The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Carmine DelGrosso
Conducted by Kelly Crager
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors
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Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an oral history interview with Colonel Sean, or Carmine, DelGrosso.

Carmine DelGrosso: Put Carmine down, yeah.

KC: Carmine, okay. Today is October 18, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University and Colonel DelGrosso is joining me from his home in San Clemente, California. Colonel, to begin this interview, I'd like to get some biographical information if I may. Could you tell me when you were born and where?

CD: I was born in New York City on January 14, 1942.

KC: And what were your parents' names?

CD: My parents were Irish-Italian second generation, and my mother was a housewife, and my dad was a longshoreman.

KC: Now did you have any brothers or sisters?

CD: Yeah, I have one brother Rob who is five years younger than me and was also a Marine Corps officer wounded in Vietnam. He served in Vietnam throughout 1968,'69. In fact, we both served in-country together.

KC: Is that right?

CD: Yeah, which is really not the policy, but on the home front we told my mother I was in Japan. So, for my Christmas present in 1968 and '69 were ski sweaters.

KC: (Laughing) Not something that would have been all that handy in Vietnam.

CD: Yeah, but the Marine Corps policy was no two sons in country at the same time.

KC: That's very interesting. Well, you said your father was a longshoreman and your mother was a stay-at-home mom. Of course, you had this older brother. Tell me about your family life. Did you grow up there in New York?

CD: There's an old saying in the Catholic Church; the Jesuits and the Marine Corps, they were all the same. So, I came from a very Italian-Irish neighborhood, attended Catholic schools, and then went on to Fordham University on a track scholarship and entered the Marine Corps through what's called a PLC, Platoon Leader's Corps program and was commissioned upon graduation in 1963. I had a wonderful, stable, happy child life on the streets of New York and got to see a lot of the world without having to leave town.

KC: I'm sure that you did. Going back to this time, you're growing up in the 1940s and 1950s. What sort of things do you remember, if any, about larger global events? Things like the Cold War and different developments and events in the Cold War?

CD: Ironic, the owner of the Catholic School—I went to the largest Catholic School in the United States with four thousand kids. We went to eight to twelve and twelve to four. There was not much reliance on the sciences. We did not have laboratories and biology and all that sort of supporting equipment. So, the emphasis in Catholic school is on the liberal arts and particular history current events. Even at a young age, in seventh and eighth grade, looking back I thought my awareness of geography, which was a mainstay then, which I regret, is not taught in schools today. I find, in history, and between the legs of geography and history, you've got a pretty good appreciation for political events worldwide. I find in general, today's children, they understand so many events, but they can't put them on the skeletal frame of history. They can't tell you what the event was and the timeframe. My point is, back then I thought I had an awareness. Particularly events in Indochina and the French in the 1950s, all when I was just in the seventh and eighth grade.

KC: Right, well, tell me about some of those things that you remember. Again, the French experience is going to lead into the American experience.

CD: Could you say that again?

KC: Yes, tell me about some of these things that you remember. Which of these events stand out to you?

CD: Of course, I remember the French at Dien Bien Phu and looking at a map and trying to appreciate the strategic consequences of how fair-skinned Europeans were

involved in that part of Asia in history and what the significance of all that in Dien Bien Phu. Then, of course, like many children in my generation, in '57 the concept of Sputnik, and that's an eclectic impact on the world and what that meant in the beginning of the Space Race. I also understood World War II and many of the documentaries on TV then was *Victory at Sea*. I understood Eisenhower to be a prominent general officer. So, I thought I had a pretty good, at my age, an appreciation of current events that occurred offshore.

KC: How well did you do in school?

CD: I was a great student. I was a good student. An A student. I had partial scholarships for scholastics and academics in high school. I went to Fordham University on a track scholarship. I was on the dean's list two years until I left.

KC: When did you enter Fordham?

CD: I entered Fordham in the Fall of 1959.

KC: The fall of 1959. All right, here you are, a young man who has done very well in school up to this point with a Catholic school education. You seem to be—I don't want to say worldly at this point, but certainly aware of things that were going on in the world and the cultural influences growing up in New York as you said, were prominent. What did you want to do as a young man entering Fordham University?

CD: Well, Fordham is well known not only for Vince Lombardi and Frankie Frisch and so on, but as a good pre-law school. It's a Jesuit institution. I knew, at that time, with my family upbringing in the streets of New York and with an immigrant background, I owed a debt of thoughts to the country. So, the first thing to do when I was figuring out whether I wanted to grow up and be a lawyer or not. Was to do what I perceived to be right in service to the country. By far and away for me, the Marines, I dealt with the most challenging, the best institution. I could prove myself further just like on the athletic field with some time in the Marines. I was off on a regular commission upon completion of the PLC program, but I turned it down. I said, "Listen, I can't spend four years in the Marines. Three years is enough until I go through it. At the end of the three years, then I'll see if I want to stay or not." So, I chose the Marines. There was a lot in my neighborhood, too. There's a good population of generational US Marines in New

York City area. Many of my friends from college also had signed up for the Marine Officer Candidate Program.

KC: What was Fordham University like when you entered it?

CD: What was Fordham University like? It was a Jesuit Institution, so it was steeped in liberal arts. I chose liberal arts. In fact, the first day of Greek—you had a choice, math or Greek—the professor in Greek said, "Well, we all know why you're here." We looked at each other puzzled and the answer was, he said, "You're all refugees from the math." So, I had a good liberal arts education steeped in Greek and free additionally is Latin beyond what I had at the high school level. I got a good grounding in political science as a BA with the idea that being grounding to go forward towards law school.

KC: Okay, now again, as a young man at a Catholic school in 1960, I would assume that you were quite aware of the election of John Kennedy. What was your opinion of Kennedy? What did he mean to you?

CD: Back then, in the grand picture, my family grew up blue collar Democrat. But the nature of American politics was changing dramatically so I had an appreciation for Kennedy, but I don't think I was swept up in all that Camelot politics, but rather, after a year and while he was handed from Eisenhower, I realized that the United States was in a worldwide confrontation with the Soviet Union in many dimensions. Particularly in Africa. I abide Kennedy. I thought that if he had lived, he would have been politically judged as a failure. The concept of martyrs in American politics goes back a long way.

KC: Sure, sure.

CD: I thought his tenure as president was not very successful, both domestically and to a degree internationally, but unregretably the man perished so I had so many mixed emotions. And like most Americans, I can remember exactly where it was when it was announced that he passed away.

KC: And where was that?

CD: I was on the drill field at Quantico undergoing six months of The Basic School where all Marine officers, regardless of their military occupation specialty (MOS), spent six months. Even pilots back then before you were assigned to Fleet Marine Forces.

KC: All right, tell me about the things that you would do at Fordham that was not academically related? What was your life like at Fordham outside of school? What sort of things were you involved in?

