Wynne Whiting: This is Wynne Whiting it is 3:30 on March 13, 1990. I am interviewing Sanford D. Hunt for the first time. This interview is taking place in Mr. Hunt’s home (Editor’s note: personal information expunged), Lubbock, Texas. This is part of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project at Texas Tech University. Colonel Hunt, why did you join the Marine Corps and when?

Sanford Hunt: Well, I was in the Marine Corps Reserve in 1940 and I joined one evening and drafted into the unit the next morning. So we left from Newark, New Jersey, and got on the train, without any training at all and went on down to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Then from there they shipped us over to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. I had no choice. I was in the reserves. I had to go, and that was before the war and before anyone had an idea what was going on. It’s a—I guess the president, and some members of the government knew what was coming. That’s the way it happened.

WW: So you originally joined as an enlisted man?

SH: That’s right.

WW: When did you become an officer?

SH: I was a radio operator. I became an officer July 2, 1942, in Wellington, New Zealand. That was a—I guess I was tight with my commanding officer. I worked in cryptography and spent my time with the officers, very little time with the enlisted people. It went right along with the work I was doing. I repaired cryptographic equipment and deciphered messages for the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, Gen. Archer Vandegrift. I repaired cryptographic equipment on all U.S. Navy
ships that were in the harbor in Wellington, New Zealand. Stayed in Wellington until we
sailed for Guadalcanal. We landed in August 1942. We stayed there for one-and-a-half
years and went from there to Brisbane, Australia, and didn’t like it in Brisbane. So they
made a deal with General MacArthur and we were all shipped out to Melbourne,
Australia. There we stayed for six to seven months. I went to Nouméa, Caledonia, with
General Vandegrift. Then was shipped back up to Guadalcanal for about six months
time. There was an oral message to tell the commanding general of the 3rd Division to
land on Bougainville on November 1, 1943. That is how they got the word that they were
going to make the Bougainville landing. We flew from Nouméa, New Caledonia, to
Guadalcanal about ten feet off the water all the way. As for the pilot, copilot, and myself
in a DC-3—I guess there is another name for those mountains. Two engines going, they
had another name, but I don’t remember what it was. There were a lot, three of them
around at the time. There is still some of them today. Then I guess it was 1943 to ‘44, I
had a little—I guess the war was just about to be over. They were trying to find out what
they were going to do with all the officers and others that were in the service. Before
they—when they’re going to start reducing forces in, well, I guess it was in ‘44. They
got out a bunch of Princeton University course equivalent examinations and anyone said
that they would like to stay in the regular service out of the reserves. The regular service
they gave college equivalency examinations. If you passed them you were commissioned
in the regular service then they promoted you from second lieutenant to whatever rank
you had in the reserves all in the same day for subsequent days. So I stayed.

WW: Sir, when you were about to begin your service in Vietnam, what Vietnam
conflict did program your mind and what did it mean to you?

SH: It was a—I made up my mind that I was going to be a military professional
and so I, well, I—it didn’t mean anything much to me except the fact that all
professionals wanted to go where the action is. I was looking forward to going to
Vietnam. I think I was in San Diego, California, in the Marine Corps recruit depot at the
time. I got a set of orders after twisting a few arms, got a set of orders and was sent over
there as an individual which is one of the problems that they had with the Vietnam War.
They sent all the replacements over as individuals. They sent no units over to replace
other units, consequently, there was no unit morale. You had individual people replacing
individual people. A lot of them were fresh out of high school. That was a completely
different situation than we ever had in any war before. Consequently, we had a lot of
people yanked out of school who were just too young, and that had never happened
before in this country that I know of. There are a lot of disgruntled people and people
who didn’t want to go. The regulars didn’t have any problems. The draftees had a lot of
problems. They were just too young and they had no desire to go over there.
WW: How did that make you feel, as a professional Marine officer?
SH: Well, I didn’t have any draftees. I had all regulars. The reason I had all
regulars is because I had to have competent radio operators. You didn’t get competent
radio operators out of the draft. The draft, most of the draft people if they didn’t have a
profession or a specialty of their own they wound up as cannon fodder on the front lines.
That’s the way it works all the time in every war. If you have a specialty you could wind
up with a commission. You could wind up as a public relations officer, as an engineer,
cryptographer, most anything. But if you had no education, other than high school,
which most of the draftees barely had finished high school, they had no specialties unless
they were farm boys or mechanics or something like that who knew something before
they were drafted, knew how to make a living before they were drafted, then they got
better jobs. All I can say is they make good infantrymen when some of them came out
with Medal of Honor and others didn’t. But I wasn’t really closely associated with the
draftees. Probably just as well.
WW: Sir, when you left for Vietnam what was the most difficult part about
leaving here, leaving the States?
SH: Well, leaving my family, of course. But that comes with the territory.
That’s part of it. If you want to be a professional you have to expect things like that.
Other than that, nothing. The unit was going, at least other people that I knew were going,
which is another wild adventure, I guess. At least there was something to look forward
to. There’s always something where you are going that you can improve, make it work
better. Always look forward to that.
WW: Where were you stationed in Vietnam and what years were you there?
SH: I was in Da Nang, Vietnam, at the headquarters of the 3rd Amphibious Corps
for the year-and-a-half that I was there. I spent lots of time up in the front lines, spent at
least two days a month down at Saigon, in conferences, in communication conferences
with the Army general that was in charge of communications in Vietnam. I was the next
senior communicator in Vietnam to the general. I handled all of North Vietnam and he
handled all the south part of South Vietnam. You know that North and South Vietnam
were never one country. You did know that?

