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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Don Seibert
Conducted by Kelly Crager
January 23rd, 2009
Transcribed by Valerie Sopena**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an oral history interview with US
2 Army, retired, Col. Don Seibert. Today is 23 January 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on
3 the campus of Texas Tech University, and Colonel Seibert is joining us from his home in
4 Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I am conducting this interview to gain the reminiscences of
5 Colonel Seibert and his time in the US military, specifically in Vietnam. Colonel Seibert
6 was a veteran of the Pacific War in World War II, as well as a veteran of the Korean War.
7 More specifically for the Vietnam War, among other things, Colonel Seibert served as
8 Deputy Senior Advisor of the 25th ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Division,
9 as well as Senior Advisor in the 24th Special Tactical Zone in II Corps in Vietnam, and
10 also as a brigade commander, commanding the 1st Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division in
11 III Corps during his time in Vietnam. Colonel Seibert, to begin this interview, I would
12 like to ask you some questions about—(technical difficulties). Do we still have you on
13 board?

14 Don Seibert: Oh, yeah.

15 KC: Okay, very good. We had some sort of technical malfunction. If you could,
16 Colonel, give me some brief biographical information about you. Can you tell me when
17 and where you were born?

18 DS: I was born in Hempstead Long Island, New York, on the 27th of April of
19 1920.

20 KC: And what were your parents' names?

21 DS: Names?

22 KC: Yes, sir.

1 DS: William Hugo Seibert and Genevieve Alvina Seibert, nee Miller.

2 KC: Okay. What did your parents do for a living?

3 DS: I didn't understand that question.

4 KC: What did your parents do for a living?

5 DS: My mother was a homemaker. My father did various things. Worked as an

6 agent in real estate, a building in Wall Street, sort of a concierge. And later on became a

7 welder in the Well Built Stove Company. Middle class family background.

8 KC: Okay. Now, your father worked on Wall Street, as you mentioned, and you

9 said that you were born in 1927. Was that correct?

10 DS: Right.

11 KC: Was your father still working on Wall Street when the Great Depression

12 began?

13 DS: Actually, he started to work after the Depression started.

14 KC: Okay. That must have been some pretty lean times out on Wall Street.

15 DS: It was, it was indeed.

16 KC: Could you describe for me what it was like growing up in that environment

17 during that time?

18 DS: Well, let me give you a recap.

19 KC: Sure.

20 DS: My father was originally a runner at Wall Street when he was a kid. Then he

21 became a groom on one of the estates on Long Island that he groomed polo ponies and

22 that's where he met my mother, who was a nurse. She was taking care of the children and

23 they were married. He left that job and went to work for some kind of a freight hauling

24 firm, which he worked for during World War I. It took him from Long Island to Boston

25 to New Orleans, and then finally to Richmond, Virginia. And in Richmond, Virginia, he

26 worked for the RF&P (Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac) Railroad in the

27 roundhouse. Exactly what he did, I'm not sure. And then in 1928 we moved up to my

28 mother's parents' home in College Point, Long Island. And that's when the Depression

29 really hit us. Both of my grandparents died at the beginning of the Depression and we

30 existed from hand to mouth. My dad for a while was a laborer on building the 8th Avenue

31 subway in New York. And then he got this job in Wall Street, started out as an elevator

1 operator then became sort of a concierge, as I say, directing people throughout the
2 building. It was 120 Wall Street, as I remember. And then he left that job and went with
3 Well Built and that's all I remember.

4 KC: Well, what was it like for you as a young child growing up in the
5 Depression? What sort of things did you see and what sort of things did you do during
6 that time?

7 DS: I must say that we had a good life. We didn't have new clothes. I got hand-
8 me-downs from my brother. We slipped cardboard in our shoes when we got holes in
9 them but we never went hungry. We always had a house to live in or an apartment to live
10 in. I had a very happy childhood, as a matter of fact.

11 KC: Can you tell me briefly what was your impression of the Franklin Roosevelt
12 administration? Growing up in New York, he was of course from New York. What did
13 Roosevelt mean to you and your family?

14 DS: Well, my family, we are all Republicans.

15 KC: Oh, is that right?

16 DS: We didn't think very highly of FDR (Franklin D. Roosevelt). As I remember,
17 the first term was accepted pretty well, but after that every time he went up for re-
18 election, my father would get more and more angry about it.

19 KC: Well then he had an opportunity to be angry an awful lot then.

20 DS: Yes, he did.

21 KC: Well, now, you were also obviously a World War II veteran, serving in the
22 Pacific War, fighting on the Island of Okinawa.

23 DS: Right.

24 KC: Can you tell me about your awareness of the coming of the Second World
25 War and what that meant to you as a young man?

26 DS: Yes. Growing up in New York there was a great preponderance—not a
27 preponderance—a great number of Germans. I lived in a small community called College
28 Point, which had largely a German ancestry background. I remember a lot of my friends
29 belonged to the America First Committee, were protesting it. Let me think. I was well
30 aware of the *Bund*, I had friends whose neighbors had pictures of Hitler in their homes.

1 One of my classmates in grammar school, her parents returned her to Germany. So, I was
2 aware of what was going on. I don't know how else to answer that question.

3 KC: No, no, no. That's fine. You saw it from a different perspective, I think, than
4 most Americans having had the experience with German-Americans and going to
5 friends' houses and seeing pictures of Hitler. That must have been quite an eye opener for
6 you, I would think. But what about the war in the Pacific? What did Pearl Harbor mean to
7 you?

8 DS: I couldn't afford to go to college so I got a job and went to night school,
9 NYU (New York University) night school. On December 7th, which was a Sunday, I was
10 studying for a physics exam and listening to WQXR, a good music station, to drown out
11 the noises in the house when they interrupted the program to announce it. We were all
12 aghast. The family huddled around the radio and listened to all the broadcasts and we just
13 couldn't believe it. At first, we didn't realize where Pearl Harbor was or what it meant.
14 But as the reports kept coming in a picture gradually developed. The next day, we
15 listened to Roosevelt talk to Congress and declare the Day of Infamy. I went down to try
16 to enlist in the Marine Corps and they wouldn't have me because I had bad eyes and I
17 finally enlisted in the Army and quit college and that was it.

18 KC: Okay. Now, it was 1941 and you were born in '27, so that would have made
19 you how old? Seventeen years old?

20 DS: I was born in '20, so I was twenty-one.

21 KC: I'm sorry. Okay, so you are twenty-one. All right, so you enlisted in the
22 Army. Where did you go for basic this first time around?

23 DS: I went to Fort Lee, Virginia. I was trained as a medic. After the screening
24 when I first got in they determined—I was taking a pre-med course at NYU so they put
25 me in the medics.

26 KC: Okay. Now, what did medic training consist of in 1941?

27 DS: Well, we had field training and field sanitation. Largely how to carry patients
28 on litters and some first aid, but very rudimentary. Basically, it was the school of a
29 soldier with emphasis on medical subjects.

30 KC: Okay. Now, did you have a preference as to which of the theaters that you
31 would go to? The European or the Pacific theater?

1 DS: No, I'll recap. When I left Fort Lee I was sent to Walter Reed Army Hospital
2 for two months' training as a surgical technician. Then I was sent to Indiantown Gap
3 Military Reservation where I had duty in the hospital there. Ward duty at first and then
4 the head of the laboratory found out my college background and got me into the lab there.
5 Then I applied for OCS (Officer Candidate School) and was accepted for chemical
6 warfare OCS. Went to Edgewood Arsenal and got my commission in chemical warfare. I
7 was sent out to the West Coast, Flying Training Command as an Air Chemical Officer. I
8 spent a year and a half between Santa Anna on the air base and Roswell Army Air Field.
9 Finally, I got disgusted with it. All my friends were going overseas. So I applied to a
10 transfer to the infantry and went to Fort Benning for the Basic Officers Course. I finished
11 that up and went to Fort McClellan, Alabama, where I was an instructor to the infantry
12 basic training. I got disgusted with that and finally I got transferred to the Pacific in time
13 to fight on Okinawa.

14 KC: Okay, so you spent all of this time, then, either training or OCS or chemical
15 warfare and this whole time you were wanting to be involved in the fighting?

16 DS: Right.

17 KC: That's why you said that you were disgusted with this. You kept trying to
18 find your way to the frontlines and they wouldn't let you, it sounds like.

19 DS: Right. I oughta send you the whole of my account of my career and the
20 fighting I did to try to get into combat.

21 KC: Yeah, I have read the portions of your book that you sent me already. It's
22 fascinating stuff and obviously very, very well done. Describe for me in a nutshell, if you
23 can, what were your experiences in the Pacific like, during the latter part of the Second
24 World War?

25 DS: I joined the 96th Division as a replacement, just after they had made the
26 invasion. They had taken a lot of initial casualties just before the Shuri Castle Line. I
27 joined, had to fight my way from division to regiment to battalion and then down finally
28 to a rifle company. Everybody wanted to keep me someplace else. But I took command
29 of the 1st Platoon of F Company of the 382nd Infantry. Within an hour and a half after I
30 joined it, we were in our first firefight, which fortunately, ended successfully as far as I
31 was concerned. Then we fought our way down the island to the southern end of it, past

1 Shuri and Yonabaru and the hill mass, the Yaeju-Dake hill mass. Finally the island was
2 declared secure and we went back over and policed it up to sanitize it, really, bury the Jap
3 dead that we hadn't buried before and recovering equipment and so on.

4 KC: What was your rank at this time? Were you a first lieutenant?

5 DS: First lieutenant.

6 KC: First lieutenant, leading this platoon. Now, this would have been your first
7 exposure to combat, I would assume. Can you explain what that was like for me? Your
8 first experience in combat on Okinawa.

9 DS: Well, I approached in, the closer I got to the assignment, with a great deal of
10 trepidation. How was I going to react under fire? How would the "veteran troops" go to
11 accept an untried lieutenant? All the usual questions about your ability, your knowledge,
12 and whatever. But as I say, I was pressed in so fast once I joined the company that there
13 was no real problem. And I found that the men hungered for leadership. They wanted
14 somebody to take charge and that was willing to do anything that was reasonable. So they
15 accepted me with no question.

16 KC: Do you feel that you acquitted yourself pretty well in this first engagement?

17 DS: I got a Silver Star for it.

18 KC: Really? You've got to tell me about this, then. What happened in that first
19 engagement that resulted in your Silver Star?

20 DS: Well, they had been fighting for a small hill called Hector. They had made
21 four assaults on it over the past week and hadn't been able to take it. So the powers that
22 be—,

23 KC: Let's try this again Colonel Seibert. Hopefully the line won't give us as many
24 problems as it did before. I'm sorry, you were telling me about this experience that
25 earned you a Silver Star in the Battle of Okinawa. Please pick up the story where you left
26 off.

27 DS: Well, as I said, the powers that be determined that we had to take this
28 position, finally. I assessed the situation, astounded the platoon by saying we were gonna
29 take it with two BAR (Browning automatic rifle) teams, which we did. Incidentally,
30 during that assault on this little hill, the right of me, Clarence Craft earned his Medal of
31 Honor on another hill.

1 KC: Incredible. When you were finished with this, when you had successfully
2 taken this hill with just the two BAR, can you explain to me the feeling that you have
3 once you have successfully completed your mission here in this particular battle? As you
4 look back on it what sort of things stand out to you?

5 DS: Relief that I had gotten through the situation. A certain satisfaction that we
6 had achieved the mission we were given, a great regret for the one man that was killed
7 during the operation. And no feeling whatsoever for the enemy. It was just one of those
8 things you had to do. You killed without any remorse.

9 KC: You mentioned that later you came back and your outfit had to bury the dead
10 and recover equipment, etc. I would assume you probably would have been looking for
11 any Americans who hadn't been taken care of at that time as well. What was it like going
12 back to this battlefield after you had been through it?

13 DS: We were all disgusted. We thought it was a waste of time and effort. We
14 were eager to find out what our next assignment was. We sort of knew in our hearts that
15 the division was going to be refitted to make the invasion of Japan. We were just marking
16 time and, as I say, we were kind of disgusted with what was going on.

17 KC: Now, obviously, the invasion didn't take place because of the use of the
18 atomic bombs.

19 DS: Let me back up again.

20 KC: Okay, please do.

21 DS: After the island had been declared secure, we were told that we were going
22 down to the island of Mindoro in the Philippines to refit and retrain for our next mission,
23 which obviously was going to be the invasion of one of the islands of the homeland. We
24 were getting ready to go when there was a sudden alert that there was an approaching
25 hurricane or cyclone or tornado or whatever. So we boarded the LSTs (landing ship, tank)
26 very hurriedly and put out to sea and rode the hurricane aboard LSTs, which was a little
27 hairy. On the other hand, when the hurricane hit Okinawa it really tore that island apart. It
28 pushed the ships up on the sand and so on. So we were lucky in the fact that we were at
29 sea and while we were at sea, of course, the atomic bomb was dropped and we received
30 word that the war was over, literally, and so we proceeded to Mindoro and just bided our
31 time until we could be returned to the States.

1 KC: What did the use of atomic bombs on Japan in '45 mean to you personally?

2 DS: A great deal of relief. We wouldn't have to make that invasion which we
3 expected to be really horrendous. I think every one of the troops I knew were pleased that
4 some means had been found to end the war.

5 KC: What did you do when the war was over?

6 DS: I went to medical school.

7 KC: Okay. Where you still in the Army when you went to medical school?

8 DS: No, I got out of the Army. I needed a couple of credits for my undergraduate
9 degree and got those within the first two or three months after I was released from active
10 duty. I applied late for medical school and was accepted to the Long Island College of
11 Medicine by the skin of my teeth. Still, I joined the Reserves and maintained my status as
12 a Reserve. In my third year of medical school I decided that I did not want to be a doctor
13 so I went back in the Army.

14 KC: Now, why do you think that you stayed in the Reserves?

15 DS: I want to say, camaraderie. I was very conscious of the friends I made in the
16 military, the brotherhood that existed among warriors, the desire to belong to a unit
17 sharing similar aims and ideas. Interestingly enough, it was the 77th Division and the
18 commanding general was Julius Ochs Adler, managing editor of *The New York Times*.

19 KC: This would have been what? 1948? When you joined back?

20 DS: I got out of the Army in '46 and I got back in, in '49.

21 KC: All right. In 1949, what were you hoping to do in the Army, make it a career?

22 DS: When I applied for active duty I asked to go to the 82nd Airborne Division. I
23 went to Fort Benning to jump school and then to the 82nd and spent a year and a half
24 there.

25 KC: Why did you specifically choose the 82nd?

26 DS: I'm thinking here. I was impressed with their *esprit*. One of my good friends
27 in the Reserve division had fought with the 82nd in World War II and had told me a great
28 deal about it. I was interested in the extra pay and, as I say, there was a lot of *esprit*
29 because of the jump boots and the cap patch and whatever.

30 KC: All right now, had you hoped to make the military a career at this point?

31 DS: Yes, I had applied for a Regular Army commission.

1 KC: All right. Was there anything in particular that you hoped to do to be able to
2 accomplish as a career military officer, career Army officer?

3 DS: Not particularly. I thought I would be lucky if I got to be a lieutenant colonel
4 and I really had no plans for my own career. I just wanted to be in the Army and the
5 infantry.