CD: My life was basically a college boy that all of a sudden walked out of New York and crossed into the Mason-Dixon Line and at Quantico, although it's thirty miles from Washington, D.C., I thought I was in the Deep South. I had the same aspirations to get an education, to serve the country, and chase a few skirts.

KC: In no particular order, I would assume.

CD: In no particular order.

KC: All right, now you finished Fordham in 1963. So, you were there for things such as the Bay of Pigs crisis, Missile Crisis. You mentioned early that—

CD: Well, there's a little funny thing now. The Bay of Pigs, yeah, I was politically aware of it at the collegiate level, but then all of a sudden when I was at Quantico, and I was at Quantico from September of '63 through March of '64. Many of my classmates there were the Cubans who were traded for tractors.

KC: Really?

CD: You see, after the Bay of Pigs when they were released in late '61, '62, probably two hundred of those Cuban officers were put into the US Army, they were given a choice. Some went in the Air Force. The American government, because they were politically sensitive, didn't know what to do with these people. Some of them, I can remember, had three in my company who were from the Bay of Pigs had spent almost a year in the US Army and gone to US Army OCS (Officer Candidate School) and then said, "Well, let's go work with the Marines for a while." So, they were in my basic class. So that meant nightly I could get their view of what happened at the Bay of Pigs.

KC: And what was their view?

CD: They were second lieutenants in the Marine Corps.

KC: What was their view? What sort of things did they tell you about that?

CD: Well, first of all a lot of them had spent time in prison while awaiting release, to my recollection. They were very tough people. They didn't moan or complain about their time in prison. A lot of them were tortured, but they were very motivated. They did see someday a free Cuba, and they sincerely believed that the United States government,

at an undetermined time in the future, would again use their talents and newly gained expertise to again try to recapture Cuba.

KC: All right, now you finish in ‘63 and you had already chosen the Marine Corps. You talked about the influences of the neighborhood, the people that you knew, your friends. You’re going into the Marine Corps proper. You’re going to be commissioned as a second lieutenant. What did you really know about the Marine Corps? Were you steeped in its history prior to entering?

CD: I knew I felt that I was on a chosen path. I believe I understood the concept of service. I felt that if you had to do national service, the best vehicle for me was the Marines. I knew not everybody was cut out for it. So, I was very confident in myself that I had made the right choice, in terms of the next step and an unfolding life at the age of twenty.

KC: All right, now when you enter the Corps—again, second lieutenant, you go to Basic School. What were your aspirations in the Marine Corps? Did you want to go into law in the Marine Corps? Did you want to get into more traditional line such as infantry or artillery or anything like that? What did you want to do?

CD: Well ironically, I brought some baggage from college with me in terms of track and field. It was an Olympic year, and I thought I had an outside shot for the Olympics. Back then, the Olympics was composed of—like a certain event of 800 meters was the three AAU, American Athletic Union champions to three national collegiate champions, and the seventh person in that final would be the inter-service champion. So, I thought I had a very outside shot at 800 meters and I went to Basic School. In the spring of 1964, I was on the track team. So, I got out a number of events to be able to go to Annapolis every day to train. So, I built up. I would have liked to be in the infantry, but to my shock and chagrin when I got out of Basic School, they made me a supply officer.

KC: (Laughing)

CD: Which I protested vehemently. This was well beyond any scope I had thought, and I had been an honor man in the PLC program, I did well among my peers, so I thought my dream was to go into the infantry. So, I spent June and July, because I did not make the Olympic team, protesting around Quantico and remonstrating to the headquarters that this has been a serious mistake. Fortunately, I won that battle so I was

assigned in late June, as an infantry officer. You see, if you had gone to a formal school, you could never change your MOS. The government had invested money in you and that was it. I had not gone through formal school and was able to arrive in July on Okinawa as an infantry officer just suited me fine.

KC: Tell me how you were able to protest successfully, this assignment as a supply officer?

CD: Well, during my time on a track team, after graduation from basic in March, I had March, April, May on the track team where I was assigned at mainside of Quantico as a sort of an aspiring supply officer awaiting school. I protested vehemently with a New York attitude to those I was reporting to. From captains and majors and they went along with me. I put in a request for transfer to remonstrate this fact that I had been severely misassigned. The monitor, sort of a detail in the Marine Corps, I went to see him for both the infantry and supply. I explained my case to him that I thought this was prejudicial to me and it cancelled. I was not going to go on in the Marine Corps after my initial obligation if I was going to be assigned supply officer. So, I powered him, and I won. One day the infantry monitor called me up during track practice. In June he said one word, "Pack." He said, "You're going to Okinawa in a week." So off I went for two weeks leave, say goodbye to my parents in New York, and headed for Okinawa in mid-June 1964.

KC: This must have been pretty exciting times for a young man.

CD: Yeah, it was. With two or three lieutenants who I met in Buffalo, New York, we drove across the country. That's the first time I had ever been across my country. I began to appreciate the depth and the diversity and the size of it all.

KC: Tell me about that trip. What sort of things stand out to you as you look back?

CD: We took Route 66. We picked it up somewhere around Chicago. I kept comparing it to my mind, "Route 66, what happened to the Eisenhower interstate system that I had studied in school? One of his great contributions was the interstate highway." I found out that it wasn't all finished yet. It was pretty rugged back there. I remember stopping in Las Vegas, which was not much given New York's standards. Just wandering around Las Vegas, which was just beginning in 1964, as compared to what it is now. I

remember the California beaches. Then I took a plane up to San Francisco and then we traveled to Okinawa on an old military Globemaster. It was somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty-four hours in the air. I arrived on Okinawa about the 1st of July 1964. I found out eventually that thirty days before I was competing for the Marines. One of my teammates in the Marine Corps back then was Billy Mills who went on, ironically, that same year, in August, to win the Olympic gold medal in the 5,000 meters and set a world record.

KC: Describe for me what your duties were going to be in Okinawa. You're a second lieutenant. What are you going to be doing there?