WW: Yes, sir. Part of it was China and part of it was Hanoi.

SH: That’s right. I wasn’t the—North Vietnam was closely connected to China
and South Vietnam more closely connected to Indonesia and the Malay countries. It
wasn’t until the French came in there that I guess they put it together, very interesting.

WW: What were your living conditions like?

SH: Well, in a big corps headquarters, living conditions aren’t bad at all. You got
showers and you got bunks and rooms and a good place to eat, which was a far cry from
what the people up in north of us had. They didn’t have good places to live, but we had
lots of tents. Everybody had tents and everybody was working toward putting wooden
floors in their tents and getting things fixed up pretty well. They didn’t live out in the
bush. They always came back to camp. So you asked me when I was there, and let’s see,
5 April 1967 to 20 April 1968. I was assistant chief of staff, G-6, thirteen months. The
director of communications for the corps, which consisted of Army, Navy, Marines,
Korean Marines, and technical advisor to the Vietnamese Army and Navy of
communication matters. Then back to the States.

WW: What did that job entail? You personally looked at—you have to do with
it?

SH: Well, I had a staff of, let’s see—three majors, two majors, couple of
captains, master sergeant, and a couple of two or three courts. When you handle all the
radio frequency allocations they are all for—in the northern part of Vietnam, we built and
maintained all the microwave systems, both maintain all the telephone and radio systems
and furnish the personnel to operate them, both terminals to send and receive messages
and other matters to the U.S. from Vietnam. There were something like fifteen thousand
communications in the I Corps area where I was. We all worked together very well.

After I got there we worked together very well. They weren’t working well together as
the services were not cooperating, but it didn’t take very long to get that corrected. After
about six months everybody worked together real well as a team.

WW: This was an inter-service unit?

SH: Beg pardon.

WW: This was inter-service unit?

SH: Well, I don’t know exactly what you mean.

WW: Marine Corps. You had more and more—

SH: Oh, we had two Marine divisions, Marine Air Wing, 82nd Airborne, Army,
Navy command, Korean Marines, brigade of Korean Marines, U.S. Air Force units. Air
Force ran radio message service for all the Department of Defense at Da Nang. My job
was to keep all of that going. Each unit had its own logistics supply and its own training,
probably. My job was to keep the people talking to each other and cooperating, which
we did. There have been a few things written about that in the Marine Corps histories
particularly in ’68 to ’69 histories of Vietnam produced in and published by the Marine
Corps Historical Headquarters at the Washington Navy Yard. In those books, lay out
some pretty interesting details about inter-service problems. The general had lots of
inter-service problems. I didn’t among the communicators. We got along fine. The
general had problems between the various units because everybody wants to be in charge.
That is something to take to the commanding general in Saigon and get it straightened
out. General Westmoreland and General Abrams handled it pretty well. They did it
pretty much the way the headquarters of the III Corps wanted. The III Corps commander
was a general, a Marine Corps general, that is probably the largest Marine Corps
command organization that ever existed. The corps headquarters was five divisions and a
lot of miscellaneous troops, it’s a big outfit, in hand. There was— Marine Corps never
had an assistant chief of staff in this section before. I was the first one. When I first went
there, I was a corps communications officer. About halfway through my tour, in keeping
with the status of the corps headquarters, they changed my title from communications
officer to assistant chief of staff, G-6.

WW: What did you think about the people you served with, regular units, regular
service?
SH: I don’t know. I had never, just the usual cross-cut of people. Some people were ambitious. They did well. Some people wanted to go home. Some people are just there to hang out until they got their year in and leave. That is one of the reasons we had problems, morale problems. But everyone that I worked with worked hard, worked hard and long days, long days, long nights, spent lots of time up on the front lines with battalions and infantry companies. Spent lots of time on the hospital ships that were laying off Da Nang, seeing people who were wounded, Navy hospital and Purple Hearts and enlisting these people and they all lying there with missing arms and missing legs and various terrible conditions. Every one of them wanted to come back to fight. A wounded man in the hospital didn’t want to get out and get back to what he was doing, ever. Most of these were Navy people and Marines. I didn’t have—I had very little contact with the wounded Army and Air Force people because they had their own facilities. They’re down there at Saigon and other part of the country. Lots of Navy nurses coming in from the ships and visit with us, take trips up in the front lines. We sent them up as far north as we could to the various units. We had shows for the troops. Everybody drank a lot of booze, not while they were working, I hope, but at least I didn’t see any instances of that. But they didn’t hesitate to have a few drinks in the evening if they weren’t otherwise busy. I didn’t see any dope at all, not up through the time I left. There were signs of it, every once in a while, when some—nitch at night, but I—up through ‘69 it was not a prevalent thing. Most of that dope business started in the early 70s. I was gone by then. Although my son was there, came in after I left and he made a couple of tapes. In fact, he made five or six tapes of what was going on up on the front lines. I have those tapes, here, if someone wants to make a copy of them, provided I can find them. They are quite revealing as far as front line action in his unit was concerned.