6 KC: Now, in June of 1950, of course, communist North Korea invades South
7 Korea. What did that mean to you?

8 DS: As a matter of fact, I was on leave on the 25th of June 1950 and I was driving
9 back to Fort Bragg when the announcement came. I said, "Here we go again." It didn't
10 mean very much to me except that I knew that I had to get into the action again.

11 KC: Why?

12 DS: That's why I was in the Army. That was the path I had chosen and as a
13 professional officer that was my duty and my privilege to serve with people in combat.

14 KC: Okay, very good. Explain to me or describe for me your experiences in
15 Korea. When did you get to Korea and what was your—?

16 DS: I got to Korea late because I was in a regiment in the 82nd that had been
17 tagged to go to Korea right away. But for some strange reason the division was
18 designated as a strategic reserve for Europe and so they took us out of it. We did a lot of
19 training and they wouldn't let any of us go. I finally got to the Advanced Course in
20 Benning and then to the 508th which was supposed to go to Korea but didn't. Finally I got
21 over to Korea as a replacement. When I got to Japan I thought I was going to the 2nd
22 Division. My former battalion commander was commanding a regiment in the 2nd
23 Division and he assured me that he would give a company if I got over there. But for
24 some strange reason I was tabbed and sent out to work for the guerrilla force in Korea. I
25 spent six months, eight months on an island, Pang Yang-Do, just off the coast of Korea
26 working with the guerrillas. I finally made enough noise and had to extend my tour in
27 Korea but I got assigned to the 2nd Division. I got command of B Company of the 9th
28 Infantry. I stayed with the 9th Infantry until the end of the war, until the 27th of July.

29 KC: Were there any engagements in which you were involved as a part of the 9th?

30 DS: Pardon me?

31 KC: Were you involved in any engagements as part of the 9th?

1 DS: Oh, yes. The lines had been stabilized but there were attacks on both sides
2 and my company was very heavily engaged in a massive attack that fortunately we were
3 able to beat off.

4 KC: Now, when did you take command of this company?

5 DS: Pardon me?

6 KC: When did you take command of this company?

7 DS: The company?

8 KC: Yes, sir.

9 DS: I want to say in probably January of '53.

10 KC: Okay, January of '53. So it was pretty late in the war, then. Of course, the
11 truce, the fighting stops, the cease fire starts in July of 1953. What was, having fought to
12 a definite conclusion, the Second World War, what was your feelings, what were your
13 thoughts on the way the fighting stopped in Korea?

14 DS: A little unease. Not sure that we had achieved what we set out to do.
15 Certainly we hadn't unified North and South Korea and I wasn't sure that it was a
16 permanent solution to the problem. I really didn't give it that much cogent thought but
17 those were the ideas that went around in my head.

18 KC: Now, again, as a veteran of the Second World War and you've seen the Cold
19 War begin to take shape and Korea was obviously a watershed in the Cold War, it
20 certainly set the balance of forces against one and other and let both sides know what the
21 other may be in for. How did you see the Cold War shaping up? What did it mean for you
22 as someone who sought their career in the US Army?

23 DS: I can't say that I really identified this thought of the Cold War and didn't
24 really understand it until after I graduated from Command and General Staff School and
25 went to the Pentagon and was working in DesOps (Description of Operations) in the
26 Pentagon. Then it really solidified in my mind.

27 KC: Okay, now, when would this be, that you were working in the Pentagon,
28 DesOps?

29 DS: That was '57.

30 KC: In '57. Okay. Well, take me back a little bit. What did you do between 1953
31 and taking this position at the Pentagon in '57?

1 DS: I was PMS&T (Professor of Military Science and Tactics) at Kentucky
2 Military Institute for three years and I ground my teeth for three years.

3 KC: I see a pattern forming here, Colonel.

4 DS: Pardon?

5 KC: I see a pattern forming here.

6 DS: Yeah. I was a maverick.

7 KC: So what were your duties here? What were you doing here?

8 DS: Where?

9 KC: In Kentucky.

10 DS: Pardon?

11 KC: In Kentucky.

12 DS: Oh, I was the senior military officer at Kentucky Military Institute, which
13 was a private military school. I had a staff of four. We primarily taught military subjects
14 as an aside to their, it was actually a prep school so the military was an adjunct to their
15 normal high school training. We emphasized close-order drill, small arms training, map
16 reading, military history, and that sort of thing.

17 KC: Preparing young men for, to serve as officers later on in the US military in a
18 variety of capacities. Now, it sounds like this was not something that was tailor made for
19 you. Where you appointed to this position?

20 DS: Yes. I left Korea with no orders and when finally orders caught up to me they
21 assigned me to the Kentucky Military Institute. I went down to the Pentagon to find out
22 why and how, and how I could get out of it and I wanted to get back to the 82nd Airborne
23 Division. I went in to see the chief of infantry who was General Fry, who had been the
24 division commander of the 2nd Division while I was there. I finally got in to see him and
25 asked him if I could get out of that assignment and he said, "No, I selected you for it
26 because we weren't satisfied with what was going on in the Kentucky Military Institute
27 and I observed you in Korea and you are hardheaded. Once you start doing something
28 you get it done. So you're going and you're going to stay there for three years." Every
29 year I applied for transfer and every year I got the same letter back.

30 KC: So you were there for three years then? And you said it was in '57 that you
31 went to the Pentagon and it finally came through.

1 DS: Finally I left there and went to—first I went to the Ranger course. I qualified
2 as a Ranger. And then I went to Leavenworth to the Command and General Staff School
3 and from there to the Pentagon.

4 KC: Now, what led you to Ranger school? Why did you want to become a
5 Ranger, or be Ranger qualified?

6 DS: Well, part of being an infantry officer is honing your skills and whatever. It
7 was one of those things that I thought a professional should do.

8 KC: What was Ranger school like then?

9 DS: It was good. Let me phrase it. It was a good refresher in small-unit tactics and
10 survival and patrol activities. I was one of three majors in the class. All the rest were
11 captains or lieutenants. I found that, although I learned quite a bit, it was not as valuable
12 for me as it I thought it would have been. But I thought it was extremely valuable for
13 young lieutenants and junior captains. It honed, again, their leadership techniques as well
14 as the ability to live off land.

15 KC: And as someone who has led troops both in the Second World War and in
16 Korea, maybe some of this was something that you learned on the fly, I would assume.

17 DS: Yeah, more or less. In fact, I took one of the instructors to task because I felt
18 he was over emphasizing the growling and whatever and not the basic leadership
19 techniques, but that was neither here nor there.

20 KC: Okay, now, you go from Ranger training to Fort Leavenworth.

21 DS: Right.

22 KC: Okay, now, what were you going to be doing here in Fort Leavenworth?

23 DS: Well, that's part of the career pattern of any professional officer. Hopefully if
24 you're going to advance in the military you have to go to Leavenworth, the Command
25 and General Staff School, which is primarily, at that time, was geared towards making a
26 staff officer of you.

27 KC: So what was the training, what was the education here at Fort Leavenworth?
28 What was it like for you? What were the courses that you were taking? What sort of
29 things did you want to come out of Fort Leavenworth with?

30 DS: Well basically, we reviewed map reading, reviewed basic tactics, had
31 instruction and problems in the four basic staff personnel, intelligence, operations, and

1 logistics. At that time, every officer that went through had to qualify as an atomic warfare
2 officer.

3 KS: How did you qualify for that?

4 DS: They had a special course of instruction. They excluded all of our allied
5 officers and we went in to a secret compartment guarded by MPs (military police). It was
6 an adjunct to the regular course.

7 KC: Now, when do you come out of the Command and Staff College?

8 DS: '57

9 KC: In 1957?

10 DS: I was assigned to DesOps at the Pentagon.

11 KC: Okay, here we go again. What were your duties in the Pentagon?

12 DS: I was assigned to the Office of the Director of Plans and my first assignment
13 was Army War Plans, which we—I don't want to say we made plans for future war but
14 we analyzed what was going on in the world and what was needed as far as troops,
15 deployments, and weaponry.

16 KC: So it was an analysis of current world events and creating contingency plans,
17 should "X" happen, we will respond with "Y" and troop deployments and weaponry and
18 things like that while you were there.

19 DS: Right.

20 KC: What did you think about this? You seem to me to be someone who would
21 rather be involved in the—?

22 DS: I was unhappy. I would have rather been with the troops. In retrospect, I
23 found that I learned to appreciate what was going on in the Army from a strategic point
24 of view and thought it was a very valuable three years that I put there.

25 KC: So what I think I here you saying is that although maybe it wasn't your ideal
26 choice, it did give you a perspective that maybe helped you in the future, considering
27 what you would be involved with, in planning and things like that with your time in
28 Vietnam as an advisor.

29 DS: True.

30 KC: Very good. I don't want to put words in your mouth but I think that's what
31 you're saying.

1 DS: Right.

2 KC: All right, that's 1957. By 1957, of course, we are knee deep in the
3 Eisenhower administration. The Cold War has taken on a very real visage, if you will. It's
4 clear the sides are shaping up. What was your opinion as you are becoming more and
5 more aware from a larger perspective and a more strategically-oriented perspective?
6 What is the Cold War shaping up to be to you, as you're seeing it?

7 DS: I was afraid that we were eventually going to fight Russia, that there was no
8 way that we could avoid a confrontation on the ground with Russia, in some area. I was a
9 little bemused or amused, maybe, by the efforts that our Joint War Plans people were
10 making to make diplomatic overtures to the military and whatever. But, as I say, I
11 eventually thought we were going to fight Russia.

12 KC: Now, of course, by this time it's 1957, the Soviet Union obviously has
13 nuclear capability. How did that affect your thoughts?

14 DS: For one thing, I remember when Sputnik went up, the entire Pentagon buzzed
15 at that. When we finally got our first satellite in orbit we were very highly pleased that we
16 could finally do it. Everybody was pushing von Braun and Red Stone Arsenal and
17 whatever. I'm a little incoherent on this. I can't really remember my thoughts at that time.

18 KC: No, no, that's perfectly fine. Well, of course, later on, at the end of the
19 Eisenhower administration, the beginning of the Kennedy administration, Cuba becomes
20 an issue. Over the next couple of years Cuba would be incredibly important. Were you
21 still in the Pentagon?

22 DS: I left the Pentagon in 1960 and went over to Europe and was assigned to the
23 8th Division.

24 KC: Assigned to the 8th Division? Okay, so you weren't in the Pentagon for the
25 Bay of Pigs, or the missile crisis, etc. Okay, now, with the 8th Division, you had hoped to
26 be with the 82nd again, I would assume. Is that correct?

27 DS: Right. Well, I got to be with the 504th Airborne Regimental Combat Team or
28 I guess it was Battle Group at that time, which was a part of the 8th Division at the time.
29 The 8th Division had an airborne brigade of two battle groups, the 504 and 505.

30 KC: So it wouldn't have been too far from what you were looking for?

31 DS: That's right.

1 KC: Okay, okay. Now, what were you doing in Europe as part of the 8th?
2 DS: At first I was the S-3 of the battle group and then got promoted and became
3 the exec. The last three months I was there I was the G-4 of the 8th Division.
4 KC: Okay. Where was it located at this time?
5 DS: The two battle groups were located in Mainz and the Division headquarters
6 was at Bad Kreuznach.
7 KC: What was it like in Germany in 1960, as you saw it?
8 DS: Surprisingly enough there was still some war damage apparent but the
9 Germans had done a tremendous job of clearing it up by that time. I frankly enjoyed my
10 tour in Germany because I enjoy good food and ate my way through Germany, so to
11 speak.
12 KC: Yeah, the *schnitzel* and the *wurst* and the beer, that's good living right there.
13 What was the attitude of the Germans you encountered towards the United States?
14 DS: I never met a German that fought against the Americans. Everybody fought
15 against the Russians. (Both laugh) I think there were mixed emotions. Most of the people
16 were happy with our presence there. There was some who felt it was more of an
17 occupation than a defensive measure. But on the whole I think the attitude was very
18 positive towards the Americans.
19 KC: Now, how long were you in Germany as part of the 8th?
20 DS: A little over a year and a half.
21 KC: Okay, so we are looking at 1961 into 1962, then.
22 DS: '61 I was assigned to the 1st Armored Division at Fort Hood, Texas, as a
23 battalion commander.
24 KC: Okay, so you came back in 1961 then?
25 DS: Yeah.
26 KC: All right. When in 1961 did you come back?
27 DS: January.
28 KC: In January, so it was very, very early on in that year, then. Okay, so you were
29 around, you were in the United States for the inauguration, the early days, of the Kennedy
30 administration.
31 DS: Absolutely.

1 KC: What did the election of John Kennedy mean to you, a career military
2 officer?

3 DS: Frankly, it didn't mean anything to me. It was just another commander-in-
4 chief. I was impressed with Kennedy and I wished him well, but I don't think that I really
5 had any positive reaction to his election.

6 KC: What about his overall plan for the US military, the flexibility, etc.? What
7 did you think about all of that?

8 DS: The 1st Armored Division was being reconstituted and had a new table of
9 organization and we thought we were being prepared for deployment in Europe, if
10 necessary. Actually, we mobilized for the Cuban Missile Crisis and moved out of Fort
11 Hood to Fort Stewart, Georgia, in preparation to move down to Cuba. That was an
12 interesting exercise in loading tanks and tracks, APCs (armored personnel carriers) on
13 railroad cars and getting them moved from one post to another.

14 KC: Let me back up here just a little bit and we'll get into this part briefly. But
15 shortly after Kennedy takes office, of course, in April of 1961 with the Bay of Pigs
16 Invasion. We know what that came to be. As someone who worked in planning in the
17 Pentagon, what was your personal take on this effort of the Kennedy administration?

18 DS: I didn't understand that question.

19 KC: I'm sorry. As someone who had experience in the Pentagon, in planning
20 operations in the Pentagon and meeting these world threats, you do have some sort of
21 strategic understanding and view and perspective from a larger viewpoint. When
22 Kennedy gave the okay for the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in April of 1961, what did that
23 mean to you?

24 DS: I thought it was a good move. Then when he rescinded it and didn't follow
25 through I was very disappointed. I thought that it was a strategic mistake that he had
26 made. That's as far as I can think now.

27 KC: Okay, that's fine. Well, of course, in the next year, as you just alluded to it a
28 moment ago, in October of 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis takes place. Before you were
29 ordered to move out, when this hits the news, when you first become aware of what's
30 going on here, take me through that time.

1 DS: Well, at that time I was busy training my battalion. We had cadre'd the
2 companies and gotten replacements and we had to take them through advanced infantry
3 training and then tactics and company and battalion exercises and that's what we were
4 engaged in all during that time. As I say, with the vague idea that we were trained to go
5 to Europe. I don't know what else to say.

6 KC: When does the 1st Armored at Fort Hood receive orders to mobilize to move
7 down to Georgia?

8 DS: For the Missile Crisis?

9 KC: Yes, sir.

10 DS: I remember we had a division office call and at first they were going to
11 deploy only one brigade of the division and we all tried to make ready for that. They sent
12 that first brigade and then they decided the whole division had to go and followed it up,
13 so that was very early on in the planning of the Missile Crisis.