CD: The Marine Corps at that time, had what we called trans-placement battalions. Where a battalion would be formed up, particularly on the west coast of Camp Pendleton. They would train together and they would be locked. All the personnel would be frozen for a fourteen-month period. Then they would train and build up from squad tactics to company tactics to battalion tactics. Of course, six or eight weeks. And then that battalion would usually go by ship to Okinawa. Then on Okinawa on that thirteen month cycle they would train in the Philippines, stop in Hong Kong, maybe even get down as far as Indonesia or Singapore. This was called a float, a thirteen-month float for peace time. That concept still lives in the Marine Corps when we keep three or four reinforcement battalions afloat in what's called the Marine Expeditionary Unit or Marine Amphibious Unit that floats around in the Mediterranean or the Pacific for six months. Now, having said that I was not in a trans-placement battalion because I flew into Okinawa and I was a brand new 0301 which means infantry designation, but not yet fully qualified as an infantry officer. You have to spend ninety days in an infantry battalion and then be certified. I flew in and was assigned to a battalion which had already been formed. Probably with functioning for four or five months as sort of a newbie that was out. By the way, I was the only second lieutenant in that battalion. All the other lieutenants had, by now, moved up to first lieutenant. So, I was assigned to that battalion to gain my ninety-day authorization or verification as a qualified infantry battalion. I was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines. As soon as I got to that battalion, I was there for ten days. That battalion was sent afloat. So, I did a cruise that encompassed Taiwan, the Philippines, a stop in Hong Kong, and then magically what did we have? We had the Tonkin Gulf

incident. So, by late July I find myself afloat in a formed trans-placement battalion, 2/3. Floating off the coast of North Vietnam in the Tonkin Gulf and also occasionally floating down off of Saigon. So, I spent fifty-seven days in a row on the USS *Valley Forge* as a second lieutenant. As part of the Tonkin Gulf build up and responds to the Tonkin Gulf incident. Now, I didn't fully understand the Tonkin Gulf incident, but there were so many ships there I felt that I was in a World War II *Victory at Sea* movie. I would look at the horizon and there would be anywhere from thirty to fifty ships, a massed as a flotilla, which later became known as Yankee Station in the Tonkin Gulf. Well, into almost the end of October 1964.

KC: Now, you mentioned you weren't probably quite aware of all the ramifications of the incident at the Tonkin Gulf. What about the American involved there—

CD: We knew there had been an attack on the USS *Turner Joy*. Probably by small boats. We were convinced but didn't really know if they were Chinese or if they were Vietnamese. The intel filtering down at my level was basically, I spent most of my time getting my forty-three-man rifle platoon ready and sharp. We would shoot off the fan tail of the *Valley Forge* and tried to stay in, as best we can, physical shape. But the political and the palm that blew to military dimensions, the nature of the attack of the *Turner Joy*, and what that meant, we could only deduce by the amount of ships that we could see on the horizon. That something big was about to happen.

KC: Right, how aware were you of other developments and American policies and American actions in Vietnam? Or in Southeast Asia, generally, but in Vietnam in particular?

CD: Again, ironically as my paths in life later, led me into Chinese language studies. At one time I was the political military officer at the US embassy in Beijing fifteen years later. I had a pretty good understanding of the emerging threat of China. What an alliance with North Vietnam would mean. I understood the Laotian situation. So, I thought compared to my peers I had a pretty good historical understanding of what was coming to bear and could possibly occur in Southeast Asia and what those ramifications meant. What a possible frontal engagement with China and what that meant in view of our history in the Korean War and how that was a stalemate when that ended in March 5,

1953. I mean, that war ended because Stalin died on March 5, 1953. That war was shut down ninety days after Stalin. So, I understood the Russian component of the Korean War. I had studied that quite a bit. So, I realized that the United States, if we didn't tiptoe correctly, could wind up and engage fully with the Chinese of some sort in Asia. Vietnam would have been a likely place.

KC: Were you aware of the slow build up in South Vietnam by the United States in terms of the advisors that Kennedy and Johnson had in Vietnam?

CD: Was I aware of the buildup?

KC: Were you aware of the advisory effort there?

CD: I had Marines, even in that brief time in Okinawa, I was meeting junior Marine officers, captains, majors who had just returned from ninety-day periods with the Vietnamese Marine Corps. You wore their uniform, you ate their food, and you were treated with respect. It was called an advisor, but you weren't really an advisor, you were their access to their possible combined fire support of American fire power. Whether it would be air or naval. I knew of that experience, and I thought those were pretty neat young Marine officers that were selected for that. Professionally it was a feather in their cap that underwent that type of experience.

KC: Is that something that appealed to you at that early stage?

CD: Again, I kept that in my mental file. I said "Gee, if that opportunity would arrive for me. I might avail myself of it."

KC: Of course, it would later on, but we're not to that point yet, right.

CD: It was not a burning goal for me in 1964. I was just aware of those people. Later, when ashore in 1965, I again ran into Army advisors, Special Forces people, and my own Marine Corps people who were Vietnamese advisors with the Vietnamese Marines. So, I began to understand in a spectrum of warfare what the component was and what you would do as an advisor with the host government. Whether it be Vietnam or Taiwan or elsewhere.

KC: Right, at the end of your fifty-seven days, you said that you were traveling up and down the coast there. Once you get the order to stand down, you're not going to land, you're going to be called back. I assume you go back to Okinawa at this point?

CD: Yes, when the buildup was completed and there was a stand down in November, I went back and that coincided with my completion of my ninety days as an infantry officer. So now, I had a choice, that battalion was going back to the United States. So, I had to find myself a job on Okinawa with either an infantry battalion or something close to it. I was able to negotiate going from an infantry battalion to a ground reconnaissance battalion, the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion. Which is the basic elements, do the same thing as the infantry, only in long distance patrolling. So, I was very happy. I felt very fortunate that as an infantry officer. I continued to practice my trade in an operational reconnaissance battalion located at Camp Schwab, Okinawa.

KC: How did you wrangle this position?

CD: Say again, please.

KC: How did you wrangle this? How did you arrange this?

CD: The battalion I was with had to make out a fitness report on me and they thought, given that I was the only second lieutenant in the battalion and then had done a satisfactory job while afloat, just two steps short of going to shore, that I deserved to continue. I suspect they thought I was pretty good at my trade. So, they made a few phone calls to over two thirds of the recon battalion. That was my brother's so when I moved—and I didn't even have to leave Camp Schwab, which was the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines were stationed. That was also the home of the 3rd Recon Battalion. I was able to walk across the street and continue on in what was a thirteen-month overseas tour for me. So, I got very lucky. I initially went right afloat for the battalion and probably after four months a float, we returned Okinawa into an operational ground reconnaissance battalion.

KC: Tell me about 3rd Recon Battalion when you arrived there.

CD: I got to do some interesting things with them and ironically, I was chosen, in January, of 1965 to take a ground reconnaissance platoon of twenty-three men to Taiwan and to be matched with a Chinese Marine reconnaissance platoon and operate from the very tip of Taiwan in the south of Taiwan for three weeks working our way north. The concept was each ground reconnaissance platoon had four men. My two junior people worked for my counterparts. My two senior people had two Chinese Marines. So, we had four—no, we had eight, four-man teams. Each with two Chinese and two American Marines with a lot of arm and hand signals. I spoke no Chinese at the time. We learned a

few words. We worked our way in the field due north for over a hundred and fifty miles and three weeks in Taiwan trying to document, "Could we work with a Chinese reconnaissance platoon? What were some of the pitfalls? Would our equipment match? Were we physically trained for the terrain and the weather? And living, eating Chinese food in the field and vice versa." Just seeing what that mix would bring in terms of cooperation. It was very closely watched by authorities on Taiwan and the 3rd Marine Division at Okinawa. So, I got the joy of being able to lead that platoon for three weeks in January. Every now and then I come back and it's February. In February, everybody's starting to get the feeling that we're really going to go to Vietnam. So, the intensity is getting ready to have platoons and companies from the reconnaissance battalion dispatched to Vietnam was pretty well clear in our minds. In fact, the battalion commander had an interesting concept. He was going to take the captains off the staff of the battalion and put them down in letter companies. And take the lieutenants which you could control and make them up at the principal staff offices. So, we had the most experience, officers running the four companies or three companies, rather, and the lieutenants learned close to their first exposure to staff work from a very capable battalion commander.