WW: Did you see or hear of any race relation problems?

SH: We had some race relation problems, every once in a while. It wasn’t really that bad. The worst race relation problem were Army units. Once you get wind of it it’s no problem to go out and straighten it out. The Army had a lot of race relation problems, but we didn’t have, we had—the Marines had integrated their forces along before the war and everybody got along. Of course, I don’t know whether some of them were officers, senior officers, cared much about having black people in the units, but they did a good
job. Majority of them, they got out of the—Marine Corps officers is military academy, and southern military institutions. They were not integrated into the regular units of the Marine Corps. There were no part of them in World War II. We had individual black units and that was all done away with. But nothing serious. Of course, newspaper people will make something serious out of it because they have to sale newspapers. They make something out of nothing, most of the time. Read it in the newspaper. The papers that are mailed to you from home, you wonder if it was the same people and the same place. Really, difficult to imagine that what you are reading is what really happened. This has being going on for years and its worse all the time.

WW: How did the newspapers’ representation of the facts—?

SH: Oh, I didn’t like it. Nobody in the military liked it for the simple reason that, unless the material with the writing is censored, you are laying your troops a lot of trouble because the newspaper people can get up in the front lines. They can interview people and learn the information that has been linked from, direct in fighting from cryptography, from crypto analysis and things like that. The units have information about things that are going to happen in the future. If you get some jarhead that has had a few beers and he starts shooting his face off, he can cause the deaths of a lot of military people. Not only cause the deaths of military people, but it can ruin your source of information because as soon as it breaks in the paper and particularly if it breaks in the paper before it happens, the enemy knows you are reading their mail. So they just change all their ciphers. The work that we’d done and the work that people in national intelligence have done for six months or a year all goes to hell. So we just don’t like it, just as soon not have newspaper people up there, it’s not good for business at all. Or if they are there, everything they write should be censored to protect the troops from getting killed. Prevent leaks of information that we need to keep to ourselves until after it occurs. In World War II, we had the same problem. They censored everything. Well, you know about Grenada. They kept that pretty quiet. It might have cost us hundreds, and hundreds of people down there if the war in Grenada had gotten out ahead of time. If you left it up to newspaper people, it would have. They don’t seem to have any conscience. The only conscience they’ve got is dollars and cents, get a pay raise, get the story in the paper and to hell with the consequences. That’s been going on as far back as
I can remember. A lot of things to think about before you run newspaper people into any phase of fighting or shooting war. It’s dangerous. It endangers the success of your mission to have newspaper people around. It’s better to use your own combat correspondents then let them wreck the stuff up and send it to the newspapers, or give it to the newspaper people. Rather than have the newspaper people loose or able to go around wherever they want to go, it’s not good.

WW: Was there friction between the war correspondents and the troops?

SH: No friction. All the troops liked to get their names in the paper. They were easy targets for newspaper people. Send messages home and let the folks at home know how they were doing. Whether the mail was censored they couldn’t tell, report home where they were, what they were doing. Censored, all’s necessary to sensor the mail.

There was a—they had a tough time over there for the draftees.

WW: What was a typical day? Like for you in Vietnam.