14 KC: What was your opinion, expert opinion in this case, of sending an entire
15 armored division?

16 DS: I thought it was idiotic to send an armored division to invade an island.

17 KC: Elaborate on that for me, if you would, please.

18 DS: I would have thought that they would have either mobilized a Marine
19 division or at least an infantry division that had some amphibious training, but apparently
20 they wanted the tanks. Well, that was the decision that was made.

21 KC: Do you suspect that this may have been something other than a genuine
22 desire to send tanks into Cuba, that maybe it was a show of force?

23 DS: I'm sure it was. I'm sure it was an overt gesture to show that we were serious
24 about doing something about—I really can't believe, although they had mobilized a
25 whole bunch of LSTs, gotten them for Liberia and Panama and every other place because
26 our Navy didn't have enough LSTs to move an armored division. Yeah, I thought it was
27 more of an exercise in a show of force than an actual invasion.

28 KC: What do you think of Kennedy's handling of the overall crisis?

29 DS: I thought it was well done. My only criticism of Kennedy was that Bay of
30 Pigs thing. I thought he handled the missile crisis in good form.

1 KC: Now, you'd mentioned earlier that you believe, maybe not completely
2 convinced, but were becoming convinced that the Cold War would eventually come
3 down to the United States and the Soviet Union in ground warfare. What did the Cuban
4 Missile Crisis and the resolving of the Cuban Missile Crisis, what did that do to your
5 thinking?

6 DS: I don't remember. I can't think of what I was thinking at that time *vis à vis*
7 the Russians. We were focused on Cuba, and obviously the Russian missiles were there
8 and this was a thrust at Russian through the missiles, but other than that I didn't have any
9 real thoughts on the Cold War.

10 KC: Okay. Well, the last question about Kennedy—and I promise I'll go
11 elsewhere after this—of course, has to deal with his assassination in November of '63.
12 What did Kennedy's assassination mean to you?

13 DS: Well, let me go back.

14 KC: Please do.

15 DS: I spent a year and two months with the battalion in Fort Hood and then I was
16 assigned to the Joint Alternate Command element at Fort Ritchie, Maryland. I was an
17 emergency action officer there. We had the keys to the codes for the atomic weapons and
18 whatever. When Kennedy was assassinated I thought we were going to go on a very
19 advanced defensive posture, but we didn't. We just went on as usual. I was very
20 concerned about the transition from Kennedy to Johnson. I didn't know too much about
21 Johnson but I was not overly impressed with him as a senator. I was quite fearful, as a
22 matter of fact, when Kennedy was assassinated.

23 KC: Now, you suspected that you'd be on a higher state of alert. Do you think this
24 was this because you suspected a foreign country, possibly the Soviet Union, would try to
25 take advantage of this vacuum in power after Kennedy was killed?

26 DS: Right. I happened to be off duty at the time and I called in to see if they
27 wanted me back on duty at the command center, and they didn't. They said they had
28 everything in hand. All I did is go home and watch the TV.

29 KC: Okay, now, this is in 1963 and you get to Vietnam in 1965. Is that correct?

30 DS: From the Joint Command Center, I went to the War College, the Army War
31 College at Carlisle.

1 KC: And what were you doing there?

2 DS: Well, you studied geopolitical matters. How the military fit into national
3 policy. We had emphasis on logistic infrastructure and so on. It was basically a classroom
4 study course in which you wrote a lot of papers on what would be needed if this
5 happened and what would be needed if that happened and so on. It was more a strategic
6 exercise than the Command and General Staff School.

7 KC: So over your time you have received quite a well-rounded training in the US
8 Army, between actual combat in two separate wars, your time at Leavenworth, your time
9 at Carlisle, of course you've been in Europe, you've been basically on standby, part of
10 the 1st Armored during the Cuban Missile Crisis. You've seen a lot of things from both a
11 personal tactical and strategic viewpoint. When the crisis, I guess we should say, in
12 Southeast Asia begins to rear in 1964, I mean, of course, US involvement in Southeast
13 Asia wasn't just Vietnam, it was Laos, etc. Were you aware of the growing involvement
14 of the United States in Southeast Asia?

15 DS: Very definitely. I had read all of Bernard Fall's books. We had Big Minh that
16 came to speak to us at the War College. We followed the advisory effort and, of course,
17 the assassination of Diem. Yeah, we were very aware that was a growing problem. When
18 I put in my preference for assignment I put it in for Vietnam, for an assignment in
19 Vietnam.

20 KC: Before we get you into this, I'd like to ask your opinion of Bernard Fall.
21 Obviously a very influential observer of what was taking place there. What was your
22 opinion of Fall?

23 DS: I was very impressed with him. I met him. I rode in a helicopter and I had a
24 lot of conversations with him. I thought he had his finger on the pulse in Vietnam. He
25 knew what was developing and he didn't have all the answers to how it should be
26 handled but at least he pointed us in the right direction.

27 KC: What in particular, if you can think of anything, what in particular was it
28 about Fall and his observations that struck you as being so right on the money?

29 DS: Well, his indices, the amount of rice harvested, the number of village chiefs
30 assassinated, road openings and closings, the terrorist activities. He had analyzed all of
31 those indices and come up with some conclusions which I thought were valid.

1 KC: What was it about Vietnam that made you want to go?

2 DS: That made me what?

3 KC: That made you want to go to Vietnam. You said you put in for duty there.

4 DS: I had anticipated that we would have regular Army units fighting there

5 eventually and I wanted to be in on the action.

6 KC: Okay. Describe for me your impression of the Tonkin Gulf Incident.

7 DS: Well, I was at the command center at that time and I listened to all the Navy

8 communications between—what was the name of the ship? I can't remember.

9 KC: The *Maddox* and the *Turner Joy*.

10 DS: Pardon?

11 KC: The *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*.

12 DS: Yeah. I thought that that was the trigger, or would be the trigger, for our overt

13 action there rather than just as advisory effort.

14 KC: So you expected the United States to move more rapidly into Vietnam, more

15 forcefully into Vietnam?

16 DS: Yes, I did. I expected it would.

17 KC: Okay. Why do you say that?

18 DS: I thought it was a provocation that we couldn't afford to dismiss. It indicated

19 that the North Vietnamese were not going to sit idly by and let us build up the South

20 Vietnamese army.

21 KC: So you believed it was going to take a large strike against the North

22 Vietnamese to allow the United States to continue the training and the build-up of the

23 South Vietnamese army. Okay. Well, obviously, Colonel Seibert, that didn't happen.

24 DS: Yeah.

25 KC: The United States obviously very deliberately limited its involvement in

26 Vietnam and increased incrementally. What was your opinion of that? Before you get to

27 Vietnam, what was your opinion of the limited response to this?

28 DS: Disappointment. I thought we should have taken a more positive stand.

29 KC: What in your estimation would have been an appropriate response?

30 DS: I think we should have at least shelled part of North Vietnam.

31 KC: Any place in particular? Industry? Hanoi?

1 DS: Well, I didn't think that through so I don't know.

2 KC: Okay. All right. Well, of course it's going to be a limited involvement and
3 it's the United States Marines at first. So you're watching this on television. You're very
4 much aware of this, based on your background and your interests. When do you put in for
5 duty in Vietnam?

6 DS: We had to indicate our preferences around Christmas time and that's when I
7 did it.

8 KC: This is of 1964?

9 DS: Pardon?

10 KC: And this was of 1964?

11 DS: Yeah.

12 KC: December of '64.

13 DS: Right.

14 KC: Okay. When do you receive word that you're going to go to Vietnam?

15 DS: Well, it's very interesting. My initial orders were to the staff and faculty at
16 Fort Benning. I protested those orders and got them changed and then I got sent over to
17 Vietnam, and I got those orders in June.

18 KC: In June of 1965, then?

19 DS: Right.

20 KC: Okay. What did you hope to do in Vietnam? What did you hope your role
21 would be? Were you after an independent command? Was advising something you were
22 interested in? What did you hope to do?

23 DS: I hoped that if we deployed Army troops there that I would get a command
24 there.

25 KC: Okay, and again in June of 1965. I didn't ask you this question earlier but I
26 should have. Were you married? Did you have a family at this time?

27 DS: I have never been married.

28 KC: You've never been married?

29 DS: Yeah.

30 KC: Okay.

31 DS: The Army didn't issue me a wife.

1 KC: (Laughs) Well, maybe they were shortsighted on that. Okay, so as a single
2 man—you are a lieutenant colonel at this time—and you have just a wealth of experience
3 and knowledge and training and education here. Did you see Vietnam as being, your
4 service in Vietnam as being potentially as being a vehicle for further advancement in
5 your career?

6 DS: No, I sort of expected that I had reached the peak of my career. I was more
7 interested in the fact that I had trained to be a professional fighter and that's what I
8 wanted to do than of thinking of career advancement.

9 KC: Okay. So as a forty-five-year-old lieutenant colonel, you're going to find
10 your way to Vietnam in the summer of 1965. What did you find when you got there?

11 DS: What did I find?

12 KC: What did you find, in general? What was the state of affairs where you were?
13 What was your opinion of the military situation?

14 DS: I thought things were a little chaotic when I got there. I arrived in Tan Son
15 Nhut and was sent to a hotel, the Majestic Hotel in Saigon. I was given a four-day, I
16 guess it was four days, of briefings and whatever. It was sort of disjointed, as far as I was
17 concerned. I waited for an assignment and none came and finally I went to the personnel
18 people and said, "Why haven't I been assigned?" And they said, "Well, your clearances
19 of your past are too high and we don't know where to assign you. We were thinking of
20 sending you back to the United States." And I said, "Over my dead body." So I went to
21 see General Rosson who was the Chief of Staff of MACV (Military Assistance
22 Command, Vietnam) and who I had served with in the 8th Division. Within days I was
23 assigned as the deputy senior advisor of the 25th ARVN Division.

24 KC: Okay, now, you are going to be a deputy senior advisor.

25 DS: Right.

26 KC: What are your duties going to be as deputy senior advisor to the 25th
27 Division? This would have been III Corps, right?

28 DS: Right. Primarily, I was going to be the advisor to the assistant division
29 commander and the chief of staff of the 25th Division. I was going to be the
30 administrative head of the advisory team. Colonel Ugalde, the senior advisor, delegated

1 to me all these administrative duties and overseeing logistics and whatever. Well, that
2 was it, primarily, as an advisor to ARVN officers and as an administrator of the team.

3 KC: Well, you have mentioned in the past that you were someone who wanted to
4 be involved, someone who wanted to be on the ground, someone who wanted to have
5 their hands in things. And here you are in Vietnam but you are essentially the
6 administrator of this advisory group. How well did that sit with you?

7 DS: It didn't sit very well, but I accepted it and hoped that through my
8 counterparts that I would become more and more involved and then when and if units
9 opened up I could transfer to a unit. Incidentally, the 173rd came over into the 25th
10 Division area for a short time and I was hopeful of getting into that but it didn't work out.

11 KC: What was your relationship like with your commander there, with the 25th?

12 DS: With what?

13 KC: With your superiors there?

14 DS: Very good. We had surprisingly excellent rapport. They were sympathetic to
15 any suggestions I made. I tried to keep out of their way. We eventually co-located our
16 offices, except I didn't get in with the chief of staff because he had too many
17 administrative things to handle that I couldn't help him with. But I co-located my office
18 with the assistant division commander and we went on a number of division operations
19 which were remarkably unproductive.

20 KC: Now, why do you say that? What types of missions were they and why do
21 you say that?

22 DS: I always felt that there was a compromise in most of the plans that the ARVN
23 made. Somebody was leaking something to somebody and we got to the area that we
24 hoped to find the enemy and they were not there. I have a lot of ideas about the 25th
25 Division. It was held in very, very tight control by Prime Minister Ky as an anti-coup
26 force. They never did get to deploy any really sizeable force. Usually a reinforced
27 battalion and maybe a Ranger battalion and infantry battalion but very rarely an entire
28 regiment, for instance, was ever deployed because the division had to be a blocking force
29 for any coups forces coming up to Saigon.

30 KC: That brings up a very good point. You were in a somewhat unique position in
31 that you saw what was going on with the advisory effort and you made these friends

1 within the ARVN 25th Division and you begin to see the political constraints placed on,
2 specifically, the 25th Division. What was your impression of the relationship of the
3 American advisory effort as it related to the ARVN as it related to the political
4 considerations?

5 DS: Well, the division commander, the ARVN division commander, was also the
6 political force in the division tactical area. He therefore nominally controlled all the
7 province chiefs in his area. It was a very tenuous arrangement and we got into a lot of
8 real problems *vis à vis* military versus political versus provincial activities. Sometimes
9 the advisory effort fought itself. I'm trying to think of a name. Who was the—oh, God.
10 It'll come back to me.

11 KC: That's fine.

12 DS: We had—they had already set up CORDS (Civil Operations and
13 Revolutionary Development Support) so that you had the advisory efforts from CORDS
14 and you had the military, and CORDS in the military didn't always see eye-to-eye. In one
15 case, I had to relieve a province senior advisor because he was taking more direction
16 from the CORDS representative than he was from us, the military. It got to be a very
17 hairy situation. I had to have him reassigned. My great frustration was that there was no
18 centralized command. We were fighting four or five different wars. We were fighting the
19 American war, the ARVN war, the Green Beret war, the CIA war, and nothing was really
20 —there was no overall command like there was in Korea and that posed a lot of problems
21 for everybody.

22 KC: Now, you mentioned a moment ago that you had to relieve a province senior
23 advisor because of this person's taking the advice of CORDS rather than the US military.
24 What was it—what type of advice, what type of approach of CORDS offering there in III
25 Corps that differed from the military's approach to it?

26 DS: I'd have to think about that. I can't recall offhand what the problem was.

27 KC: No, that's perfectly fine, perfectly fine. Well, let me ask you a more general
28 question then. What was your opinion of CORDS in general?

29 DS: My initial experience with them was very unfavorable. Later on, when I got
30 to I Field Force and worked with CORDS at the highest level I began to see a positive

1 approach, but I thought we were dissipating our resources by having the two separate
2 commands.

3 KC: Well, you were again in a unique position to observe things. Like you said,
4 you tried to do your job and stay out of the way to some degree, but it certainly didn't
5 keep you from observing and from seeing these things. What would, if it were left up to
6 you, other than centralizing command, which is something that you were not in a—that
7 was well above your paygrade to do—what would you have done with the advisory group
8 to the 25th to make it run more effectively, in your opinion?

9 DS: I think we did everything that we could to make it run as effectively. I think
10 the problem was personnel assigned. We had some outstanding people and we had some
11 real duds. If we could have had our choice of people, I think we could have done a better
12 job. I thought the integration of our efforts with the ARVN at the division level was very
13 helpful to everybody concerned. I really couldn't think of anything else we could have
14 done.

15 KC: Now, did you have any control or any influence over the placement of people
16 in these positions?

17 DS: Yes. Of course, Colonel Ugalde, who was a senior advisor, was the ultimate
18 decider but I made my recommendations and he usually went along with them. The
19 problem was that the MACV would assign people directly to a job, as I was assigned to
20 the deputy senior advisor slot. Usually the province advisors were assigned directly to the
21 provinces and in some cases the unit advisors were.

22 KC: What in your opinion—what according to Lieutenant Colonel Seibert,
23 qualified as someone who you wanted to work with?