KC: Yeah, that's really interesting. As I was looking through some of the information that you sent me over the weekend, I saw that you were holding these staff positions still as a lieutenant. I was thinking that's a little strange. I guess that kind of clears it up.

CD: Dr. Crager, could you say that once again. I missed that completely with this phone that I got here.

KC: Sorry.

CD: That's not your fault.

KC: I was looking at some of the information you sent me over the weekend, and I noticed you held these staff positions as a lieutenant, and I thought it was kind of strange that you were holding these staff positions at this early stage in your career and that explains why that was.

CD: Right, this was the credit to the brilliance of the gentleman's name Lieutenant Colonel Doc, Doc was his nickname, Blanchet. His concept was to take his

talented captains that were on the staff, move them down to the rifle companies to get ready to take the companies wherever we were going to deploy and he'd keep an eye on the lieutenants and teach them something about staff. There was a point there, for a month, that I was the S-3 as a brand-new first lieutenant of a reconnaissance battalion.

KC: Huh.

CD: Which I had a lot of pride in doing that.

KC: Oh, I'm sure, I'm sure.

CD: Also, at that time, there were four companies at 3rd Recon Battalion, but one of those companies has always been on Hawaii, it was Company B. And Company B arrived in Okinawa to join up with the battalion which was another sign that something was going to happen. That company was led by First Lieutenant Frank Reisner, who was later killed in July of 1965 and was the first Marine officer to win the Medal of Honor in Vietnam. So, Frank was senior to me. He was a contemporary and Frank brought Company B together and four reconnaissance companies on Okinawa by the beginning of March of 1965. Also, one platoon was a float with 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines off of Vietnam which 3/9 was the first battalion to go ashore in Vietnam about March 7th, I think. If I recall, I'd have to check. Maybe March 5, 1965. That was commanded by Lieutenant Bill Vankat. Then, by that time, Company D had been pegged under the command of Captain Pat Collins, a very distinguished officer to fly into Vietnam to link up with that platoon that Vankat commanded to shore, gathered recon assets around Da Nang, and prepare for the battalion follow on that probably happened three weeks later. The remainder of the battalion came from Okinawa and flying and built around the reconnaissance assets that were already ashore under Captain Collins. At that time, Lieutenant Colonel Blanchet said, "DelGrosso, you're going with Collins." So, I got to fly in, in the initial fly-in wave a week after Vankat had come across the beach in the Da Nang area. So, I was ashore probably late March 1965.

KC: Why were you chosen for this position?

CD: I'm sorry. Why was I chosen for this position?

KC: Yes.

CD: I don't know. I had a rapport with Captain Collins. Captain Collins' wife ironically lived in the Bronx in close proximity to my parents. So, I knew of his wife,

Mary Collins, and Captain Collins sort of shared kind of a New York rapport and I had a lot of respect for him, and he was looking for people to go with him and I was jumping up and down, "Take me." I asked Doc Blanchet if I could go and he said yes. Again, luck of the draw, that I was selected to go with Captain Collins.

KC: Tell me about this, coming ashore, what is your role going to be? What is your mission going to be? Tell me about going ashore in this new effort in Vietnam?

CD: My role, initially, was as a platoon commander. Now, again at this time, reconnaissance platoon commander I revert to the idea of enclave theory, the Marines were assigned at Phu Bai, Da Nang, and Chu Lai. I'll tell you an interesting story on Chu Lai, but I was assigned to the Da Nang area to support the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade. The expedition or brigade, which had landed in late March around the airfield in Da Nang and was beginning to expand west. As a platoon commander at Fort Collins, the 9th MAB Commander, General Freddy Karch, a one-star, had concentrated two infantry battalions to protect the airfield and then beginning to probe and move west. One of the instruments he used in that probe was the reconnaissance company that's Captain Collins's Company D, 3rd Recon Battalion, to begin to move west and probe into the hills surrounding Da Nang and find out what was there, make contacts, and basically to expand the perimeter of the air field so we had enough room between the runways and the perimeter not to be able to take incoming mortar rounds or artillery at night. This presented a challenge in the rules of engagement. Could we move forward with loaded weapons? Under what circumstances could we use them? How to treat the locals? What constituted our abilities to distinguish between the Viet Cong and the locals? And a whole list of questions, particularly in terms of firepower because we were operating on somebody else's property. If we were to get into a bit of a scuffle, could we use our own artillery or do we have to coordinate that? Who in the Vietnamese government would be responsible to say, "Yes, you can fire artillery in support of the reconnaissance Marines." How far out are we to go at three thousand, ten thousand meters? If we would engage in a firefight and be wounded, could we use the Marine air ashore to support us? Who did we need permission? So, the whole idea of rules of engagement up and down the chain, we were the initial tests. So, round reconnaissance in four-man, sometimes company size, up to eighty people. Through the months of April and May began to tests concepts. 3rd

Reconnaissance Battalion, whole structured the mission was fairly new. The idea was to be able to operate four-man teams, but could four-man teams operate in that climate and that heat? How did they get water? Carry batteries for their radio? Number four, we realized that maybe the magic number for a reconnaissance battalion should be seven-man teams and begin to test with that. We send platoons out, twenty three-man platoons. So, we throw basically west and south of Da Nang. In fact, on April 25th, Collins took our company out and we were patrolling in a platoon sequence. First Platoon, ten minutes later Second Platoon following in the same path west, southwest of Da Nang, about fifteen miles. We got into one hell of a firefight.

KC: Is that right?

CD: Yes, and that is the first Marine major ground combat with the Viet Cong was Captain Collins and Company D, 3rd Recon Battalion engaged the VC at a place called Binh Thai, B-I-N-H T-H-A-I. We had a hell of a donnybrook. It went for about four hours and had a couple of guys wounded and then the rifle company that had been back on the strip, for just such emergencies, the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines Sparrowhawk was the concept was flown into support us. Then we got in pursuit of the Vietnamese, Viet Cong, something North Vietnamese and they broke off contact, but it was a long day. That was the first time US Marines had engaged in at least company-level combat with the Vietnamese.

KC: Well, let me ask you a few questions here. I think this is incredibly interesting.

CD: Can you say that again, please?

KC: Let me ask you a few questions here. All right, had you had any sort of training, had anyone talked to you about, had anyone prepared you for what kind of combat that you might encounter? Did they talk about the VC or the NVA (North Vietnam Army) and what kind of tactics to expect? How familiar were you with this potential enemy?