SH: I don’t know whether I worked at night or not. Up in the morning at five o’clock and got some breakfast and maybe meet an incoming officer from General Abrams’s headquarters in Saigon. Go with him out to some of his troops or maybe go with him out to pay his troops, or fly down and meet with some people of the Korean Marine headquarters. Take the helicopter and go up to Marine headquarters at Khe Sanh and see what there is that we can do for them up there, what they need, what they aren’t getting. Just signing requisitions doesn’t help much. You need to get out and see what the people need. I spent a lot of time doing that. I spent a lot of time bailing the Army, Navy, and Air Force units all over the area. As I said, I spent two to three days a month in Saigon, meeting with people down there about supplies and new developments and new operations. Some days I just stayed in the command post and people from units coming in to see me about their things they needed. Spend an hour or two each week over at Vietnamese Army headquarters, talking about the assortment and allocation of radio frequencies. Everybody always wants something. They want to borrow a couple of pairs of wire out of our cable from point A to point B to put a telephone on, or a teletype machine. Then there were occasions we went over to Vietnamese—well, I can think of two occasions went over to Vietnamese Army headquarters, for ceremony to be decorated by General Ky, for various sundry things we had done. Vietnamese like to hang ribbons
on you for this and for that. We went visiting our wounded out in the hospital ships. I used to go over and visit the combat correspondents. Some of them I’d known thirty years before. There were parties. There were a lot of civilians over there. Army had civilian workers that were all nurses, running around the place. Somebody having a cocktail party. If you happened to be in the area, and you were invited, people came from all over and went to the party every once in a while to break the tension. In the evening we had going away parties for people, always somebody leaving, somebody going back home. Make an excuse to have a party at some time, make a few speeches. In a large headquarters like that, we had all as far as dignitaries from other units, wheels from the United States coming on inspection tours. Congressmen, take them out and show them what’s going on. All this on top of having to handle terrific amount of message traffic between the units of the United States answering questions from service headquarters for the United States. Get personnel assignments straightened out, who wants to go where and how many, what do they need. Checking with the headquarters Marine Corps to see how many people we were getting, when we were getting them and who had to go home. In the operations dugout of headquarters, I stood watch over there from dinnertime sometimes until three o’clock in the morning. Particularly when there was something happening. All staff officers had duty in the operations circuit, regardless of whatever else you had to do.

WW: Did you have any contact with the foreknowledge of the Australians, ROKs (Republic of Korea troops?)

SH: I didn’t have any contact with the Aussies. I met a few at a couple of parties. Marines, I worked with them most every day. They’re all after something, supplies. They needed radios. They needed wire, telephone poles. We furnished the stuff, whatever they needed. The general used to go visit those headquarters in the evening maybe for dinner or something. Take some of the staff officers with him and I usually went with the general when he went visiting the headquarters. Korean Marines were a good bunch, pretty ferocious bunch as well. When they told a Vietnamese village to get the enemy out of their village by eight o’clock in the morning, they meant exactly that. Because if they didn’t they would go in there and wipe the place clean, kill everybody. Anything that moved was killed. They were a pretty ferocious bunch. I don’t think we
ever did anything like that. We threatened a lot of people, and gone in there and shot a few people, but you can’t tell who’s friend and who’s enemy over there. You can’t tell a South Vietnamese from a North Vietnamese. You go in there with those (unintelligible) with a small unit, you can be shot by anybody. A general that I used to ride with in a helicopter, on a day that I was supposed to be riding with him, landed near a Vietnamese village and got blasted out of the air. Killed his pilot and blew up his helicopter and killed everybody in it. Can you see?

WW: I believe, Colonel, that occurred during the time that you were up.

SH: Yeah. It happened when I was there. I went up there, oh, a day after all it had cooled off and looked at how they wrecked all our communications. Then when our antennas were all shot down and the place was a real mess, we had to rebuild everything. But I spent all my time in the operations dugout during the time of the Tet Offensive moving troops around with the operations officer, providing spare units to go up there. To get something like that going, all the staff officers in the operations place and spent all our time there. Just another fight, a pretty good battle, loss of good people. The Army did. The Marines did, too. I spent a lot of time up there way, way—Lord I can’t even remember the names of the towns up there. Two or three towns, Hue, Khe Sanh, and a couple of other places escape me. It’s been a long time. I remember more about World War II than I do about Vietnam. Of course, I researched World War II a lot. All the books and things that have anything to do with were written about World War II. Very little written about Vietnam, as a matter of fact. Trying to think of—I don’t know who writes about Vietnam. I am looking up in my bookshelf. I can’t see, maybe one or two books about Vietnam are all there are, some and some about to be written. I refresh my memory. I didn’t mention who was the commanding general was when I was there at 3 Com. He’s dead now, 3 MAF, Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman, Jr. He eventually became deputy director of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) before he retired. Then he retired and he died a few years later. February ’68 that they changed the communications electronics officer to G-6. It was done and it says here and I’m reading from the U.S. Marine in Vietnam, 1970 to ’71, put out by History of Museums Division Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps in 1986. Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman, commanding general 3 MAF re-designated as CEO (chief executive officer) section of the G-6 section, February 1968.
This was done in recognition of the increased coordination and technical control demanded of expanded corps-level tactical situation, brought on by the Tet Offensive. That’s when it sent up Army troops. This is the first time in Marine Corps history that twenty communications electronics were elevated to G section status and continued for the remainder of the war. And Maj. James Connell provided comments on draft manuscript et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. What else?

WW: Well, sir, I was going to ask you what did press accounts to Tet Offensive—how what did you feel about that?

SH: I don’t—it’s just another battle. I can’t—maybe if our intelligence would have been better, it wouldn’t have happened. But I’m not an expert on the Tet Offensive at all, except that we brought in a lot of new troops from south of South Vietnam and brought in Army and Air Force people weren’t there before. In fact, two Army divisions came up to help.