24 DS: I didn't understand that question.

25 KC: Okay. I don't think I phrased it very well is probably why. What sort of
26 characteristics were you looking for in this advisory team for the 25th?

27 DS: Oh. Number one was the ability to get along with the indigenous, if I can call
28 them that, people. There were some officers and enlisted men who were—looked at the
29 Vietnamese as subhuman or whatever and didn't really understand their culture or their
30 resources and so on. So the first thing is they had to be able to get along with the native
31 population. The second thing is they had to be well versed in the military small unit

1 tactics and whatever and had to have a good grasp of fire control, calling in artillery,
2 calling in gunships, and whatever. In many cases the artillery officers that were assigned
3 to us were the better advisors, although, they were not as adept in infantry tactics as they
4 might have been. The problem was that we got too many tech service officers who were
5 assigned down to small units and they didn't have the background for the job they were
6 doing.

7 KC: Okay. You mentioned that the number one thing was the ability to get along
8 with the Vietnamese, with the indigenous personnel with whom they would be working.
9 What was your personal relationship like with the Vietnamese?

10 DS: My two counterparts were great people and I got along very well with them. I
11 had no problem with working with other nationals. I worked with them in Korea, I
12 worked with the Thais and I got along well with the Germans when I was in Germany. I
13 did well with the guerrillas in Korea. So I treated them as co-equal professional military
14 people and that's what I thought all the advisors should do.

15 KC: What do you think was the biggest hurdle or the biggest barrier between
16 American advisors and their Vietnamese counterparts, in general?

17 DS: Politics.

18 KC: Okay. Politics from which end? Or both ends?

19 DS: Primarily from the top end.

20 KC: Okay. Explain that to me.

21 DS: The assignment of Vietnamese officers was so political it was pathetic. A lot
22 of really good officers were never given the chance and a lot of poor officers got to
23 command a unit that they were not capable of commanding.

24 KC: And this is based on, of course, on political understandings within the region.

25 DS: For instance, when I was up in Kontum, my counterpart there, Colonel Phuc,
26 was in disfavor because he was a Roman Catholic and the corps commander was a
27 Buddhist. It was that sort of nonsense that went on. I saw that in any number of cases.

28 KC: Okay. Now, what sort of political issues did you see from the American side,
29 if you saw any? And of course I'm talking about hampering the advisory effort.

30 DS: Really, at my level I didn't see too much of it. I suspected it. There seemed to
31 be—in direct respect, I knew about the micromanaging of the bombing in North Vietnam,

1 but really I didn't notice any real political implications, from my point of view, at my
2 level.

3 KC: Al right. Now, where are you based out of here as deputy senior advisor?

4 DS: We were in Hau Nghia province. I can't think of the name, Duc Hoa, we
5 were in Duc Hoa.

6 KC: Okay. Now, of the advisors that you were working with, or among the
7 advisors that you were working with, or who were working for you, essentially, what did
8 you find the morale was like among them, among the Americans who were working with
9 the Vietnamese?

10 DS: When I first got there it was very poor and that was one of the first tasks that
11 Colonel Ugalde gave me to see what could be done about the morale of our advisors.
12 Morale was low because, number one, the 25th ARVN Division had been moved from the
13 sea coast up in the 1st Field Force area to Duc Hoa. We lived in sort of primitive
14 conditions there. In fact, we lived in a Buddhist temple or a monastery area and things
15 were pretty grim. The American buildup had started and everybody wanted to go to an
16 American unit rather than be an advisor. They didn't really appreciate the importance of
17 the advisory effort and so, as I say, morale was a little low. So that was the first task that
18 Colonel Ugalde had really given me.

19 KC: What was your prescription for improving the morale?

20 DS: You wouldn't believe but, Rusty Nails.

21 KC: Rusty Nails? Are you talking about the drink, I assume?

22 DS: The drink, yeah.

23 KC: Well, expand on that for me.

24 DS: What I suggested to them was that every new advisor that came in should
25 have dinner with Colonel Ugalde and I, and we'd just talk informally about what we were
26 doing and what we expected these people to do and so on. They'd already had their
27 formal briefings and so on. What they needed was to get our take on what their job was
28 what we expected of them. And so after the dinner I would automatically order a Rusty
29 Nail for everybody so that we had something to drink while we were talking and that got
30 to be a joke among all the junior officers.

1 KC: Well, I think that it makes an awful lot of sense once you've—it sounds like
2 what you are doing here is the training has already been done and they know the role but
3 what they need is some openness in how things really work and have a relationship with
4 their superiors to know that it will be open, that they will be honest, so they can have a
5 better understanding of what they are expected to do. I think it makes an awful lot of
6 sense. And to buy them the drink sure wouldn't hurt things, I wouldn't think.

7 DS: (Laughs) Getting back to the requirements. I think that we needed more
8 Vietnamese speakers than we had. For instance, I had no Vietnamese whatsoever. I didn't
9 understand, and I had no French. Those people who either spoke French or Vietnamese
10 seemed to get into the effort a lot more readily than those of us who didn't. So that was
11 one thing that I think should have been emphasized.

12 KC: Now, I should have asked this question earlier. How many advisors did you
13 have working for you?

14 DS: I can't remember exactly but I would think it was well over a hundred.

15 KC: Okay. How many—and again, just an estimate here—how many would you
16 suspect had training in Vietnamese language, or at least French language?

17 DS: I would say less than five percent.

18 KC: Less than five percent? So that is an astonishingly low number when you
19 consider that this advisory effort is based on communication.

20 DS: Right.

21 KC: Were you able to make in sort of inroads in either bringing in more advisors
22 with Vietnamese language skills or providing or trying to find a way to provide the
23 Vietnamese language training for the advisors?

24 DS: No, we had no input whatsoever in, or no effect whatsoever on the input of
25 personnel to our advisory team. When I was up at Kontum, I had one officer who was
26 fluent in Vietnamese and he tried to teach some of us a little bit of the language but not
27 too successfully. I'm personally abysmal at languages. I had never been able to master
28 any language. I guess I have a tin ear. He succeeded in helping a few people understand a
29 few words.

30 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, Colonel, why don't we take a break for today and pick this
31 up on another time?

Interview with Don Seibert
Session [2] of [4]
20 February 2009

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Col. Donald
2 Seibert. Today is 20 February 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University and Colonel Seibert is joining us from Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Colonel, a
4 moment ago we were talking about where we left off with our last interview session. We
5 had you as deputy senior advisor with the 25th ARVN Division based out of Duc Hoa and
6 you're giving your general impressions about the way the advisory system was working
7 at the time. And you mentioned something about co-location of the advisors and the
8 indigenous personnel with who they were working. Can you pick up the story there,
9 please?

10 DS: Right. One of the things we tried to do to get a better rapport between the
11 advisors and their counterparts was to get them co-located. In other words, I advised the
12 assistant division commander and the chief of staff, obviously I couldn't co-locate with
13 the chief of staff because of his many duties, but I did co-locate with the assistant
14 division commander, and our S-3 advisor co-located with a G-3 and so on. And it worked
15 very well. And when we were briefing either ARVN or US officers, it was a joint
16 briefing. Sometimes the people felt a little awkward about it, but by and large it worked
17 out very well and it gave visitors a better impression of the division or a better grasp of
18 the division.

19 KC: Now, you mentioned that it was somewhat awkward for some people. Why
20 would it have been awkward?

21 DS: Well, for instance, if a US officer came and wanted to be briefed he felt that
22 we were not going to be candid in front of the ARVN counterparts, and conversely.

23 KC: Sure, sure, that makes sense. Now, was it a fact that the same information in
24 these briefings was being given to both the Americans and the Vietnamese counterparts?

25 DS: Yes.

26 KC: So it was much more of an open, candid sharing of information in this way,
27 then.

28 DS: That was what we tried to achieve and I think we did achieve that.

1 KC: Very good, very good. What sort of examples of the success of this approach
2 can you think of?

3 DS: Examples of what?

4 KC: You say that you achieved this, that it was a measure of success, with the co-
5 location and providing the same briefing, providing the same information and
6 intelligence. Where there specific operations, for example, in which this really came to
7 the front, where it really showed the positive effects of this approach, co-location?

8 DS: Yes. In all the planning of the operations our S-3 advisor made positive input
9 and by and large their recommendations were accepted. My big problem with operations
10 with the Vietnamese, in general, was that I felt that they were compromised all too often.
11 I had this feeling that perhaps some of the information that should have been close held
12 was either loosely talked about or was deliberately leaked to somebody because ninety
13 percent of the operations we went on proved fruitless.

14 KC: Hmm. Now, what do you think accounted for this? Why was this information
15 leaked?

16 DS: I can't substantiate this but I had a feeling that there were people in the
17 ARVN hierarchy who were anti-government and were deliberately leaking to the North
18 Vietnamese agents throughout the South. I felt that there was an unlimited flow of
19 agents—who could tell a North Vietnamese from a South Vietnamese and that sort of
20 thing.

21 KC: Sure, sure. All right, well, what other characteristics of the advisory program
22 would you say was important for its effectiveness or conversely, what characteristics do
23 do you think made it not be as successful as you would have liked?

24 DS: Let me go off on a tangent here.

25 KC: Please do.

26 DS: I felt that there were a lot of people at MACV level who didn't really
27 understand the limitations on the advisors. Somehow or other, they felt that the advisors
28 could dictate to the ARVN what they should do and the ARVN would docilely agree.
29 That wasn't the case at all. We were advisors and I had an example where General
30 DuPuy, who was at that time was the J-3 of MACV, came down and we briefed him
31 jointly. Afterwards he was talking to Colonel Ugalde, the senior advisor, and myself and

1 he said, "Now, you've got to get this division moving more. They're not aggressive
2 enough." And Colonel Ugalde explained the limitations on Colonel Chin, at that time
3 Colonel Chin. And he said, "Well, you're the advisor. You can do it." As if all Ugalde
4 had to do was walk into Chin's office and tell him to get moving. He just did not
5 understand the relationship between the advisor and the counterpart. In my forthright
6 manner, I said, "Well, if you want the division to move, you go to your counterpart, the
7 ARVN J-3, and tell them to order it and Colonel Chin will do it." And he said, "Well, I
8 can't do that." And I said, "Exactly. That's the situation we are in."

9 KC: Now, you were speaking out of turn here. I'm not saying what you said to
10 him was not justified but, you know, in the hierarchy of things, it seems to me that you
11 took a big risk in saying this and being so forthright in your comments here. Where there
12 any repercussions for this?

13 DS: I'm that way. I speak before I think.

14 KC: So was there anything negative that came out of this? Where you
15 reprimanded in any way for bringing this up?

16 DS: When I asked him for a brigade later on, he just dismissed me. So I guess that
17 was still rankling.

18 KC: Oh, okay. So those chickens did come home to roost to some degree, then.
19 Well, you know, what you are saying here, Colonel—I think what you are saying. I
20 certainly don't want to put words in your mouth, is that the limitations of the advisory
21 mission, as you saw it, certainly started at the very top for a lack of understanding of the
22 ARVN position. Is that what you are saying?

23 DS: Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying.

24 KC: Would it be safe to say that this—

25 DS: I keep contrasting it to Korea where we had an overall command and
26 everybody was under that overall command. In Vietnam, there were at least five different
27 wars going on and none of them fully coordinated. MACV himself was not able to tell
28 the chief of staff of the ARVN what he should or should not do and all down the line. The
29 Special Forces operated until General Rosson finally went to MACV and said, "Put them
30 under my OPCON (operational control)." They operated totally independent of the

1 advisory effort or the ARVN or whatever, and so it went. That's the sort of thing that
2 bothered me while I was an advisor.

3 KC: Now, I think that it would be safe to say, also, that this attitude of not
4 necessarily trying to know who you would be working with in the advisory mission
5 trickled its way down to the actual individual advisors themselves. I believe last time you
6 told me that of all the advisors that with whom you dealt, about five percent of them
7 actually spoke Vietnamese. You would think that would be absolutely essential but it
8 seems like there was a lack of emphasis on trying to understand the culture of the
9 Vietnamese military as well as Vietnamese culture in general.

10 DS: That's absolutely true. One of the other problems, of course, is the language
11 problem. For instance, I have no language ability. I couldn't learn Vietnamese or any
12 other language and I didn't speak French. I depended upon my counterpart's knowledge
13 of English to communicate. We were fortunate in having some young officers who went
14 through the language school and could communicate in Vietnamese with their
15 counterpart and we had the other officers who spoke French fluently enough to talk to
16 some of the officers, most of whom, the old officers spoke French. So, that was another
17 problem with the advisory effort.

18 KC: Now, you're deputy senior advisory here with the 25th and I know that you
19 were, I don't want to use the word chafing, but you were certainly, you wanted your own
20 command. Is that safe to say?

21 DS: Right.

22 KC: Okay. Now where do you go, from your time as deputy senior advisor to the
23 25th ARVN Division in 1965, when that ends, where do you go from there?

24 DS: I was fortunate enough to be—I was senior, enough I should say, that the job
25 opened up as a senior advisor to the 24th Special Tactical Zone in Kontum and Pleiku.

26 KC: So this was in II Corps, then.

27 DS: A friend of mine who was in the G-1 business nominated me for that job that
28 I was assigned to. That job as a senior advisor of the 24th Special Tactical Zone.

29 KC: Now, when did this happen?

30 DS: January of 1966.

1 KC: Okay, very good. So you are going to be the senior advisor here. Now,
2 having seen from the deputy senior advisor position with the 25th, when you go to your
3 new—when you arrive in the 24th Special Tactical Zone, what do you hope to do? Having
4 seen it from the deputy senior level, now that you are going to be the senior advisor, what
5 do you want to do to make you and your advisory group work? To make it effective?

6 DS: Well, the first thing that I tried to do is co-locate our advisors and their
7 counterparts, which I succeeded in part in doing. I understood the political problem that
8 my counterpart had. Colonel Phuoc, who was the commander of the 24th Special Tactical
9 Zone, was not in favor with the corps commander, General Vinh Loc. He had been
10 moved up from the Delta, where I think he was an intelligence officer under the Diem
11 regime and somehow as a Roman Catholic he was not trusted completely by Vinh Loc
12 and his staff, whose headquarters was in Pleiku. I worked on that, trying to bolster his
13 bona fides and see if I couldn't get them to trust him more. I guess that was it.

14 KC: What was your impression of Colonel Phuoc?

15 DS: Pardon me?

16 KC: What was your impression of Phuoc?

17 DS: I was very favorably impressed. He was open. He was open to suggestions.
18 He was knowledgeable. He had a very sophisticated network of agents operating
19 throughout the zone, Kontum, and Pleiku. He knew tactics well. He could utilize
20 combined arms when he had them. In essence, I was in impressed that he knew what he
21 was doing. I think he was an old—he had worked with the French army in the pre-World
22 War II era.

23 KC: Now, you said that you were favorably impressed with this man, but you
24 know that the individual to whom he will be responsible doesn't have much use for him.
25 You mentioned that he didn't trust him and that possibly his Catholicism was part of the
26 reason for this. Did that any sort of impact on your relationship with his commander?

27 DS: No. Of course, it was an advisor to Vin Loc, a brigadier general, at that time
28 it was General Timothy. He sort of isolated us from Vin Loc so, no, I don't think there
29 was any adverse effect on my part.