CD: A very good question. You learn fast. Now, all through the end of March and the first few weeks in April was about three weeks. In those three weeks, we would be patrolling every day. We started to shed pieces of equipment you didn't need. We came to appreciate to be able to travel light. We had a special dispensation from the

commanding general; we didn't use helmets. Helmets you couldn't hear with helmets at night. So, we were allowed to wear soft covers. So, we were lightly armed, we salvaged a whole bunch of plastic bags that could hold water. So, in our packs, we would be carrying water because of the tremendous heat and dust in April around the Da Nang area. We also began to realize when we did get shot occasionally, it might be a local VC or somebody in the village who might have thought we were French. There were a lot of those kinds of reverse psychological things going on, too. In fact, it was about the time when Marines changed the word expeditionary. At that time, it was the 9th Marine Expeditionary Unit that represented all the Marines ashore. That was changed to 9th MAB (Marine Amphibious Brigade) amphibious unit to dispel the idea that we might be somehow the heirs to the French expeditionary heritage, which was floating, we were told, among the local villages. So, as we progressed through April, we knew when we were getting shot at or getting engaged by some local rag tails. We could tell what a VC was. They basically had a mixture of arms, small arms. Different kinds of ammunition. That they kept under the boards in their village hooches. When we took that, on April 27th, took on that particular Vietnamese unit, they had heavy weapons, machineguns. Their tactics we found ourselves in a perfect, what's called, L, "Lima," shaped ambush. We were right smack in the middle of it. We knew we were into some first-rate troops. The intensity of the fire, the nature of the fire and their tactics and they had uniforms on, thought we were up against the higher grade of the VC. Which by deduction, we believed were the NVA.

KC: Now, you talked about learning these lessons as you were moving through on these patrols. You're dumping equipment. What sort of equipment would you dump and what would you take with you?

CD: The first thing you'd dump was your skivvies.

KC: Why?

CD: Because back in those times, we didn't have the rain-proof utilities. We had just standard old issues that were in the Marine Corps at the end of the Korean War. We were only beginning to hear about new utilities that if it rained on you, they would dry quick to material. So, you would walk, and it was a hundred-degree weather with skivvies. We would get rid of our skivvies. At that time, we began to be issued a new

jungle boot that had two holes in the side of each boot that if you would hit water in the water paddy, it would squirt the water out so the shoes would dry faster. We began to understand the nature of the rainforest. As we moved further left from Da Nang, when the rainy season came, you had to take your boots off every day, at least for a period of time. So, you didn't suffer a mild case of, you might say, emersion foot. We got into thinking lighter. All the things that we used to bring to the field, as if were deployed in Korea or even the Philippines, we began to jettison in the name of speed, anything that made noise. Some of these big knives and things these people are pictured with in today's movies that didn't go. We went as light, as dry as we could keep ourselves. We began to use plastic. I asked my mom to send me plastic bags that I would use to keep my maps in. Anything to prevent the rain from getting in. Certain key documents on codes for the radios, we would put those on plastic bags and carried them inside our utility jackets. Again, to make sure they were waterproof against the rain when it happened. So, there was a tendency to move toward lightness. Anything that could get rid of water that could be used and would be waterproof, even ammunition. How we carried our ammunition to waterproof it.

KC: What kind of weapons did you carry with you and how much ammunition did you take?

CD: Yes, well, at that time there were a number of debates on weapons, what were the ideal weapons. We arrived with the M-14, even reconnaissance troops carry the M-14. The debate was, upon a tradition, you only carry a small arm. When an officer has to use an M-14, you're pretty well in the middle. You have lost control and you're in control. So, it's kind of dashing to be able to just have a pistol. In an infantry unit, where you're surrounded by forty Marines with all that firepower, but in reconnaissance battalion the debate was, wait a minute, should an officer who's got a seven-man team also have a rifle? And if so, what should it be? And does this violate an old precept that officers only carry pistols? The decision in the battalion was, if it was a seven-man team, we would allow the officer, if need be, if we wanted to, depending on the nature of the threat and the distance, it would be from friendly lines, whether to bring a weapon or not. We also, fortunate with Captain Collins, we went down and bartered with the Special Forces for two, 60-millimeter mortars and six hundred rounds. We were able to

cumshaw. So, what we did in an eighty-man recon company, is we'd train the first sergeant and his four or five clerks, to operate these two sixty-millimeter mortars. So, in this way, if we went out in company size of eighty men, and the first sergeant went with us, we had our own artillery. We didn't have to wait for coordination of 105 or even air. We could immediately bring firepower to bear or only a lightly armed small reconnaissance company. Things during April and May was a tremendous learning curve that probably didn't stabilize until July on. Because this is the first time in the reconnaissance battalions, which had been an institution on paper since Korea, were beginning to be tested in the field situation. The concept of how far out should reconnaissance go? Well, the books and the doctrinal publications said, "Ten thousand meters from the front line." We didn't have front lines back then. I think we had certain installations like protecting the airfield. So, the rule of thumb became the distance that reconnaissance would be deployed depended on where the artillery fan would be. Now, the 105 would fire up to nine miles so anywhere where we could operate through a radio or a radio relay. Again, that's another subject, too, our radios were not that great. We had the old PRC-10. We would always have to set up relays on some of the high grounds. If you could contact through the PRC-10 artillery, we could operate in a fan up to a depth of eight miles and we could bring in air if we had the proper coordination through the Vietnamese. So, all these things were being learned. The nature of the patrol, the duration of the patrol could be three days, could be seven days. It depended again on the amount of weight you had to carry, the amount of water or if you had water accessible. If you had pills you could put in the water to purify the water. So, there were limiting factors on the degree of how long a patrol could go. But during this whole sixty-day period, we began to push west into the hills. We're talking to four hundred to eight hundred feet high due west of Da Nang and up the Song Thu Bon River into an area called Elephant Valley northwest of Da Nang. Due west of Da Nang there's an old French fort up on the hills called Ba Nha which at one time had been a French garrison, but also a luxury resort to get away from the heat up in the hills. Ba Nha was up, I think about three thousand feet. So, we'd operate out west toward Ba Nha and west toward Happy Valley in four-to eight-man teams. Or sometimes go as a company of eighty people. Most of the time, we'd walk in as a company or we would be flown in as a recon team during an insertion period. We

would usually insert teams as it got dark because darkness was your friend. We could get four men in about six or seven o'clock in the evening. If you didn't hear, the VC would use drums to signal that they knew you were in the area. If you landed about six or seven o'clock at night you were pursued by the VC with drums. Hopefully the cover of darkness would allow you to begin at night to go where you had to go. Reconnaissance patrols normally were somewhat passive in nature and just observed that far out and what was going on. That was another debate. If a reconnaissance team saw a major NVA force, even though they're for seven men out on the trail, should they engage with indirect fire or to engage them themself or to just report that a major enemy target just moved by? With Captain Collins, this notion of you're neatly disguised as a potted palm and you're out on the trail and you see the enemy go by, you just report, "Well, thirty VC just walked by me. About thirty NVA." That was anathema. Our rule was, despite the size of your force, engage them with either indirect fire or if need be, direct fire yourself. Even though reconnaissance is just to surveil, to watch and report, we found ourselves almost a small infantry unit and infantry units cause is to engage and destroy. We found ourselves at that role, almost acting as infantry and engaging often, VC and VC groups lodging in the four- or seven-man team.