WW: What was your impression of the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) and the Vietnamese government?

SH: Well, you mean compared to—we going to get into that compared to what business again?

WW: Not really, compared to anything, just your impression.

SH: Well, they were poor, underfed, poorly trained and led by people, who if compared to American officers, were corrupt. Compared to their own, they weren’t corrupt because that’s the way they lived. They lived with one hand under the table. Any of the senior officers, particularly some of the ones that I worked with and knew pretty well, like General Ky and General Lam, every penny they got they sent to Switzerland or someplace else. Because they knew eventually, they were going to have to go. There was no point in keeping the money around. That would have been foolish. But they are all corrupt, from an American point of view. But that was an Oriental (way of life), and you get a—for everyone that wants something you have to give something back, something off the top. As the Chinese said, “Cumshaw,” that’s the way of life over there. If you want something you haven’t got, you want to get something, then you have to pay somebody to find it for you. If they get it for you, the person that wanted it gets three-fourths and the person that got it for you gets one-fourth. That’s a way of life. That’s the
way they are. But they went out and got shot. Those troops that were trained by
American units, they were pretty good. They were faithful. They were loyal. They did a
good job, particularly if they are working with U.S. units and got three meals a day and
got their clothes from them and a place to sleep and all. They were loyal. They did a
good job. We should have listened a little closer to some of them, which we didn’t. On
many occasions we didn’t, we would have saved a lot of troops. But generally speaking
they weren’t interested in winning the war. They were interested more in eating three
meals a day and supporting their families and having clothes on their back. As far as
winning the war was concerned, I don’t think that there were many of them at the troop
level who cared anything about fighting. It was their seniors, people who make the
money out of this thing, who are the people who made them keep at it. They were in a
position where they had to do what they were doing or they would get shot. I talked to
somebody on my computer the other night, I don’t know how old he was. You can’t tell
on a computer. He was talking about that he would never go to war and he was never
going to kill somebody. He got a lot of flak—actually this was a veteran’s conference.
He got out of flak from a lot of people. Then he retaliated by saying, well, you are the
sort of guys that would have turned the gas on the ovens in Dachau. Well, then I realized
that I was conversing with someone that was either ten years old or just wasn’t thinking
very well, because that is apples and oranges. If I was in the German Army, been
brought up like a German, trained like a German, probably turning on the gas in Dachau
wouldn’t have meant a thing, nothing. But I’m not, which shows what I talked about a
little while ago, standards. When comparing someone you have to compare them with
their own people, and their own way of life. You can’t say that a Japanese girl that pays
$3.50 for an abortion, that did something immoral. But the immoral to you, you’re an
American or moral to me because my church says that you shouldn’t do those things. But
not the Japanese. They do it every day. That’s the way they live. It happens. Terrible.
Everyone—it happens to a lot of people. It’s the way they live and you have to judge
people, not by American standards. On top of that you can’t import Americanism to
places that don’t want it and you shouldn’t. But what you should do is spend your time
trying to convince them. Look we’ve got it made. We like the way we live. You ought
to try it, but not with weapons. But the important thing to remember, don’t judge people
in other countries, what they are doing, by your standards that you’re brought up with. Unless you specifically state that in your conversation. Never come right out and say Noriega is a demon or Hitler was a whatever, compared to whom, compared to what. Whereas the important thing to state as you are making those remarks. Because it comes out a lot better and you get higher marks for remarks like that. Because then people can understand what you are talking about. I suppose that from a—even when the Americans say, “Well, from a humanitarian point of view, don’t you think that was bad?” Well, from who’s humanitarian point of view? The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), that great organization that is all over the world now, telling people what is right and what is wrong. Where do they get their standards? It’s difficult. You have to be very careful when making comparisons as well as making generalities. But that didn’t answer your question did it?

WW: You mentioned earlier, General Ky? Would that be Nguyen Cao Ky?
SH: Yeah. Yeah.
WW: As an American officer, what was your impression of him?
SH: He’s just like—he was a dandy. Do you know what a dandy is in the American? Sly and he was a crook probably more so than anybody else that I ever met over there. From my point of view—and he saw what money he had and he sold it away and he was a power grabber. He wanted to be the all-powerful and he just about made it, but not for long. General Lam, whose house I’d been for dinner, he and his wife were very nice people, well educated. He was a commander of the 1st Vietnamese Corps. I went to dinner with him in Saigon. In fact, I went with my son, when my son was a lieutenant and my son was married to a Vietnamese girl. We went to dinner at their house, but General Lam—but when he left, he left earlier enough. His family was all in France. So was all of his money. But Ky was a power grabber. Not to say that the other high-ranking officers weren’t trying to do the same, wouldn’t have accepted it, being the head of the country if it came their way. Ky was very much, very obviously wanted to be in charge of the shooting match and probably wanted money and power, or power and money whichever comes first. He’s a nice guy, polite, well spoken. He wasn’t a military man, really. He had a uniform on, gave away a lot of nice medals. He pinned one on me. He is in Santa Monica or Los Angeles or somewhere now. Financially, if he is like all
the other Vietnamese that come to this country that are Orientals for all he is doing very
well. May even have a shakedown racket. There are a lot of honest Orientals and a lot of
honest Vietnamese in this country, but people like that you know they been having this
shakedown business for years. They are good at it. He’s the kind of guy that would
come to this country and get involved with some sort of mob tactics. Local shakedown of
the local Vietnamese merchants or something like that. I don’t think he’s the kind of guy
that would get out and work for it, do an honest day’s work. But he may have changed.
He may have seen the light. I don’t know. I haven’t heard from him or about him for at
least a year now.