30 KC: Okay. Now, let me ask you some questions regarding more specific things,
31 on a daily basis. Let's do it this way, for an average day—and I'm sure you would

1 probably say there was no such thing as an average day in the 24th Special Tactical
2 Zone—but on an average day, how would you approach your job as senior advisor there.
3 Take me through an average day of what you would do.

4 DS: Okay. I would go to my advisory office in the headquarters of the tactical
5 zone, which were separate from the compound in which the advisors lived and General
6 Phuoc, Colonel Phuoc rather, had a billet down in Kontum city. He did not live in the
7 ARVN compound. So I would get up, have breakfast, drive to the headquarters
8 compound, take care of any administrative problems that my deputy put forth for me and
9 then I would go over to listen to the morning briefing. That was in Vietnamese or French.
10 Fortunately, my S-3 advisor spoke fluent French so he could talk with the officers who
11 spoke French if there was a problem in the translation. We would have the briefing and
12 then I would consult with Colonel Phuoc to see what his plans were. I made available the
13 assets of the advisory team to include the chopper so that we could go on visits together
14 and we always traveled together to visit units of the zone or the Montagnard villages that
15 he went to quite frequently and then we would go back for lunch. If he was going to be
16 occupied with administrative work I would either visit some of the advisory teams
17 myself, separate from Colonel Phuoc, or take care of administrative matters myself.
18 Usually, we left the headquarters compound around four-thirty, five o'clock and that was
19 the end of the day. The ARVN did not work on Saturday and Sunday and we were free
20 those days unless we were out on an operation, which happened quite frequently. It was a
21 very relaxed, at that time, a very relaxed operation. There were no great Viet Minh, or
22 Viet Cong attacks, Duc My and those operations had long since gone. So as I say, it was
23 sort of a relaxed attitude throughout the zone.

24 KC: You mentioned that you would occasionally go out on operations. Were there
25 any of these operations in particular that stand out in your mind for one reason or
26 another?

27 DS: Well, one operation we opened the road from Kontum city to the farthest
28 north Special Forces camp. I can't think of the name of it right now. But we opened the
29 road all the way up there to get some equipment that had been left up there when the
30 camp had been built, specifically engineering equipment. It was a long, drawn operation
31 which cleared the road of mines. We cleared the verges or searched the verges to make

1 sure that there were no snipers or whatever. Colonel Phuoc and I drove from Kontum city
2 all the way up to this Special Forces camp. I wish I could think of its name. It was a very
3 well-coordinated operation. We hopscotched the artillery that was available and I thought
4 it was well handled. The other operation that stands in my mind was an operation by the
5 ARVN regiment to relocate refugees and Montagnards from areas that were considered
6 very dangerous to safer areas. Just as they got to the area of Tan Canh where they were to
7 be relocated, the convoy was attacked. There was quite a battle at that time. We had to
8 call in gunships in order to get the Viet Cong to let go, to let the convoy complete itself.
9 Those are the two that stand out. There were many unproductive search and clear
10 operations, trying to move supplies back and forth and to isolated villages and to search
11 out areas where intelligence indicated that there might be a concentration of Viet Cong,
12 but they were more or less routine.

13 KC: Let me take you back to the operation that you just mentioned about clearing
14 the road from Kontum up to the Special Forces camp to bring this engineering equipment
15 back.

16 DS: That was Dak Pek, Special Forces camp.

17 KC: Good, good. I figured before the interview was over it would come to you.
18 Let's take back to the initial stages of this. You are based in Kontum, you know that this
19 camp at Dak Pek is there and that you've got equipment that you'd like to rescue, or that
20 MACV would like to rescue. Where does the idea for this begin? I should say, take me
21 through the process of where the idea for this begins and how you go about to achieve
22 these goals. I'm talking about intelligence, I'm talking about planning, because like you
23 mentioned, you had to clear the roads, you had to look out for snipers, you had all of
24 these things that you had to do. Can you take me through the process, step by step, I
25 mean from conceptualization through intelligence through making this road safe for
26 travel.

27 DS: I'll try to do that. It's a little vague. As I recall, the operation was initiated
28 because they wanted to get this engineering equipment in order to use it for the
29 construction of another camp. So it was essential that the road be cleared of mines in
30 particular and be secured so that this equipment could be driven down from Dak Pek to
31 Kontum and then wherever it was going to be used. The planning was basically done by

1 Colonel Phuoc's staff in coordination with the regiment stationed at Tan Canh, and again
2 I forget the designation of the regiment. It was coordinated with the Special Forces and
3 RF/PF (Regional Forces/Popular Forces) and everybody else that would be involved. A
4 detailed plan was drawn up and again my S-3 advisor kept me informed of the progress
5 of the plan and we made several suggestions but basically it was an ARVN plan and it
6 worked out very well. That's about all I can tell you about that.

7 KC: Sure, sure, sure. Well, you brought up something that I think is important
8 here. You mentioned the RF/PF. They are the Regional Forces, Popular Forces. So the
9 ARVN is working in coordination with them as well as with your advisory team.

10 DS: Okay. I think you have to remember the political situation. The DTA, the
11 division tactical area or the special tactical zone commander was both political and
12 military commander. He commanded all the military units and he also indirectly
13 commanded all the village and the city administration, which included, of course, the
14 RF/PF, which were the regional forces that secured the villages. So there was that sort of
15 unified command within the ARVN. We did have some advisors down with RF/PF units
16 but that came a little later. The province advisors, the province senior advisors,
17 overlooked the RF/PF. As a senior advisor of the zone and as the senior advisor of a
18 division, the province senior advisors were under the supervision of the senior advisor.
19 For instance, all the province advisors in Kontum and Pleiku were under my direct
20 command. We worked together to insure that the resources available were made available
21 to either the province or to the zone, as needed. The Special Forces were a different kettle
22 of fish. When I first encountered them they were operating pretty much on their own
23 within their—outside their camps. There were some pretty bad instances of lack of
24 coordination where friendly units fired on each other and so on. And General Larsen,
25 who was the 1st Field Force commander, when to—this was before my time—but he went
26 to General Westmoreland and insisted that the Special Forces be OPCON'ed to him so
27 that they could be coordinated, and he in turned OPCON'ed the Special Forces within a
28 zone or a division tactical area through the senior advisor so that we had some control
29 over the operations and use of the Special Forces.

30 KC: Okay, very good. So you have some semblance of this overall coordination
31 that you would have loved to have seen at a much higher level and much more

1 thoroughgoing. There was some element of that within your tactical zone. That must have
2 been—made you feel much better about that mission there.

3 DS: That's right.

4 KC: What about the local forces, the RF/PF? If you're working in coordination
5 with them, we're going to clear this road of mines, etc., we're going to bring this
6 equipment down to Kontum. Was there any fear or did you see any evidence of the
7 RF/PF leaking information about the plans or about the movement of the ARVN in this
8 effort to bring relief to the Special Forces camp?

9 DS: I think they were kept pretty much in the dark until just before the operation
10 kicked off. They were used primarily to outpost the road after it was cleared by the
11 ARVN units. Once the main body of force had passed, they left little pockets of RF/PF
12 along the road to insure that the Viet Cong did not reenter the area.

13 KC: What was your opinion of the RF/PF?

14 DS: Generally very poor. There were some exceptions that were very good but on
15 the whole they were poorly trained, poorly led, and even poorly equipped. They lacked
16 morale. In a word, they were pretty sorry.

17 KC: Sure. Many, many people expressed the same concern that the RF/PF, they
18 would say the same things. Lack of motivation, poor morale, lack of training, and poorly
19 equipped, and it led to a variety of problems, of course, throughout the conflict. Well, let
20 me switch gears a little bit here. Now, you have, you've described for me the process by
21 which you opened up the road to bring those engineering equipment back from Dak Pek.
22 But you mentioned another operation in which you participated, and that was much more
23 humanitarian in nature, trying to move Montagnard refugees down to safer areas. That
24 much of—I mean, the overall purpose and mission is very, very different. I mean this is
25 quite literally a humanitarian effort in the middle of this war to help protect refugees. Can
26 you explain how that began and how you would follow all the way through?

27 DS: I can't remember how that started. That was primarily an operation run by the
28 regiment up in Tan Canh and of course, I had an advisor with them and he kept me
29 informed, but I really don't, can't tell you any details about it. I only got into it after the
30 ambush and when I tried to get Colonel Phuoc to go out to the ambush site, and for some
31 reason or another he wouldn't, and I went out there and we finally got the thing sorted out

1 and got the necessary gunships to clear the area so that the convoy could—it was
2 primarily the regimental operation that, I guess it was approved by Colonel Phuoc, but
3 not directly under his command so I was not intimately involved with it.

4 KC: Okay, now, because there was an ambush do you suspect that information
5 was leaked that would have allowed the enemy forces to set up an ambush or do you
6 think it was something that was bad luck.

7 DS: Rather than leaked, I think that they just followed and decided where we
8 would be most vulnerable and hidden. The operation started out in an area called
9 Tumorong, as I remember, which had been fought over between ARVN and Viet Cong
10 and it changed hands quite often. And there was a sizeable Montagnard village, they
11 didn't want to leave that area but the ARVN could not provide adequate security so it was
12 decided that they had to move, and that was the genesis of the operation.

13 KC: And about how many Montagnards were involved in this, that had to be
14 moved?

15 DS: I can't—I don't remember if I ever knew.

16 KC: Okay, sure, very good, very good. Now, you mentioned earlier as well that it
17 was a somewhat leisurely type of pace that you were living. You said that they aren't
18 working in the evenings, they're not working on Saturday and Sundays. What did you do
19 during your off time, personally? What sort of things would you do to spend your time?

20 DS: When I had free time?

21 KC: Yes, sir.

22 DS: Every Sunday I took a flight over the two provinces, mainly the borders of
23 the two provinces, in a light plane. Each of the province senior advisors had a flight of L-
24 19s assigned to them. I had the use of it when I wanted. Every Sunday, as I say, Sunday
25 morning, I would fly over the entire zone and see if I could see any changes. And of
26 course, the pilots were very keenly attuned to that and they could point out any changes
27 they saw. And then on Sundays if I had not seen a particular advisory team for some
28 time, I would visit them. Quite often I would have to go to a funeral service for an ARVN
29 that Colonel Phuoc dragged me to. As I mentioned, he was a Roman Catholic and he was
30 very big on memorial services and memorial Masses. I did a lot of reading. We did a lot
31 of drinking at night. Played bridge, saw movies, the usual routine.

1 KC: How many Americans did you have contact with on a regular basis there?
2 DS: I would say thirty-five to forty.
3 KC: Thirty-five to forty?
4 DS: Yeah.
5 KC: And where they all under your command there, as senior advisor?
6 DS: Yes.
7 KC: Okay.
8 DS: And I say that, there were thirty-five to forty, routinely, and there were many
9 more, maybe twice that number that I saw occasionally.
10 KC: Okay. And those are the ones who were working for you but were out in the
11 field? Out on different operations, etc.?
12 DS: Right.
13 KC: Okay. How often—you said you would visit them if you haven't seen them
14 for a while. About how often would you try to make these rounds to these different
15 teams?
16 DS: I tried to see every team at least once a month. Some of them I saw daily. For
17 instance, the province senior advisor of Kontum lived in the same compound that I did
18 and so I saw him and his team of advisors constantly. Some of the outlying hamlet
19 advisors I didn't get to see until maybe, as I say, once a month.
20 KC: What about contact back home? This is 1966, the anti-war movement in the
21 United States is beginning to make some headway, starting to make some headlines. It is
22 becoming more and more apparent of the American role there is, in Vietnam is beginning
23 to grow. Were you aware of any of this information about the change in perception of the
24 war back in the States? Were you aware of this while you were in-country?
25 DS: Yes, very much so. Of course, we got copies of newspapers. I got letters from
26 home with clippings. We had the Armed Forces Radio. So, yes, we were all very much
27 aware of the movement. We were also aware of the misrepresentation by the media of a
28 lot of what was going on. It was dispiriting, to say the least.
29 KC: Well, how do you—when you know you are there, you are serving the
30 country in this capacity and you see this attitude back home by people who don't truly
31 understand what you're doing, or certainly don't understand it from your perspective,

1 anyway. How does that—you say that I was a little discouraging, but how do you deal
2 with that on a daily basis? Is it something that you just put behind you? Is it something
3 you think about? Does it make you angry? How do you deal with that?

4 DS: Basically, you put it behind you. You said, “They don’t know what they are
5 talking about. To hell with them,” and you ignored it. There was this gnawing feeling
6 behind that you hoped that somebody would wake them up, but in my own case at any
7 rate I just didn’t let bother me.

8 KC: I would think that that would be how you would have to do it. When you are
9 in charge of such an important task there you can’t be worried about what the newspapers
10 back home are saying, for sure. Well, one of these important tasks that you had, and you
11 mentioned this earlier in our earlier session, had to do with the morale of the advisors,
12 and the advisory teams in general. Here you are, a senior advisor. What are you doing on
13 a daily basis to help improve this morale among the Americans that are serving in your
14 teams?

15 DS: Well, first of all, I found the morale at the 24th Special Tactical Zone pretty
16 good. I say this with reservations because my predecessor was one of those control freaks
17 who tried to do everything himself or keep everything close to hand. I’m just the
18 opposite. I like to delegate and have people operate freely on their own. So when I took
19 over, while there was a certain tension among the advisors, the morale was pretty good. It
20 improved as they learned my methods and I learned to trust them. What did I do
21 specifically? I tried to improve the living conditions, the food. I was always after the
22 mess officer. I tried to make sure that the PX (post exchange) was stocked and I had a
23 really good sergeant in charge of it who was a scrounger and got good supplies from the
24 main PX down in Saigon, or I guess Bien Hoa. I instituted a program of retreat. We
25 saluted the colors all the time and had martial music. We had award ceremonies and little
26 affairs to welcome new team members and say farewell to others. Things of that sort.

27 KC: It seems like it was, obviously done very purposefully by you. And the things
28 that you are doing, obviously instilling some pride and you’re getting to know these
29 people and letting them know that you are there for their support and that their actions
30 and the things that they are doing are worthwhile and that they are making a difference. I
31 think that would be vital to your overall mission of trying to improve it. Did you ever try

1 to get the teams back to, say, a base in Kontum or even for R&R (rest and recuperation)
2 leave on a more regular basis?

3 DS: You mean the outlying team members?

4 KC: Yes, sir.

5 DS: No.

6 KC: No.

7 DS: No, I didn't think that would—I would occasionally get the province senior
8 advisors together and the advisor to the ARVN unit at Tan Canh but it was not practical
9 to get anybody else back for orientation or whatever.

10 KC: Sure, sure. On average, how many Americans would be in these advisory
11 teams that were spread throughout your area?

12 DS: I would think about seventy-five to eighty.

13 KC: Okay.

14 DS: Now, does not include Special Forces types.

15 KC: Okay.

16 DS: They were—of course, each A Team, there were six or eight camps in the
17 two provinces and each camp had at least five Special Forces there and there was a B
18 Team headquarters in Kontum, so that did not include those.

19 KC: Okay. Were there any particular problems that you saw, in terms of the
20 relationship of the American advisors with the Vietnamese with whom they were
21 working?