KC: This is really interesting. Let's go back to weapons for just a moment. You've talked about the M-14 on these reconnaissance patrols, and you also mentioned the M-60. Both of these are large cumbersome weapons in their own way. Did you find them to be adequate for these recon patrols where you have to be swift, you have to be quiet, and you have to be agile? What kind of weapons did you find work the best?

CD: What we found worked best, which we found was awfully unique, we were the only company that did it. We had those two 60-millimeter mortars that we had gotten cumshaw from the Army to be able to send the first sergeant and three to four company (unintelligible) out there to use those two, 60-millimeter mortars. That was very reassuring for a small group to have our own self-contained artillery. At the personal level, we found the .45 adequate. We found the M-14 superb. Now, what made the M-14 so superb is, if an enemy was behind a tree, if you shot at that tree long enough with that M-14, it will blow the tree away and get him.

KC: It would eventually reach him if you kept firing.

CD: That's right, you just keep shooting at that tree and he will go away, one way or the other. We found it reliable, worked in water, worked in mud and we managed to keep it clean every evening. It was most reliable. The M-16 came in very late in my tour late in the fall of 1965. Before it arrived, there were horror stories about people trying to keep their M-16 clean, having problems keeping it clean. In the field, the stories went because the bullet tumbles from the M-16 and as it goes, it could deflect. So, if you were firing over grass, it could hit the grass and deflect. So, in terms of accuracy and the reliability that you were accustomed to with the M-14 and hell the VC was behind the tree, keep shooting at the tree and it'd go away. That did not apply with the M-16. It was a very delicate weapon that needed a lot of mothering. Now, if you hit a person in the arm, you could almost consider that person dead because if the bullet tumbled through the air and you hit a person in the arm, it might take off his whole arm. It was bone-shattering ammunition. That was the major advantage, if you hit somebody or dinged them or wounded them, you could probably count that as a kill. So, the base and the transition of a new weapon, people always resent it. There was an aspect of Vietnam, down in the company outhouses, sometimes when you're back at camp, people would scroll on the walls some pretty earthwise philosophy and it was one I never forgot. It said, "Never forget, the M-16 was built by the cheapest bidder." Implying that the weapon itself went to the lowest bidder and that's how much of government equipment is bought and purchased.

KC: Not a very reassuring thought.

CD: Not a reassuring thought. So again, it's amazing what makes you a believer. Initially having to come ashore armed with the M-14, it proved effective, reliable, and the bullets were bigger and there was a little more weight. Most Marines, even in the reconnaissance business, never balked at the reliability of the M-14. For the M-16, there were stories that didn't happen to recon people. You'd hear these stories from time to time about in the infantry or the US Army having lots of problems on the battlefield with the unreliability of the M-16. I take you're familiar with some of those stories.

KC: Sure.

CD: At my time and my place—you know, in Vietnam the experiences I was having in the Da Nang area in'65 and early'66 was not the same. It was like five or six

little cauldrons as an Army unit that would have been in the delta or up in the highlands and somewhere west of Saigon. It is very difficult to correlate the Army or the Marines unless you can set the timeframe and the locations and then do a comparative analysis.

KC: Right, because it's very different depending on where you were and when you were there.

CD: In fact, in the old days, when you got back, you'd buy somebody a beer. Then I reached a point in my own experiences of, "Where were you and when?" That dictated the parameters for a free beer or not.

KC: That's really interesting to hear that.

CD: Right, because you know I hear these stories someone will go, "Ah, I was in Vietnam." "Well, what were you, a box kicker or were you an Army medic or an Army pilot?" It differentiated and there were surgeons. In '68 and '69 they got beers; we were losing two hundred Marines a week. You began to differentiate as the years went on. What was your particular Vietnamese experience and where and under what conditions?

KC: All right, let's go back to these patrols again, these recon patrols. You're going out with four-, seven-, eight-man patrols. What did you find to be the most effective size, what did you find to be the proper range? What kind of tactics did you eventually settle on as being the right way to do it? Tell me about going out on a standard patrol.

CD: In the Da Nang area—again, this is different than Chu Lai or Phu Bai. What had happened to the battalion, we had sent a company up to Chu Lai who operated and supported the 4th Marines up there—4th Marine Regiment, but Company D, 3rd Recon battalion was sort of the general company in support of the 3rd Marine Division in the greater Da Nang tactical area of responsibility, T-A-O-R. Beyond the TAOR, which was drawn by the commanding general, what he considered his area of interest, we have what is called an R-A-O-R, a reconnaissance area of responsibility. You might say an additional belt of anywhere from a few thousand to ten thousand yards. So, we would do directed patrolling, and we found that seven-man teams were the best. You could send a seven-man team from five to seven days. They would basically—and remember we were sort of drawing the map at that time. We didn't know what was out there. We never got much aerial overview. We were just being issued new sets of maps. Initially we wanted

to show it using old French maps. I was very lucky because I had two years of French at Fordham so I could read some of the *Marchand* and some of the other words. As we transitioned to better maps in July, we were getting first rate topographical material that we could operate. We began to look at areas of approach into the Da Nang area that would spin off the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and come down into two big areas, three really. Down Happy Valley was a major area of logistic line of the supply to Da Nang area. Up in northwestern Da Nang at what was called Elephant Valley, it was a river. And then by sea. In fact, one time north of Da Nang there was an Esso refinery of Shell Oil. The very tip of the Bay of Tourane there, there was an island that we believed was the last jumping off place for armed caches coming out of the Da Nang area. So, we even once rented an eighty-man company raid from the sea against that island. So, we did everything from company raids at sea, all the way to initial seven-man patrols. Now, on those seven-man patrols we also believed who should be the leader. Now, a reconnaissance platoon company, a lieutenant, either first or second, and a staff sergeant as a platoon sergeant in four, four-man teams; a radio operator and a corpsman. We would spilt that platoon down the middle. So, the patrols that went out, it would either be the lieutenant, or the staff sergeant would take the patrol. Captain Collins had at his command at least six patrols that could be deployed. Keeping in mind you have to rest the patrol to resupply, reequip, maybe one at the ready, and maybe three or four out in the field at the time. His range of employment with the ability with his eighty-man company at any one time to have at least four, seven-man patrols in operation west of Da Nang. These patrols would need to be combat or non-combat. Most of the ones that went out in combat were looking for VC but to report them. But if engaged, they would fight back and wait for reinforcements to come in and assist. Non-combat might have been point specific targets to go to the top of Ba Nha and find out what was up there. Spend a few days and see if this could turn into anything. So initially we were working in platoon-size patrols all the summer of ‘65. Then we had a change of battalion commanders in ‘65, a gentleman named Van Cleave, also a very talented officer. Relieved Doc Blanchet. Now, by August of ‘65, Frank Reasoner had been killed. We had lost a number of troops in firefights, but we felt comfortable operating in those seven-man patrols. We had worked out all the fire support rules where if you call for fire support, you could get it within

three minutes. You did not have to go up and down the Vietnamese hierarchy and sometimes, initially in April, we waited thirty-five minutes for an artillery round. And by then everything was over.