WW: What experiences stand out the most, the most vivid in your mind about
Vietnam?

SH: Going home, probably. Well, I think number one to me, because I am a
professional, is the change of the communicational electronics building to assistant chief
of staff G-6. Because that is something I’d been working on for years trying to get
something like that accomplished. It took a war to do it. I think probably the other thing
that comes to mind was meeting a UPI (United Press International) correspondent, or
correspondent Bob Miller, who I had seen last on Guadalcanal in 1942. Somehow he got
my name and called me on the telephone. I went over and sat down and had a beer with
him and talked to him all afternoon about what had happened the last forty years, talked
about the media and how they write. When I think of Vietnam, those two things really
stand out except that general or all array electronics communications which was by far
the most advanced that all the American military services had ever seen. We had things
out there working that hadn’t been used in the U.S. yet. The Vietnamese War was a great
ground for proving new weapons, new techniques and new communication electronics
gear. It was a real proving ground for them. From that point of view it did the American
military a great amount of good. I can’t think of anything else that really stands out.
Unless I said that one time or another to you off record that something else stood out, it
did. A few parties stand out but that’s not part of the war. No, really it is part of the war.
You always have parties wherever you go. I think the mustard company incident is one
that I enjoyed. We didn’t have any hot English mustard in Da Nang. Nobody had any
hot English mustard. You couldn’t get it. I wrote the Colman company and we received
in the mail, not to long thereafter, cases of Colman’s powdered mustard. It was
distributed throughout the Marine units all over Da Nang and up to the troops in other
divisions. You could write to most of the American companies if you were short of
something and they would send it to you. But this was just one of the things. Some
general came down visiting to dinner one night. I guess we had roast beef, or something.
He said, “Where’s the mustard?” We didn’t have any mustard. So I just wrote a letter to
Colman, said we need mustard and they shipped it to us at no charge. Maybe another
thing, not being blasted in the general’s helicopter was pretty outstanding. I’d been
riding with him the day before and scheduled to ride with him again and didn’t for some
reason. I had to go see the Korean Marines or something or another, just didn’t go.
Otherwise I would have been here. A lot of the details of the techniques for
communications that were developed out there were very important, but there are so
many things, so many pieces of equipment that were developed as a result of that war that
we had for the first time over there. Intrusion devices was something I worked on when I
was chief of research and development in Quantico, Virginia, in the Marine Corps. We
had little sensors on the end of the field wires put way out in the woods and run the wire
back to a little control box. You could hear the leaves rustling. You could tell if anyone
got near. They used them up in Khe Sanh, up at the front lines laying them all out. We
bought them from Texas Instruments in Dallas, developed them when I was with the
Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia, as researcher. They were pretty good. Now they got
them, but you don’t have the hook wires. You just put them out there. They transfer all
by themselves with a receiver. It’s a signal sensor that they use to drop down the tunnels,
a seismograph type thing—I can’t answer that. I can’t—you just sit around with a bunch
of people and talk to them about the war. Well, the Vietnam War, there’s always a lot of
things that come up that you don’t think of otherwise. You didn’t ask me where I saw
Jane Fonda?

WW: Sir, I was coming to that.

SH: Well, they should have shot her. She doesn’t know how many deaths she is
responsible for or why. You don’t do things like that. I think she knows it today. It’s the
same thing, exactly, that I was speaking about earlier about codes and ciphers. You don’t
talk to the enemy about things you don’t understand. When you do, you are laying
yourself open to getting a lot of your people killed that otherwise would not be killed.
Because you are shooting your mouth off about things about Americans and you aren’t
trained you don’t know what to say and what not to say. You don’t know how to do
things like that without jeopardizing your own people. Now if she was a trained agent
and sent there by the government to spy, that’s a different story. If somebody told me
today that she actually was in the employ of the CIA, then I might change my mind about
her. All the newspaper stuff and the public statements she made were all a cover for the
job she was really doing for the government. You know, that’s possible. That’s possible,
but who knows. No one has attacked from that point of view, but how do we know. She
wasn’t sent there by the government. All I saw on the papers was merely cover up. She
came back and made a report on what she found out. It’s possible. Did you ever think
about that before?