22 DS: No, I can't think of any particular problems. I think our problems were
23 mostly with trying to insure that the ARVN had the support they needed and, as I
24 mentioned, that was sometimes difficult because of the relationship between Vinh Loc
25 and Phuoc. But, no I can't think of any.

26 KC: Do you think that the American advisors had a more positive or negative
27 opinion of the Vietnamese with whom they worked?

28 DS: I think that varied. I know some advisors looked down upon the Vietnamese.
29 They were gooks. They were slope heads and so on and so forth. I think most of the
30 advisors approached their problem and their counterparts with respect and a pretty good
31 feeling. It was a mixed bag.

1 KC: Sure. And you would expect that. You're dealing with individuals. It's going
2 to vary across the spectrum, of course.

3 DS: You know, unfortunately, advisors were not, whoever procured them did not
4 have a free hand to select them the way they should have been. And of course, the best
5 people wanted to go to the American troop units instead of being advisors so that was a
6 big problem.

7 KC: Sure. Do you think that an advisor's attitude toward his counterparts was an
8 indication of his success or lack of success? For example, if one had a very high opinion
9 of the, or a position opinion of the ARVN with whom he would be working, would he see
10 more success in general than one that had a more negative attitude or was this something
11 that varied across the spectrum?

12 DS: I think very definitely. Some ARVN units were outstanding and the advisors
13 to them had a great admiration for them and whatever. Some ARVN units were poor and
14 again, the advisors despaired. There was a wide variety of leadership among the ARVN.
15 Many of the experienced officers who had worked with the French were outstanding.
16 They knew their tactics. They were disciplinarians. Some of them were almost tyrants,
17 but the troops did what they had to do. Others were completely worthless. My experience
18 with the graduates of the Vietnamese military academy was poor. I thought that so many
19 of them had been sent to the military academy for political reasons and were not
20 outstanding leaders, but I don't want to condemn all of them because my experience was
21 limited, of course.

22 KC: Sure, sure. Well, how long are you serving as senior advisor in the 24th
23 Tactical Zone?

24 DS: Fourteen months.

25 KC: For fourteen months. So this would take you in 1967, then?

26 DS: Right.

27 KC: Into late winter, early spring of 1967?

28 DS: Yes. I would say around March of '67.

29 KC: Okay. Now, what was your impression of the work you did there as senior
30 advisor for those fourteen months? Here is what it was when you got there, in 1966; here

1 is what it was when you left. What is your impression of what changed from positive or
2 negative, if you want?

3 DS: Positive. I thought we had made progress. I thought the advisory teams had
4 done a good job and in my own view I thought that we should start reducing the advisory
5 effort to a liaison and letting the ARVN assume more and more responsibility for their
6 own warfare.

7 KC: Now, was this for something—

8 DS: That was not shared by General Westmoreland.

9 KC: Certainly. I was going to ask you if this was something that you believed this
10 would be more effective in just your area or something throughout South Vietnam and
11 apparently what you are saying is throughout all South Vietnam, is that correct?

12 DS: I'll relate a little vignette. The Chief of Staff of the Army came to visit the 1st
13 Brigade of the 101st, which was stationed up in the Tan Canh area at that time. The CG of
14 the brigade hosted a luncheon for General Johnson and invited me, as the special zone's
15 advisor, to it. During the course of the luncheon, General Johnson turned to me and asked
16 me about what I thought about the advisory effort and so on. I had not realized that
17 General Westmoreland had just made a pitch for extending advisors down to company
18 level. They had been up in the battalion level and he wanted to put them down into
19 company level and I thought, based on my experience in Korea, that it was time to start
20 phasing the advisory effort down and forcing the ARVN to assume their potential.
21 General Westmoreland vehemently disagreed, of course. But I had been asked a question
22 and I answered it that way.

23 KC: And what was General Johnson's response to this?

24 DS: He turned to his DESOPS and said, "Look into that." But I'm sure that when
25 they got back to Saigon General Westmoreland disabused him of my theories.

26 KC: You mean the opinion of a lieutenant colonel in Kontum didn't hold more
27 weight than General Westmoreland? That's a real shock.

28 DS: By that time I had been promoted.

29 KC: Oh, you had been promoted to full colonel by this time? Okay.

30 DS: But still there's a difference.

1 KC: Yeah, I still don't think it would have carried much more water than it had
2 before, for sure. Well, you leave in probably March of 1967, as you said, in this particular
3 role. What was your opinion, you had been there since '65, what was your opinion on the
4 conduct of the war and the progress of the war when you left as senior advisor here?

5 DS: At that particular time I thought that the situation was pretty stable. We had
6 no major attacks for several months and we had not been able to find and fight any major
7 pockets of Viet Cong in the zone. So my attitude was pretty positive.

8 KC: Did you think that this was something that the United States could achieve its
9 goals of making the South Vietnamese military a viable fighting force to be able to
10 eradicate the VC and hold its own against the North Vietnamese? Do you think that was
11 something the US could accomplish?

12 DS: Yes, I did think so.

13 KC: Okay. Well, part of that mission to strengthen and legitimize, if you will, the
14 South Vietnamese government and military is going to have countless different political
15 strings attached to it. By 1967 what was your opinion of the political aspects, the way the
16 United States was going about pursuing its mission in Vietnam?

17 DS: I thought that they—most of my feelings about that are hindsight and so I
18 really can't answer that properly. When I got back to the States and realized how the war
19 had been directed from Washington, I was very disappointed and disgusted. As I say, I
20 can't answer your question, really.

21 KC: Okay, that's perfectly fine. That's very candid of you to say so. Well, when
22 you leave the 24th Special Tactical Zone in March of '67, what is your next stop?

23 DS: I went down to take a brigade in the 9th Division.

24 KC: Now, this is something that you had been hankering for for a very long time,
25 isn't that true?

26 DS: I extended for that purpose.

27 KC: Okay. Now, what was it about leading a brigade that appealed to you so
28 much? Because reading through some of the things that you have written, it was very,
29 very clear that this is something that was driving you. You wanted to lead troops in
30 combat.

1 DS: Well, I think that's the whole reason for being a regular officer. That's what
2 we train for. That's what we were expected to do. That's the ultimate achievement of a
3 regular officer to be privileged to command troops in combat.

4 KC: Now, you had been pursuing this goal for quite some time and you
5 mentioned before that you were somewhat stymied before. Can you tell me about the
6 process of how you came to command this brigade in the 1st Division?

7 DS: Well, first, I started by visiting all of the American division commanders and
8 asking them for a brigade or to be put on a list when it came open. The 25th Division, I
9 saw General—names now. Anyway, I saw the commanding general of the 25th Division,
10 that's the American division, and he said he would keep me in mind. I got a letter from
11 him about a month later and he said, "I had an occasion, one of my brigade commanders
12 was wounded and needed a replacement and I asked for you and I was told by the G-1 of
13 MACV that they were tired of supplying all their best officers to USARV (United States
14 Army, Republic of Vietnam) to command American units," and unless an adequate
15 replacement for me was available, I could not be assigned. When I got that letter I flew
16 down to Washington and accosted the G-1 person, who happened to be a War College
17 classmate of mine and a complete idiot at that, and was ready to take him over the desk
18 and beat the hell out of him. Then I went to see General Rosson, chief of staff of MACV,
19 and I showed him the letter from—oh, damn, if I can think of the division commander's
20 name—but anyway, and I said, "Is this the policy?" And he said, "Hell, no. General
21 Westmoreland himself approves the assignment of colonels to brigades." And so I went
22 back, mollified, and I wrote a letter to General Westmoreland out of channels and told
23 him I wanted a brigade and I explained to him that I thought I was well qualified having
24 been in-country for a year or more and having been an advisor and within a month I was
25 assigned to the 9th Division. Apparently, they were shaking up the division and
26 reassigning some of their brigade commanders and so I lucked out.

27 KC: I misspoke earlier. I believe I said the 1st Division, but obviously it was the
28 9th Division, 1st Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division. This was down in III Corps, again,
29 was it not?

30 DS: Yes, they were just south of Bien Hoa at Bearcat, Camp Bearcat.

1 KC: Yes, sir. Now, what did you know about the 9th ID (infantry division) or in
2 particular the 1st Brigade that would be leading now?

3 DS: Not a thing.

4 KC: Not a thing. Okay. So it was a complete blank slate when you got there.
5 Now, you have been chomping at the bit, as it were, to lead a brigade in a combat in
6 Vietnam and now you've got your chance. Obviously, you feel very, very good about
7 this. But based on your previous experience in the Second World War and in Korea and
8 what you've seen in this fourteen or some odd months that you've spent in Vietnam as an
9 advisor, what sort of things did you think at the time that you could bring to this brigade
10 to help make it effective in pursuing its mission?

11 DS: Oh, I don't know how to answer that question. I took it as a challenge to my
12 leadership. I accepted it as a privilege to command American troops. I looked forward to
13 my relations with the division and I felt that I could work with the ARVN units within the
14 area of my responsibility. Other than that, I can't really put my finger on it.

15 KC: Sure, sure. I can certainly understand that. All right now, what kind of
16 adjustments did you have to make? You had been serving in this advisory capacity,
17 working largely with ARVN, now you are leading an American brigade in combat. There
18 are going to be a number of adjustments, I would think, that you would have to make as
19 you settled into this position. What sort of things were the biggest challenges for you?

20 DS: Well, of course, the major difference is that I now commanded the unit and
21 when I said something, it was done, as compared with recommending and hoping it
22 would be followed.

23 KC: Sure.

24 DS: It was a transition from, as I say, advice to command. That's all I can say
25 about it.

26 KC: Sure. I think that it would be somewhat of a relief to know that when you
27 said something it would have to be done.

28 DS: Absolutely.

29 KC: But along with that would come an awful lot of responsibility, as well,
30 knowing that the decisions that you made and were carried out on your orders.

31 DS: That's true.

1 KC: And these are definitely—not that you wouldn't have sympathy or
2 compassion for the Vietnamese, the ARVN troops, but of course American troops would
3 be potentially, would certainly be affected by the decisions that you're making, that they
4 are carrying out on your behalf. And it could be dangerous situations, because again you
5 are leading them into combat. I think that the weight of this would have been something
6 that you would have had to deal with, as well.

7 DS: Well you are always conscience of the fact that any decision you made
8 affected everybody in your command. That you were fully responsible for those troops,
9 their welfare, trying to get them home safely, and yet you had a mission to perform and
10 you couldn't slight the mission to satisfy your ability to take care of your troops. So there
11 was a—I think every commander faces that sort of a problem.

12 KC: What was the morale in the 1st Brigade like when you arrived?

13 DS: Wound up tight.

14 KC: Is that right?

15 DS: Very much like when I took over the advisory team at Kontum. My
16 predecessor was a man who tightly controlled his staff and his troops and did not delegate
17 easily. There was a definite feel of tension that nobody acted spontaneously. They first
18 tried to determine what the commander wanted, rather than present him with a proposal
19 or a plan. That was the first thing I had to do was to get the, particularly the staff, to
20 realize that they were there to assist me and I welcomed their views and their ideas and
21 their vision of the problem. They had no reason to hesitate to speak frankly to me, which
22 they apparently didn't do to my predecessor. I'm not trying to bad mouth my predecessor.
23 I think he was a good commander and some people just handle a command differently.
24 He obviously had done a good job with the brigade before I took it over so I had no
25 quarrel with that but I found that the staff was very tense and the battalion commanders,
26 in turn, were a little reluctant to use their own initiative.

27 KC: Well, I think that makes sense. It seems that you've come along to situations
28 that need your style of leadership, from what it sounds like to me.

29 DS: Right.

30 KC: And like you say, there are benefits in the tightly structured to command
31 style of many people and there are benefits in a more delegatory approach, the way that

1 you handled it, for sure. What was the first combat you saw with the 1st Brigade, and
2 when was it?

3 DS: Oof. I can't—well, when I took over the brigade they were attached to the 1st
4 Division and were up in the An Loc area north of Bien Hoa so I sort of walked into a
5 combat situation. Although, there had been some very serious fighting before I took over,
6 there was very limited contact until we moved back to Bearcat for rehabilitation and
7 further action. It became apparent right away that the 1st Brigade was a swing brigade.
8 We were moved to an area within the corps zone that needed beefing up or action. Of
9 course, the 2nd Brigade was the riverine force and they stayed down in the Delta on the
10 Vam Co Dong River. The 3rd Brigade was pretty well tied up in the form of the 25th
11 ARVN Division DTA (division tactical area). My brigade went in and out of Bearcat and
12 at one point we were working with the Australian task force. Another time we went up
13 and worked with the 25th Infantry Division and so as I say, we moved around a lot.

14 KC: Tell me about your time with the Aussies?

15 DS: Pardon me?

16 KC: Tell me about the time that you, that the 1st Brigade was with the Australians.

17 DS: They were south of us and they had information, intelligence that there was a
18 large pocket of Viet Cong in two little mountains and they wanted to do a, to encircle that
19 and then move into, try to flush them out and destroy them. I was put OPCON to the
20 Australian brigadier. We worked very well together. We saw things pretty much the
21 same. We used the same tactics. They were a little more relaxed than I was, but it worked
22 out very well.

23 KC: And how much time did you spend with them, working with the Australians?

24 DS: Only about three weeks.

25 KC: Three weeks. Okay.

26 DS: That was the average time we were out on operations. We'd go out for two,
27 three, maybe four weeks and then come back to Bearcat where I had another mission that
28 was the supervision of the security at Bien Hoa, the logistical command there and we
29 stayed in Bearcat maybe a week or two and then off we'd go again.

30 KC: Now, you say you'd come in—I assume these are full brigade-size operations
31 in which you are participating and then the brigade would come in for a week. Now,

1 when you are back at Bearcat, what do you do? You mentioned that you are in charge of
2 security for the logistics there. How would you deal with those duties as well while you
3 are in camp? It seems to me that it would be quite a switch from seeing combat in the
4 field to coming back to providing security at Bearcat.

5 DS: Well, first of all, I made a compact with the Bearcat security commander,
6 whom I think was the artillery commander, that my troops would not be part of the
7 perimeter defense. When they came back they were there to relax, to rehabilitate
8 themselves. They were not going to be—they would do their own chores for their own
9 area but not to be harassed with Bearcat problems. We got that sorted out. Eventually, I
10 did provide a few cooks and bakers and other assorted rear area people for the perimeter
11 defense but no major element. But there was a continuing operation called—I can't
12 remember the name now—but which provided for the external security of the Bien Hoa
13 complex and in turn, each division in the corps area, the 25th, the 1st, and the 9th, provided
14 a battalion for that security and the responsibility was mine as the commander of the 1st
15 Brigade and if I was out on an operation whoever had command of the security of
16 Bearcat assumed that command for me. It was my job to ensure that the plan was sound.
17 What it was was a series of patrols outside the perimeter of the Bearcat complex.

18 KC: No, I'm sorry, go ahead.

19 DS: Pardon?

20 KC: I didn't mean to interrupt you.

21 DS: No, I about finished up.

22 KC: Okay, okay. As the brigade commander you come in from the field and you
23 work this arrangement out with what you say you believe was the artillery commander
24 there that was providing overall base security for the complex. And you tell him, "Look,
25 my guys just got in from the field for two to three weeks out. We'll take care of ourselves
26 but I'm not going to make these guys walk a beat. They're not going to walk the
27 perimeter. They're not going to go out in the bush and look for things. They need to relax
28 here."