KC: And was this because you had to get the approval of the Vietnamese hierarchy, like you say?

CD: Right, it had to go up through the 3rd Marine Amphibious Force over to the regional headquarters of the Vietnamese high command for I Corps and then come back across the street and then be fired. It was very elaborate, cumbersome, and a lot of red tape. But that had been worked out by July. So that meant, with a great degree of confidence, these seven-man teams could go forward great distances. Probably out there twelve or thirteen miles. But because they had the artillery fan and by now, we had a few firefights, too, where you could call in Marine air, fixed-wing. Now, for a while there for every fixed wing I remember—I remember particularly one incident where a VMF (Marine fighter squadron), fixed-wing Marine fighter pilot 513, (VMF-513 "Flying Nightmares") came to support us when we were in a firefight, but he couldn't shoot. So, what the F-4 would do is stand the aircraft on its end and kick in the after burner. That loud noise and suppression and leaves and everything flying coming real low, would scare the NVA or the VC to create a lull in the battle. To allow us to maneuver to a different direction or whatever. But that was best air power could do then and that was because of its coordination problem. That eventually worked out, too. Then they could begin to drop a varied ordnance of napalm and do the job which they were well known for. And drop very close to us on occasion.

KC: You talked about the radio and having to set up radio relays with the PRC-10. What kind of communication system did you have set up before you were comfortable? What sort of technology did you have? How did you have to have a patrol set up in communication before you were satisfied with communications?

CD: The PRC-10 did not have any authenticity or the ability to have covered voice communications. That is, it was straight FM, frequency modulated, and that meant the VC could listen. So when you spoke on the radio you had to work out shackle devices where instead of free range codes, you could look at your codes and broadcast in the open knowing that the VC could hear your location, you had to shackle all that or shackle any

kind of information that would give somebody who might be listening and had a good understanding of English. Like you couldn't say, "Well, we're near the big blue!" meaning the lake, that would be stupid if they figured it out, but we had no shackling. Well, we had shackling, but we had no covered radio like five years later in the war. We had the PRC-25 where every day you could change the codes, but every day you would be speaking covered. Meaning it was possible to intercept. Back in '65, the PRC-10 was limited It took large batteries that were often not very—the life expectancy of the battery was not very long. The radio constantly had to be tuned and keyed up to make sure that it was on the right frequency that you were speaking to. It had the limitation of line of sight; that's the limitation of all FM. That required if you were operating behind the mountain, you had to put a team, we used to call them X-ray teams, up on top of the mountain to relay your communications through that relay net—that antenna on top of a mountain to broadcast the other side and probably the target was the Da Nang area where the battalion headquarters is located.

KC: And how many of these PRC-10s would you have?

CD: Each four-man team had one radio. Now, with a seven-man team, one of the joys was that extra manpower often allowed you to carry an extra radio if the first one went down for mechanical problems or the batteries. Keep in mind now, seven men and two radios required at least four to six batteries. Just operating for three or four days. If in the course of an operation, there might have been an aerial resupply. Again, in the helicopters that supported us back then, the Marines had the old H—Sikorsky H-34. We didn't have the OH-1H Bell, what is commonly known as the Huey. You only had old H-34s that would supply us, and they would occasionally drop batteries or drop them at a point where we could go collect them along the trail. So, it was limited with radio communications. Within five years the United States, and I'd say it dramatically and markedly improved the quality of field communications available to tactical infantry ground units and reconnaissance units.

KC: All right, now you've done just a fabulous job of setting the stage for what you're carrying with you, how you're going to operate, how you're going to coordinate. All of these kinds of things. You mentioned a moment ago where I got you off on this area of how you're setting up on patrols. You're talking about your first engagement in

which how you were involved and your first engagement in which Americans and Marines were involved. Tell me about that recon patrol. I mean, from the time you get the orders to how you're going to set things up to leaving your base area to going out and patrolling. Take me through all of it in as much detail as you can.

CD: Okay, let me talk about that one. It really was battalion sized. It happened in a place called Binh Thai, B-I-N-H T-H-A-I. Pat Collins had decided that the river that flowed west from Da Nang, southwest from the airfield. We could stay along the riverbank. There was a road, and we would patrol this in company size. That is, three platoons in trace of each other in ten minutes. One platoon would go through and ten minutes later the next platoon and then the third platoon would come ten minutes after that. The reason for that is, as you moved along the first platoon—and you moved through villages along the riverbank. The people, VC might have hidden in the riverbank or under the village so at the second wave, you would catch him. Now, we started off in the morning and we moved about two miles. We also had an infantry company on alert that if we developed something, we could vector in that infantry company if some two hundred Marines backed down to where Pat thought they could best influence the action in our favor during the course a firefight that might've developed. As we moved along, the First Platoon, which was led by Lieutenant Vankat came across, with the river right on their left came across a big open paddy. At the far end of the paddy was a village, the Village of Binh Thai. As Vankat started to move across those paddies, that's an open face, and it was dangerous. We were learning. We had a good fortune; it was pretty dry. The paddies were not irrigated so that meant you could move across them on dry land fairly quickly and you could maneuver. So, when Vankat had his platoon, most of them out in the open that were taken under fire by North Vietnamese machineguns in an L shaped ambush. It meant that the North Vietnamese were firing right down, parallel to the river on the right side right down the road. In the village there were mixed small arms for the VC Company. I told Vankat—and I used this word, "Cautiously pinned down." Pinned down means you cannot physically put your hand in the air without losing a finger. That is pinned down. You cannot physically move at all. You become a very prime target. See, for years the VC had been fighting the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), and the ARVN would bog down and freeze and they could pick them off.

So, we had a situation where Vankat was under tremendous pressure with his troops using the walls of the rice paddies. Three or four inches of mud that separated paddies as his only cover from incoming small arms from the village and being raked by machineguns. I was with the Second Platoon. Pat came up and we realized the situation. Meanwhile, by the way, the VC had, on the west side of the river, firing into Vankat's back. So, it was basically a three-way ambush and the centerpiece being the machineguns. Pat directed me to take the Second Platoon and move to the right and begin to envelope this village and bring small arms fire to bear. To relieve the pressure of Vankat. Vankat began to disengage as best he could, crawling, from those paddies back to some sort of fire position. The Third Platoon came up to me on supportive base fire over Vankat's head into the village. So that fire from two platoons into the village and trying to silence that machinegun by putting a lot of fire over there. This is not working because Vankat is having trouble disengaging. Pat then ordered something that is unique in the Vietnam War, "fix bayonets."