WW: No, sir. I can’t say that I have.
SH: Quite possible. The government knows how to cover things up. She would
have been a beautiful person to pick to do a specific job for the United States, what a
cover.

WW: Now that I think about it, it would have been a very effective way to gather
information.
SH: She would have been a very effective person at that time. See, you have to
watch out. That’s why it doesn’t pay to go jumping on people all the time about things
and giving copies to newspapers when you really don’t know. You’re just throwing
things out and you’re not sure. It just looks bad. You don’t really know and aren’t on the
inside. Opening your mouth might do a great deal of harm. If you keep your mouth shut
about things like that you don’t know about. Hey, we just thought about something. I’d
like your comments on it as a former Marine. We just decided that Jane Fonda was sent
over to Vietnam as a U.S. agent. That all the all the newspapers stuff about her was
merely hype to cover her basic mission, was to find out something about what the
Vietnamese was doing. What do you think?

Unknown Person: I wouldn’t buy it.
SH: You wouldn’t buy it.
Unknown Person:  Jane Fonda was interested in Jane Fonda, and her causes, and her husband.

SH:  Well, wouldn’t you agree, though, that that would be a great cover?
Unknown Person:  I don’t know that it would have done more harm than good.  If anybody had such a bright idea, wouldn’t have approved of it.

SH:  But the cover story was terrific, wasn’t it?

WW:  What did you think of the anti-war demonstrations as a whole?  From your point of view as a serviceman.

SH:  I thought it was a bad deal.  The people that did it, in their own mind were doing what was right and proper, but the thing is, they didn’t realize what doing those things would cost us in battle scars.  People dying.  People on the front lines, they read that stuff.  They said, “To hell with this.  I’m not going to fight in a war.”  Whammo! You get shot, because he is not watching what he’s doing.  It takes lives.  When people have to do things like that, if they can have some nice quiet demonstrations, I think the most effective way of doing something like that is, a letter-writing and telegraph campaign to your congressman.  We know that letter-writing and telegraph campaigns are very, very effective.  In fact, we just finished one.  We got the catastrophic health act receded by Congress.  You didn’t see that.  There are a few demonstrations, but nothing that was carried more than one time on the news.  It was all done by letters and telegrams, and word of mouth, and articles in local newspapers.  But no big TV thing, no big demonstrations.  It wasn’t necessary, yet it was done.  It was done very effectively.  Well, people don’t read, don’t know history, and don’t understand about things like that.  That’s the result.  It’s not the intellectuals that do things like that, it’s the people that don’t have the education.  That’s the only way they know.  They get—it’s catchy.  Other people get—

WW:  What was it like to come home?

SH:  Great.  I didn’t have any problems.  We lived on a base, all our friends.  Most of our friends were military people.  We didn’t have a civilian community to return to.  There were no problems, as opposed to the problems that the draftees had.  They had lots of problems.  But as far as I was personally concerned, there wasn’t any, except for articles in newspaper and magazines.  It wasn’t any different than—well, yes it was
different because of their auditory materials and things that you’ve read. But again for military professionals, all that sort of stuff, it’s got to be accepted along with what’s good. That’s what you get paid for. That’s the way it is. You’re still drawing your salary and you may as well let it wash over your head. The same thing for the—the same problem with people, doctors, dentists and other professional people. They are professionals. They get paid for what they are doing, and when people write things about them and they have to accept that as part of the business of being whatever kind of professional they are. That’s just another way to make a living. It’s not for God and country. It’s for three meals a day and support for your family. If you choose the military, choose to be a doctor, you can choose to be an interviewer. You can choose to open up the Vietnamese Archive at Texas Tech. It’s a three-meal-a-day and support-my-family job. Of course, in a lot of those jobs, people also like what they are doing. I liked what I was doing. I don’t believe in screwing people, but sometimes it’s necessary. So preparations. The Vietnam archivists like what they are doing, probably get well paid and if they don’t, they will. Doctors, dentists, lots of people complain about them, but they are well paid and you have to let it go over your head. But not so with draftees. That’s another story, another story altogether. That was the problem with the whole thing over there. Two basic problems, one the government wouldn’t give us the wherewithal to win the war, and two, we were loaded with people who didn’t want to be there. Why the draft? They were too young. Other than that, if they drafted at the age of twenty-five to four, given us what we needed to win the war, we might of won it. There would be a hell of a lot more dead Vietnamese than there were, unfortunately, had taken on an atom bomb or two, to win this thing. It would have been very bad. Besides, you know that, people, foreign people, they start wars because they know the United States would come and bail them out and help them start a new economy, for which we all get taxed. We pay Liggett Brothers for the coconut palms that we wrecked on Guadalcanal with American shells, killing Japanese. How much do you think the reparations are going to be in Panama? Millions. We pay reparations to people all over the world. I think this country, and I know that Great Britain did, too, and probably France and the United States and a few other countries, but by and large, only the big countries ever pay reparations.
WW: Would you do it all over again?