29 DS: That's correct.

30 KC: Obviously, that would be something of great benefit and value and would
31 certainly, I would think, boost the morale of your men and their confidence in your

1 looking after them. I think that would certainly be one of the tangible benefits of this.
2 And you say that you worked out an arrangement with the overall security commander
3 here. Two questions, the first question is: how did you work out this arrangement? And
4 the second question is: did you receive any sort of any flak for this from others who
5 wanted, who believed that you should be pulling your fair share as they might look at it?

6 DS: Well, I worked it out face to face with the commander. We talked about it. I
7 made my case and I think he bought it, lock, stock, and barrel. The troops were going out
8 into the jungle or wherever were under terrible stress and strain and needed to relax when
9 they got back. They needed time to clean up, to clean their weapons, to replace items that
10 were lost, and whatever. He was smart enough to realize the logic of my argument and so
11 there was no big problem there. I'm sure that down at the troop level there was some
12 resentment for those who had to man the perimeter defenses. Here was this brigade
13 sitting out, doing nothing about that. I didn't get any flak from any of the commanders
14 about it.

15 KC: Oh, okay. Very good. That seems to me that something that it would be a
16 private arrangement like that, I can see how other brigade commanders or other unit
17 commanders could look at that pretty jealously and say, "Wait a second. That's not
18 entirely fair," although it makes all the sense in the world, obviously.

19 DS: Well, as I say, there were really enough troops around to adequately secure
20 the perimeter. Of course, the 2nd Brigade was out. The 2nd and 3rd Brigade were not in
21 Bearcat so I didn't experience any flak from them, obviously. It worked out pretty well.

22 KC: Very good. Well, why don't we take a break there for today, Colonel?

Interview with Don Seibert
Session [3] of [4]
27 February 2009

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Col. Don
2 Seibert. Today is 27 February 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Colonel Seibert is
3 joining us from Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Colonel, when we left off last time, we had you in
4 charge of the 1st Brigade of the 9th Division, III Corps, operating out of Bearcat. And you
5 were discussing some of the general, I don't want to say operations, but you did talk
6 about some of the operations in which you were involved. I think some of them had to do
7 with external security around Bearcat, Long Binh, Bien Hoa area. Is that correct?

8 DS: Right.

9 KC: Okay. Now, some of these, I believe operation Riley, may have been one of
10 them, operation Uniontown, do those ring a bell?

11 DS: Uniontown was the security, external security of Long Binh. Riley was a—
12 now I'm confused. I can't remember exactly what it was. It seems to me that that was a
13 continuing operation to clear the rubber plantation, but I'm a little vague on that one.

14 KC: Okay, sure, sure. Well, what about Operation Junction City? Did your
15 brigade participate in Junction City?

16 DS: The brigade was OPCON'ed to the 1st Division and its primary operation was
17 the security of the supply lines between An Khe and the operational area.

18 KC: Now, did this include Junction City at all?

19 DS: Did it include what?

20 KC: Junction City, Operation Junction City.

21 DS: Yes.

22 KC: Okay. This is the role of your brigade during operation Junction City.

23 DS: Right. That's when I took command of the brigade while it was OPCON'ed
24 to the 1st Division.

25 KC: Oh, okay. Very good, very good. Now, reading through some of your
26 materials, I have noticed—we are switching gears here a little bit—but I've noticed that
27 you had some I think some impressing things to say regarding the relationship between
28 general officers and subordinate commanders in the field in terms of their attitudes

1 toward the subordinate commanders and the way they operated in the theater. Is there
2 anything that you would like to add regarding that?

3 DS: No, it was my impression that there was a tendency on the part of the general
4 officers to over-supervise and to intrude into operations when there wasn't any need for
5 it. I guess it was a natural tendency to go to the sound of the fire, but I had a very good
6 understanding with General Roseborough about that after we had a little contretemps.

7 KC: I was going to ask you if you had any specific instances that you would like
8 to relate, regarding this.

9 DS: Well, we were in contact, one of the battalions was in contact, and all of a
10 sudden I heard this radio call going to my battalion commander directly. I knew it was
11 General Roseborough but I called an unknown station and told them that the net was
12 secured and they should get out. And General Roseborough got quite annoyed with me
13 and we met after the outcome of the, after the firefight was over. He wanted to know
14 what the problem was and I said, "The problem is if I'm going to command the brigade, I
15 want to command it. I don't appreciate having somebody else giving orders to my
16 battalion commanders without going through me." And he said, well, that was one of his
17 jobs. That he felt that if it was necessary he would do that. And I said, "Then why don't
18 you relieve me and just command the brigade yourself?" Or words to that effect. At
19 which point we both stopped and considered what I had said and then we calmed down
20 and talked it over and I said, "All I want is that you pass anything you ask through me.
21 Unless there is a major crisis," and I said, "I can't think of any reason why there would
22 be." And he said he would do that and we parted amicably. And he was true to his word.
23 In future instances he did not talk directly to the battalion commanders.

24 KC: And how long had you been in charge of the brigade when this incident
25 occurred?

26 DS: Probably two weeks.

27 KC: Two weeks. So do you think it was, on his part that maybe that he didn't
28 know you well enough and he wasn't convinced of your abilities to handle the particular
29 situation with the battalion?

1 DS: That could be part of it, but I gathered that he probably did this with other
2 commanders and it was sort of an accepted thing that the generals would put their oar in
3 if they thought it was necessary.

4 KC: Now, you mentioned last time we spoke that the individual whom you
5 replaced as brigade commander of the 1st had been wound up pretty tight. That he didn't
6 delegate particularly well or didn't care to delegate. Not that he wasn't a good
7 commander but that he did things in a much different manner than you did. Do you think
8 that the influence of his superiors, the general officers, do you think that would have had
9 an effect on this tightness of the unit, as well?

10 DS: I wouldn't speculate on that.

11 KC: Okay.

12 DS: I don't know. I don't know how long General Roseborough had been with the
13 division before I joined it. I don't know whether he was one of the original cadre or not
14 that trained at Riley. So I can't answer that one.

15 KC: Okay, very good. Another thing that I have gathered from reading the things
16 that you sent us is that the award system—and by awards I mean medals for actions in
17 combat—that you had some issues with which the way they were handed out, the way
18 they were awarded. Would you care to speak on that for a moment?

19 DS: Yeah. I felt that actions that would have probably merited a Bronze Star with
20 V or maybe a Silver Star in World War II were getting higher awards, DFCs
21 (Distinguished Flying Crosses) for actions that I thought were clearly Silver Star
22 material. I thought there was a laxity. I also felt that there was a great difference between
23 the award of decoration in the MACV channel and the USARV channel. Probably due to
24 the fact that the USARV channel was strictly US and, of course, the chain of command
25 was pretty straightforward, whereas the MACV were, we had the advisors and the team
26 operations. I'm not making myself clear, I don't think.

27 KC: No, that's okay. Take your time.

28 DS: I thought there was a distinct disparity between the way the awards were
29 handled. For instance, I was very upset about the fact that almost everybody was awarded
30 a Combat Infantry Badge if they came under any fire at all regardless of whether they
31 were in the infantry or not. It stemmed from the fact that the advisors were considered

1 infantry advisors whether they were ordnance or whatever. That was a very loose
2 operation that really bothered me.

3 KC: Now, why do you think this was? Why do you think that these awards were
4 given out a little more freely?

5 DS: Possibly because of morale factors. The advisors, of course, were not directly
6 engaged in combat and also because I think the command, speaking of MACV, the senior
7 advisor hierarchy was farther divorced from the lower advisors than, for instance, a
8 division commander was from men in a battalion. That's sort of speculation on my part, I
9 guess. It seems to me that there was not as great a scrutiny of the incidents by MACV as
10 was the case with the USARV units.

11 KC: Now, you say that, even though you were a recipient of a number of these
12 awards.

13 DS: (Chuckles) Very definitely. I felt that some of them were not really earned.

14 KC: Well, I think that shows a lot of integrity on the part of an individual who
15 would be on the receiving end of this, of these awards, and say, "You know what? I just
16 don't think that we are holding this up to the same scrutiny as we were before. That this
17 is watering down the importance and the value of the awards themselves." That shows an
18 awful lot of integrity, I would think, on the part of someone who is able to say that.

19 DS: Right.

20 KC: How long were you with, in command of the 1st Brigade, Colonel?

21 DS: I believe seven months.

22 KC: Seven months. Okay, in this seven months, you took over I believe it was in
23 March of 1967, so that will take you into, say, roughly October of 1967.

24 DS: Actually it was in November.

25 KC: November of 1967. Well, were there any other significant events during your
26 time in command of this brigade that you would like to recount for the record?

27 DS: No, I was a little concerned that we did not have a very high body count as
28 compared with some of the other units. But I felt that we were as aggressive as any unit
29 and we just were not focused or did not find pockets of VC to attack. Most of our
30 operations were small-unit firefights, very few heavy activity. The one outstanding thing,
31 I think, was the finding of a tunnel complex down in the southern part of our AO (area of

1 operations) which we took out an awful lot of weapons, over a thousand weapons and a
2 lot of rice and medical supplies and so on.

3 KC: Could you tell me about this particular incident from the beginning? This
4 sounds like a very interesting story.

5 DS: Well, we had been on a quote, “search and clear operation” in which they
6 were clearing the verges of the some of the roads down in the southern area. We had a
7 modified bulldozer with very sharp blades which were cutting the vegetation back ten for
8 fifteen yards from the road so that they could avoid ambush and one of my lieutenants
9 noticed a slight depression in the ground and he inverted a Claymore mine and it
10 exploded it and exposed a tunnel. Some of the tunnel rats went down there and they
11 found a very complex network of tunnels and chambers and all this stuff was brought out.
12 As I say, over a thousand weapons of various kinds and rice and other foodstuffs and
13 medical supplies.

14 KC: Sounds like quite a cache, by the sounds of it.

15 DS: It was. We kept getting more and more. Finally, we had to get the cavalry
16 squadron to secure an area so that we could put all the equipment there.

17 KC: Wow. Were any commendations given out because of this find?

18 DS: Pardon me?

19 KC: Were any commendations, any awards given out because of this find?

20 DS: No, not that I remember. I think we gave the lieutenant one but I don’t
21 remember any others.

22 KC: Well, the 1st Brigade, from time to time, is my understanding, is that they did
23 work with ARVN units as well as with RF/PF units as well. Now, you had worked with
24 the ARVN in your capacity as an advisor previous to this. You had also worked with the
25 RF/PF prior to this as well. What, if anything, was different about working with them in
26 your capacity as a brigade commander as compared to your role as advisor?

27 DS: Well, having command of a sizeable combat unit gave me the ability to focus
28 the effort. I should point out one thing here, that the closest ARVN division was the 18th
29 ARVN Division and it was commanded by General Giai, who had been the chief of staff
30 of the 25th Division when I was the deputy senior advisor and was my counterpart at that
31 time.

1 KC: You were pretty close with him.

2 DS: We had a very good rapport. He placed, several times he placed one or more
3 of his battalions OPCON'ed to me during an operation. So we had a very good working
4 relationship.

5 KC: Did your experience as an advisor help you in the way you dealt with these
6 larger ARVN units when they were OPCON'ed to you?

7 DS: I would very definitely say yes.

8 KC: In what ways?

9 DS: I understood their limitations and their organization. I sort of understood their
10 mindset and was able to establish a very good working rapport with them.

11 KC: What about the attitude of the men who were in your command toward the
12 RF/PF and the ARVN units?

13 DS: The attitude toward the RF/PF was very bad. I mean they held them in great
14 disrepute and rightly so. In several cases, in a firefight the RF/PF just folded up and left.
15 The ARVN units were a little better, and I think that was understandable. There was
16 greater discipline in the ARVN units than with the RF/PF. At one point there was a plan
17 to put advisors down in an RF/PF unit and we did that for, just before I left the brigade,
18 but I was very uneasy about it. I didn't like to see my lieutenant and sergeants dependent
19 upon the RF/PF if they were in the firefight. I guess that's the size of it. I saw some very
20 good RF/PF units but basically they were poorly trained and poorly led.

21 KC: What about with the ARVN? Did your soldiers' attitude towards the ARVN
22 change after working with them?

23 DS: Yes. Well, I had been working with them all my time in the theater and so I
24 had a certain amount of respect for them and held some of the units in very high esteem. I
25 thought the 42nd Regiment up in Tan Canh was well led and in good discipline. Some of
26 the units in the 25th Division, ARVN Division, some of the regiments were well led and
27 likewise some of General Giai's units were very good. There were others that were a little
28 weak, but that was a reflection of the leadership, I think, rather than anything else.

29 KC: Did your men share the same feeling?

1 DS: It's hard to say. My gut feeling is, no, that they would have preferred to have
2 as little to do with the Vietnamese units as possible. But that's again a gut feeling rather
3 than anything based on real knowledge.

4 KC: Well, what about your brigade and civic action programs. Did your brigade
5 participate in any?

6 DS: That was part and parcel of every one of our operations and it was a standard
7 requirement through channels that we do civic actions. We usually tried to repair schools,
8 to build playgrounds, we had MEDCAP (medical civilian action program), what we
9 called a MEDCAP. We sent one of our doctors down and some of our corpsmen, medical
10 corpsmen and treated anybody that would come in in a particular village. That was very
11 successful. Of course, there was a lot of road building going on and recovery of rice that
12 the Viet Cong had taken from the peasants and we turned it over to the ARVN and I
13 assumed that they gave back it back to the peasants but I didn't follow up on that.

14 KC: What do you think about the civic action program idea in general?

15 DS: In theory it was a good idea. I assume it made some friends. I don't think that
16 our troops were particularly adept in that. They were fighting men and here is an entirely
17 different aspect of—I think this is one of the problems that we have in Iraq now, that the
18 troops are supposed to be doing nation building rather than fighting and they are not
19 equipped to do it. I think that's true of the civic actions in Vietnam.

20 KC: Okay now you leave the 1st Brigade in November of 1967. Where do you go
21 from there?

22 DS: Actually, I went around the world.

23 KC: Did you now? Tell me about this.

24 DS: I left the brigade and I had sixty days accrued leave, which I took only thirty.
25 I went to Australia and then to do Singapore and Honk Kong and Thailand and India and
26 finally wound up in Spain and then went home. There was a flight around the world that
27 took diplomats and people to various capital cities and I was able to tap into that. And
28 then I was assigned to the European Command, was my next assignment.

29 KC: Now, were you in the European Command when the offensive of 1968
30 occurred?

31 DS: Pardon me?

1 KC: Were you in the European command when the Tet Offensive of 1968—

2 DS: No, I had already left before Tet occurred. I thought things had quieted down
3 when I left and then I hear something erupted in '68. Well, you know the story of Tet, of
4 course.

5 KC: Well, what did it mean to you? You mentioned, and other people have said
6 this as well, but you mentioned when you left it was a—

7 DS: A failure of intelligence, to begin with, and a case of underestimating the
8 strength of the Viet Cong. Of course, it was the first time that really North Vietnamese
9 regular units were involved as well as the Viet Cong. I think that took everybody by
10 surprise. Although, we knew people that were infiltrating men and equipment through
11 Laos and Cambodia south, I don't think we appreciated the extent to which that buildup
12 was taking place. Again, this is second, Monday-morning quarterbacking, it seems to me
13 that we did not have good intelligence.

