drama teams or they had certain give away programs. They would give away cloth to make clothing out of or cooking utensils that had government slogans on the bottom of them or maybe nuc mam which is a fish oil that they use quite extensively over there.

AR: What area was this involved?
JK: I worked out of the division headquarters in Da Nang.

AR: This was in the Da Nang area then?

JK: Yes, we worked out working in Da Nang. The majority of your PsyWar CA effort went out through the provincial governments, so we worked with Huong Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ny provinces.

AR: Were you provided any guidance as far as the Civic Action Program was concerned, or was this all your own initiative idea?

JK: Well, this program was being carried on when I arrived there. We expanded on it somewhat. For instance, we would send out with the MedCAP team, a number of propaganda leaflets and as an individual is to receive pills or something, we would wrap the pills in a leaflet; give them to the individual and let them take them home, that way we virtually insured contact with them and with the programs and ideas of the government. The overall PsyWar CA program on the higher level was guided out of Saigon or out of the seat of the government.

AR: Do you think this is effective?

JK: I thought we had a rather effective program going. The PsyWar CA program is a big one; we had provincial radio stations. We also had a program there where by we had small transistor radios that could be either given gratis to a village or if they had the money to buy them, they could buy them and listen to the provincial broadcast. As a matter of note here, there were a few instances where the Viet Cong conducted raids on either specific individuals’ homes or hamlets to get the radios so that they could not listen to the government broadcast.

AR: So, in that way, you know it is effective?

JK: Yes, I feel it was quite effective.

AR: Captain, I know it’s necessary sometimes to move civilians out of Viet Cong-controlled areas. How does our Civic Action Program effect these people, is it effective?

JK: For the most part, yes; depending under what circumstances you move the people. Should they request that they be moved and it’s no problem at all; they belong to the government or they’re loyal to the government and you can move them with no problem. Should they not have requested this, as happens many times, they desire to stay
on the land that they have lived on all their lives and their ancestors have lived on. If you forcibly remove them, you get a large percentage who will just infiltrate back to their home ground and stay there. The majority of these you’ll find are the older people, but you lose them so to speak, you lose government control over them.

AR: Is there any way that we can use our Civic Action Program against these people who move back to the area, Viet Cong-controlled areas?

JK: Yes, I think there is again. We can use our Psychological Warfare team; maybe combine it with the MedCAP teams, go back and treat these people, start talking to them and once you start a program of this kind, you’ve got to keep it up. So, you receive harassing fire or attack from the Viet Cong; if you let this drive you away that only drives the people you’re trying to get to that much closer to the Viet Cong. You’ve got to be persistent in the program once you start it irregardless of what the dangers might be.

AR: Could we use these people in our intelligence network as an example?

JK: Sometimes you can; as I’m sure most people know, the Oriental many times will tell you what he thinks you want to know and you’ve got to have somebody who knows these people and can evaluate what they’re passing out to you.

AR: One other short subject here, Captain. It concerns the preparation of the Chu Lai Area for land acquisition; Chu Lai landings.

JK: Yes, we received prior notification to the landing at Chu Lai and that there was a certain area of real estate that they wanted for Marine Corps uses down there. My part in this was that of advice. We thought that this should be a totally Vietnamese operation; going in, clearing the area, getting the civilian populace out and paying the indemnification. We wanted all of this connected with the government and with the military so that they would recognize their own people and respond to their authority. Our program was, from the military point of view, to go in and sweep through the area with Vietnamese military, see if we could clear it of any guerilla activity or Viet Cong regulars that might be there, move what civilians we had, too, from the particular piece of real estate, set up temporarily a tent camp to move them into, then relocate them later. Also, at this time, special allocation of funds was requested from the Saigon seat of
government to pay indemnification to these civilians that we were moving out; pay them
for their land.

AR: You weren’t able to move any of their houses themselves; we put them in
the tent camp area.

JK: Initially we wanted to put them into a tent camp area. I understand that the
Vietnamese broke their houses down into sections, which they can do very easy; they’re
made out of grass and bamboo, and they just can fold it up into a little pile and carry it on
their back really. I understand most of them carried their houses out with them.

AR: As far as land acquisitions is concerned, were any problems involved getting
land for these people?

JK: No. Again, the war situation being what it is, you could confiscate property if
necessary. In this particular case, the government had enough land of its own which to
relocate these individuals.

AR: And were farms set up so they could provide their own living?

JK: No, the area they were being moved into, they would have to establish their
own agriculture.

AR: How would they make a living, then, once they were moved to another area?

JK: Once they were moved into another area, it somewhat resembled a refugee
camp, they were provided with the essentials to live with, such as their food, an issue of
clothing, and so on.

AR: Now, will they eventually be moved back to their original area?

JK: I really can’t answer that at this point. I should think if we could look far
enough in the future to where we can end this war over there and bring it back under
government control as possible, we could get most of them back to their homeland.

AR: How do these people feel about movement right now?

JK: I am sure they object to being pulled up from the roots of their land they’ve
lived on all their life. Their ancestors are there, all their families buried somewhere near
their home and they’ve owned these few hectares all their life.

AR: Okay, thank you very much, Captain, for the interview.