SH: Sure, and do it better. Of course, now we have things that we never even thought about, everything run by computer. Yeah, it’s a good business. Military, terrific business, and a good retirement. I don’t have to work anymore. I’d like to be working but no one will hire me. But I’d go back in tomorrow morning if I could. You know, retired people aren’t retired in the military. We are on retainer pay. We are subject to recall. A lot of people don’t understand that. Retired people are all subject to recall at anytime the government wants to recall them. That’s all right, but it’s a good business. You can even get flight jackets free, in aviation, leather ones. My grandson is going to Quantico. It’s officers’ training this summer. Barely, his grades were not what you call the best. He’ll do well. He’ll make a good officer. Besides that, as he says, he’s a minority. He’s a minority and he’s going to work that to death.

WW: That’s all the questions that I have.

SH: Well, friends that do different things, that’s the way to live. Join a service club, do something and spread yourself around a little bit. You won’t have that problem anymore. But you can’t be too narrow. If you stay narrow that’s the only thing you think about. As I said earlier, that one thing that’s wrong with policemen, they don’t get out and meet other types. But that is the reason we had so much of a problem with people coming back. The draftees are the ones that took all the guff. The regular military didn’t because it didn’t bother them.

WW: With your experiences in the Marine Corps in Vietnam, would you do it again?

SH: Sure, I’d go tomorrow if there was a reason. Certainly, if they take me back, I’d be in my uniform and gone. I can still get in my uniform, without sucking my gut in very much. Yeah. I keep it that way. So when they retire people, this isn’t very, very public knowledge, when you retire people, you are really on retainer pay, you are not on retired pay. You are on retainer pay and you are subject to call at any time. That’s the way they keep many of us from going, were keeping many of us from going into communist countries. We had a thing in our passports that won’t allow us to go to certain places because we are all subject to recall. All officers are. I don’t know whether enlisted personnel are or not. Always subject to recall, for the rest of your life. A lot of
people don’t understand that, but I think that is fine. I’d go again. Only one thing in life
in my whole career that I’d do over again, and that happened in Vietnam. I was a senior
colonel at the 3 map headquarters, senior to the deputy chief of staff, senior to a bunch of
other colonels, which is very unusual for a communications electronics officer. He is
usually the junior colonel on the staff and he gets tromped on by everybody, but I was in
a position to be a senior colonel. I was offered by the commanding general to be deputy
chief of staff. I decided that I knew my job so well and so much better I thought than a
lot of other people, that I could do more for the Marine Corps and the country if I stayed
in my specialty. I turned a job down. Besides that, I was still senior than the rest of the
staff. I didn’t have to take any crap from them which was an unusual situation to be in. I
do feel today had I accepted the job as deputy chief of staff, you would not be talking to
brigadier general or major general. So it was probably a mistake. I didn’t spread out the
way that I’d been recommending, to spread inward is another deal. However, that’s all
right. I’m still on retainer pay. I’m eating three meals a day and it was a very fine career.
I’d do it all over again the same way. It’s a good job. If you can get a commission, I
wouldn’t want to go for thirty years. Being a corporal or something like that, that’s not
good. Pay isn’t high enough. If you can get beyond the rank of major, you’ve got it
made. You can stay for twenty years whether you are promoted or not. If you only get to
be a two stripper, or a captain, or a lieutenant in the navy, if you are failed for promotions
twice in a row, you are terminated from the military service. But if you get to be a two
and a half stripper or a major, then you are guaranteed twenty years, minimum. You can
stay longer whether you are promoted or not. I just took my chances, and got promoted.
I got promoted pretty fast. When I got to be a colonel, I thought I had it made. When I
first came in, I thought if I ever made warrant officer, I’d really be doing well. But I had
a specialty when I came in. I wasn’t a fodder for the infantry. I was a radio operator to
begin with. I was in the Navy four years, and Naval Reserve before I joined the Marine
Corps reserve, and I was a radio operator. So when I went into the Marine Corps, I was a
radio operator. I already had—they gave me a stripe just for having my technicality
when I went in. Sixty dollars per month and all you can eat and all your clothes. But by
the time you get to be colonel, most people can live on their retirement pay. I have taken
care of your stocks and bonds well during the course of your life or gone to school, had a
little more school learning, why you are still young enough when you get out at thirty
years to take another job. I could work here, in Lubbock, any number of places, and get
paid for it, but I don’t want to. Motor coach sitting there, we get in it and we go. I don’t
like to be tied down. I get all the work I want by a lady named Bonny Phillips, over at
Tech in the retired senior volunteer program. She places volunteers over sixty years old
all over the city. That’s another side of Tech that some people don’t know about. All
that, what else?

WW: That’s it sir.

SH: I hope you can do something with it. Tell you what, everything that’s on
there, I have written down someplace, also.