14 KC: Now, what you heard in Europe, did it mirror what was being told to the
15 American public through the media?

16 DS: I had so many friends in Vietnam that sent letters and whatever to me. Yes, I
17 questioned very seriously the reports of the newspapers in particular were making.

18 KC: Now, you are basing this on what you are hearing from your friends who
19 were in Vietnam at the time.

20 DS: Right.

21 KC: There are saying, "No, it's not like that. It was actually a massive setback for
22 them." There was none of this whole new war thing, which is not obviously what was
23 being fed to the American public through the media.

24 DS: Right.

25 KC: Okay. In a larger sense, how were you—I should ask it this way—were you
26 keeping up with the war in Vietnam, even though you were on this around-the-world tour
27 and then at the European Command?

28 DS: Yes. It was of considerable interest to me and the fact that after a year and a
29 half I volunteered to go back to Vietnam.

30 KC: Is that right?

31 DS: Yeah.

1 KC: What led you to want to go back?

2 DS: Well, I felt that I could still make a contribution if I could find a job that
3 could utilize my talents and I wrote to several general officers over there and finally got a
4 job as a G-3 of a 1st Field Force. I spent a year as a G-3 of 1st Field Force.

5 KC: And where was this based out of?

6 DS: Pardon? It was based in Nha Trang.

7 KC: Out of Nha Trang. All right, now, when did you go back to the theater then?
8 '69?

9 DS: Yes.

10 KC: Okay. Any idea what month it may have been?

11 DS: Let me think. I think it was July or August but I'm a little vague on that. I'd
12 have to look it up.

13 KC: What is going to be your role here? What is your position with the 1st Field
14 Force out of Nha Trang? What are you going to be doing here?

15 DS: I was the operations officer, the G-3.

16 KC: Okay. What sort of operations were you working on here with them?
17 Anything in particular? Anything stand out?

18 DS: Mostly it was support of ARVN units, support of province operations, and
19 support of Special Forces camps. I Field Force had the 4th Division and some aviation
20 assets, engineering assets, and one brigade of the 101st Airborne Division that eventually
21 went back to the 101st, and a combined task force called Task Force South. We worked
22 very closely with II Corps headquarters, the ARVN II Corps headquarters, which was
23 located in Pleiku, and as I say the various provinces in the AO.

24 KC: Now, in your position as S-3, I assume you weren't going out into the field
25 anymore?

26 DS: Pardon me?

27 KC: As operations officer, I assume you weren't going back to field anymore?

28 DS: No, not directly. I went out for a lot of inspection and observation but, no, I
29 didn't go out in the field at all.

30 KC: Okay, well, Colonel this is a question that begs to be asked. Can you tell me
31 what you saw different from when you left in 1967 and returned in the summer of 1969?

1 DS: There was a greater activity. Rockets being fired into various camps. There
2 was a lot of small firefights in the villages, much more so than when I left in '67.

3 KC: So enemy activity in your area had picked up, then?

4 DS: Right.

5 KC: Okay. What about the American military? Were there changes in the way the
6 American military was operating then, as opposed to before?

7 DS: No, I don't think so. I think they were still operating under the same general
8 guidance and rules that I saw when I was with the 9th Division.

9 KC: What about the attitude of the American soldiers there? Had it changed at
10 all?

11 DS: I wasn't close enough to the soldiers to really answer that question. I sensed
12 that after Tet there was a greater lack of confidence in the Vietnamese, the ARVN, than
13 there had been before, but again that was a very vague impression because I didn't get to
14 talk to many of the troopers on the ground.

15 KC: Well, you are back in—you left when Lyndon Johnson was president and
16 you came back when Richard Nixon was president. What did you think about the new
17 president?

18 DS: I didn't understand that question.

19 KC: I'm sorry. When you left Vietnam the first time around, in 1967, November
20 of '67, Lyndon Johnson was president. This was his war up to that time. When you
21 arrived back at Nha Trang in July of 1969, Richard Nixon was president of the United
22 States. What did you think of Nixon's approach to the war?

23 DS: I thought he was a little more aggressive, possibly gave MACV a little more
24 leeway and didn't try to influence—this is an impression, now—that influenced the
25 conduct of the war. There was a lot more bombing of North Vietnam than under Lyndon
26 Johnson, as I recall.

27 KC: Did you have more confidence or less confidence in the way that Nixon
28 would fight the war?

29 DS: Have more what?

30 KC: Did you have more or less confidence in Nixon's approach than you did
31 Johnson's approach to fighting the war?

1 DS: Less, I would say.

2 KC: Less. Why do you say that?

3 DS: Just, again, I'm vague but it was an impression.

4 KC: Okay. How long were you going to be here in Nha Trang?

5 DS: A year.

6 KC: One-year tour.

7 DS: Yeah.

8 KC: Okay. What, if anything, stands out about your time here in Nha Trang?

9 Anything, any particular operations that you were involved in that you felt were

10 particularly fruitful? Were there any major frustrations that you faced here in 1969,

11 anything like that?

12 DS: Yes. One thing in particular, we—my G-3 Plans Section came up with some

13 scenarios of what might happen in various parts of our AO. Two of them came exactly as

14 they had envisioned it. What was an attack on Special Forces camp, Bu Prang and Duc

15 Lap and we kept adding troops and adding troops and adding troops to support it and, as I

16 say, it unfolded pretty much as the planners had envisioned it. The other one was up at

17 Tan Canh where they attacked a Special Forces FOB, forward operating base, and again

18 the whole province was involved in that operation and we had to send a lot of support up

19 there.

20 KC: How would you rate your time there at Nha Trang as ops officer? Was this

21 something that you felt good about when you were finished after your one year tour?

22 DS: Yes, I enjoyed the work. I had a good rapport with General Corcoran, the 1st,

23 I Field Force commander when I first got there and later on General Collins who replaced

24 him. I had the usual problems with coordination and a few arguments or disagreements

25 with the chief of staff of the field force, but in general I was satisfied that I made some

26 contribution.

27 KC: Well, you were there from July of '69 to July of 1970. During this time, of

28 course, Richard Nixon authorizes the invasion of Cambodia.

29 DS: Right.

30 KC: What was your opinion of that move?

1 DS: I thought it was long overdue. Quite often in firefights the enemy, the VC,
2 just went across the border and our rules of engagement authorized us to fire as they left,
3 but once they were over there we could not cross the border with our troops and it was
4 very frustrating. The men, especially, got frustrated about that. Many times, General
5 Corcoran or General Collins and I conferred about the rules of engagement, whether or
6 not we could do something to deny the safe haven and when President Nixon authorized
7 the incursion into Cambodia it was a very welcome decision.

8 KC: All right, now, you are also there at a time when the Vietnamization phase of
9 the war is beginning to gain steam. That was one of the things that Nixon was going to
10 do. You had worked with the ARVN in a variety of different capacities up to this point,
11 so I think that your opinion—you can offer a very unique look at this. What was your
12 opinion of the Vietnamization policy and process, the way it was carried out?

13 DS: I thought it was overdue. I made the point earlier that I thought we ought to,
14 we should be turning over more and more of the combat to the ARVN and we should
15 assume a supporting role. We had the gunships and the aircraft and other support that
16 they needed. But the ground forces should be predominantly ARVN. The problem was
17 that we never really gave them the support they needed. Certainly in the end when we
18 deserted Vietnam and cut off any supplies, we doomed them to defeat.

19 KC: You used the word “deserted.” Is that the way you feel about the way the
20 United States left South Vietnam?

21 DS: Absolutely.

22 KC: Absolutely.

23 DS: I think when we went through our ground troops it was with the tacit
24 understanding that we would continue to support the ARVN with equipment and supplies
25 and ammunition and so on. We didn’t do that.

26 KC: What was your opinion of the final peace accord?

27 DS: I thought it was poorly constructed. It was overly optimistic. It assumed a
28 greater faith on the part of the North Vietnamese than was warranted. The haggle over the
29 size of the table at which they were going to talk was an indication of the stupidity of a
30 lot of it.

1 KC: Well, you leave in July of 1970, summer of 1970. Where do you go from this
2 position?

3 DS: I went up north to be the chief of staff of the 101st.

4 KC: Okay. Tell me about this time.

5 DS: Well, it was a—I had known the commanders of the 101st, first General
6 Wright then—now my memory fails. They had been classmates of mine at the Advanced
7 Course at Benning. So I asked them to, if they would give me the job of chief of staff of
8 the division and it was arranged that they would. I wish I could remember the name of the
9 division commander when I took or when I assumed the job. Anyway, he soon left and
10 there was an interim phase when the assistant division commander was in charge before
11 the replacement came in.

12 KC: Why did you want this position, chief of staff of the 101st?

13 DS: Well, it was one of those things that you aspire to, one of the jobs that I think
14 any combat arms officer would think was a worthy job to have.

15 KC: Was there anything in particular about the 101st that led you to them?

16 DS: Well, of course, I was Airborne so I naturally looked to it. But as I say, it was
17 my relationship with the division commanders. I knew them and could speak to them
18 informally and I got permission to—well, got authority to move up there.

19 KC: How long were you going to be in this position, chief of staff?

20 DS: I extended for a year.

21 KC: You extended for a year. So you are going to be there until the summer of
22 1971, then?

23 DS: Yeah. But I didn't last that long. I don't know whether I was fired or what
24 policy changed, but I was only chief of staff for about five months.

25 KC: Well, what happened here? Can you explain this to me?

26 DS: I don't know what happened. All of a sudden I was told that USARV thought
27 I had been in-theater too long and that it was time for me to go.

28 KC: Was there any indication in your job performance or anyone's dissatisfaction
29 with what you were doing as chief of staff?

30 DS: Not that I know of. I got a Legion of Merit when I left the division. I was a
31 little disappointed in the efficiency report I got, which was sort of damning with faint

1 praise or whatever. The first efficiency report I got from—oh, damn—the first
2 commander I served under was very good, was very high. I couldn't understand the
3 difference, but that's all water under the dam. I don't want to speculate about it.

4 KC: Sure, sure. Hmm. Interesting. So after five months with the 101st you move
5 on to your next assignment. Where was that?

6 DS: TECOM, the Test and Evaluation Command.

7 KC: Okay. Based out of where?

8 DS: Aberdeen Proving Ground.

9 KC: Okay, all right. What were you going to be doing here?

10 DS: Deputy chief of staff for administration.

11 KC: And how long were you in this position at Aberdeen?

12 DS: I was there a year and a half. And then went down to Fort Bragg as the
13 President of the Airborne Communications and Electronics Board.

14 KC: How did you get this position?

15 DS: Pardon?

16 KC: How did you get this position?

17 DS: I badgered the commanding general and finally he gave to me.

18 KC: It seems that you've learned some lessons along the way and you learned that
19 badgering for a good position is not a terrible way to go about this.

20 DS: Well, I had a very rapport with General Brown who was the TECOM
21 commander. He had been the assistant corps, or I Field Force commander part of the time
22 that I was G-3 there. So I knew him before I was assigned to TECOM. Actually, when I
23 first got to TECOM, General Isenhower, spelled differently than Ike, was the
24 commanding general. Several months after I got there, General Brown took over. As I
25 say, I had an in with General Brown and so I kept badgering him because I wanted a
26 command again. I actually wanted to go out to Yuma and take command of the Yuma
27 Proving Ground but he said he thought a married officer would do better out there
28 because they had just problems with the dependents. So anyway, I got the job at the Test
29 Board at Fort Bragg.

1 KC: All right, now, while you are moving around here in the States from
2 Aberdeen down to Fort Bragg, what is the timeframe we are looking at here? This is in
3 1971, 1972?

4 DS: Yes.

5 KC: Okay, so we still have American ground forces in Vietnam. Again, I'm going
6 to ask you this question: How closely were you following the progress of the war as the
7 United States began its eventual withdrawal?

8 DS: Not as closely I had when I was in Europe. I was, at that time I was getting
9 more and more irritated at the anti-war demonstrations that were here than I was
10 interested in what was going on in Vietnam. When I left, I remember before I left I Field
11 Force we had devised a plan for the phase out of the units in I Field Force to include the
12 4th Division. I did watch that take place. I watched that closely because I had been
13 involved in the planning. I really didn't follow the ground combat very closely at all.

14 KC: Well, you bring up a topic that I was going to get to here pretty quickly and
15 that is the anti-war movement in the United States. You are seeing this firsthand in 1971
16 and 1972. Can you give me your opinion of that? What did you see and how did you
17 react to it?

18 DS: Well, of course, I was outraged at the idea that we had troops fighting and
19 here were people castigating them and protesting against it. But I also felt that this was a
20 reflection of the media coverage and that a lot of these people that were protesting were
21 ill-informed on what our purposes had been in Vietnam, why we were there, what we
22 were doing, and how we were doing it. Of course, the likes of Jane Fonda and her ilk just
23 blew my mind.

24 KC: Well, Colonel, having fought in the Second World War and in Korea and in
25 Vietnam, again, you were in a unique position to, or I think you are in a unique position
26 to be able to offer your impression of the way American society reacted to or dealt with
27 each of these three conflicts. Obviously, the Second World War, hero's welcome for the
28 soldiers who were coming home. That was the "good war" if you put that in quotes.
29 Korea was much, much, much, more cloudy.

30 DS: It was ignored, really.

1 KC: Yes absolutely, absolutely. And then, of course, Vietnam with the vehement
2 anti-war protest. What in your opinion was it about these conflicts that led to this kind of
3 gradual antipathy for or just downright hatred for or abhorrence of war from 1945 to
4 1972? Was it the wars or was it the changes in the American society, do you think, or a
5 combination of both, that led to this?

6 DS: Well, first of all, I think it was a lack of clarity on the part of the
7 administrations in explaining why we had gone into Vietnam, why we felt it necessary to
8 support the South Vietnamese against the North, and how we were prosecuting the war.
9 Again, I think it was a lot of misinformation that was being deliberately or inadvertently
10 said through the media. I agree with you that things had changed in the social structure of
11 the country. That there was this aversion to the draft that had been built up by the
12 counter-establishment culture and all of these things contributed to this violent anti-war
13 element.

14 KC: Well, you were in a position to see the end of all three of these conflicts.
15 What did it mean to you, individually?

16 DS: Great relief, all of them. Especially at the end of World War II, I was
17 delighted that we did not have to enter, have to fight for the Japanese islands. My division
18 was one of those that was scheduled to make the initial landings. I was happy that we
19 didn't have to do that. I felt about Korea that we had left it unsolved. That we hadn't—we
20 were back exactly in the same position that we started from and nothing had really
21 changed the situation at all, and so I was uneasy about that and a little disappointed. And
22 of course, as I told you, I was very unhappy with the way we handled the end of the
23 Vietnamese war.

24 KC: Well, Colonel, is there anything else you'd like to mention, to get on the
25 record?

26 DS: No, I can't think of anything.

27 KC: We've drained you dry.

28 DS: Yeah. Well, between the discussions and the information I sent you, I think
29 you've got all of my thoughts.

30 KC: We have all of Col. Don Seibert we can get, huh?

31 DS: Right.

1 KC: Well, thank you very much, Colonel.