KC: Wow.

CD: We are going to assault this village with three platoons. This is recon!

KC: Wow.

CD: That's what we do. We go yelling and screaming with fixed bayonets and to this day, I believe, the VC had never seen targets shooting and moving at them. So, with the combined firepower of at least two recon platoons, which is just about thirty-five, forty people, we have a line and we're coming on-line right at this village firing with fixed bayonets. That caused a number of whistles to go off which is an NVA signal to disengage. So, the Vietnamese realized that the Marines are charging across these paddies, about a hundred yards right at them. They chose at that time not to engage physically, but to withdrawal. We take the village, we have a few lightly wounded, we're very, very lucky, but the brilliance of that to order a bayonet attack, the opposition never having seen that. And us, the young and fearless charging seemed to work that day. So, we then began to pursuit them through the village and found a few wounded, a few dead and we chased them west. Now, thirty-five minutes later that infantry company shows up. They came by helicopter, and they want to know where the big firefight is. We said, "Hey, fellas. Not today. It's already gone." That was the first day where I, personally, had

been engaged in a pretty good-sized firefight with a good-sized enemy. Probably anywhere from sixty to eighty VA, NVA, whatever the mix was. But again, I chose to believe there were NVA in that mix because the way they had laid out the ambush and the heavy weapons.

KC: So, you come under this fire, and you walked into this L-shape ambush, and you've got a very good feeling these guys are good, they're top-quality guys. Did you know what to expect from the VC or the NVA? I mean, in terms of tactical ability and what they could bring to bear?

CD: You don't have time to think. If somebody had said to me, "How long did that encounter take?" I would have said, "Oh, about twenty minutes," in reality it was probably closer to two hours. One of the senses that you lose in real force on force combat situations is your sensing of time. You are in a reactive mode, you're living on instincts and a lot of Hail Marys, but you do what is told. There's a force inside you that propels you to try to do the right thing and all the good things that come to the Marine Corps can come to them. But when you finally have time to think after it's all over and you begin to analyze, you begin to admire that that group of NVA had complete appreciation—terrain appreciation. They knew what they were doing. They knew how to use terrain, and they had a sense of timing. They knew how to set up. Again, we were taking fire at our backs from across the river, but they had walked through that ambush and had the precision of laying it out and knew that in a couple of days they were going to come that way. So, you had to admire their tenacity. They stayed until it was time to go. They maximized what they could do that they blew the whistle, literally, and moved off. Their use of terrain, fighting holes, camouflage and just pure guts going up against the force that had air and indirect weapons most of the time. Which was denied to them. You had to admire that these guys were pros.

KC: Let me ask you what could be a stupid question. This is the first time you are engaged in combat, in Vietnam, and you're walking into this ambush. Are you afraid?

CD: Yeah, in a way you are, but you don't have time. You just eat the fear. Particularly when you have colleagues that are under duress. There is an instinct, and it is accredited to Marine Corps training you trying to do the right thing. You eat your fear,

and you just get on with it. You say your Hail Mary and as we used to say, "You make a Vietnamese confession." Have you ever heard that term?

KC: No, I have not.

CD: You put your had between your legs and kiss your ass goodbye because you ain't going to see tomorrow.

KC: (Laughing)

CD: So that was the Vietnamese confession. All those kinds of things looking back are overcome by this tremendous urge to do the right thing. The old Spartan message, "Bring home your son, bring home your shield or bring your son home on it." You want to do the right thing and not let your comrades and your colleagues down. It's got nothing to do with mom and apple pie. It has to do with your peers that are under pressure or suffering. It is your mission to do the right thing and relieve that pressure on them.

KC: Captain Collins gives you the order to fix bayonets. When he says this, what goes through your mind?

CD: "Gee, where the hell is my bayonet? If I got it, did I bring it?"

KC: (Laughing)

CD: Remember, a lot of guys were jettisoning. I think looking back that is the last thing any of us thought would be, that would be the base wall call of the day.

KC: Right.

CD: But Pat said fix bayonets. Just going through that drill you say, "Oh, the last time somebody must have done this was the Civil War." But you do it and it gives you a sense of, "Hey, I'm going to have to put somebody on the end of this blade, here." But that was the call and then the rally is about sixty to eighty troops get up and start going up about a hundred meters across these paddies with dike walls. Very small, about eighteen inches. But behind those walls are my colleagues, Vankat and all his people being pinned down. Vankat gets wounded twice that day. He takes two slight wounds, but they count. By the way, Vankat is the first person wounded in Vietnam in the Marines three times. Back then there was an emerging rule. If you take three Purple Hearts, you go home. So that day Vankat was on his way to the third strike which he received later in the month. The ability to do this—and this is all over in about twenty minutes. The whole firefight

probably took about two hours. You'd put the bayonet on, and you do what is right and we did that, and that was a credit to—again now I'm a novice in all this, but Pat had been an old mustang, Pat had seen combat in Korea. Pat was a little older than the average captain. Pat at that time was about thirty-two years old. So, everybody in that company had great trust in the abilities and skills and the good old Irish guts of Pat Collins. So, when Pat goes, we went.

KC: When this is over—

CD: Also, in that company we had a first sergeant, Harry Rogers, who stood 5'4" and had his nose broken three times boxing. Harry was a tough little guy from Boston. He was a boxer and had won about thirty fights. We had problem children in that company. We had smokers, boxing smokers. Whoever you are, no matter how big you were, the last fighter of the day was whoever our biggest problem child was against the first sergeant. So, Harry was a tough nosed little guy. Between Harry kicking troops in the fantail and Pat leading from the front, we got a lot of good things done.

KC: That's really interesting you should say that. When it's all over, when the enemy has disengaged and that particular action has ended, what do you do?

CD: Oh, well, first you sit down and you realize what time it is. You just can't believe that that much transgressed and in your mind it's twenty minutes when it's really two hours. Your body goes into sort of a lull. You look for water because of the amount of sweat and the heat and so on, you need to replenish water. Then you go into the mechanical things and making sure you've got all your people and everybody's all right. You've double checked the roster that you've got everybody. Nobody's wounded. If it's a firefight when somebody was hit, you got the appropriate ambulance. We did a lot of ground travel evacuating people back then, too. All that air is in town to take up your wounded and get them out of there. You're going through a sequence of checklists. And then, by then it's three in the afternoon and something that started at nine-thirty in the morning and you make your way back there, that's it for the day and you make your way back to the base you were operating at. It's sort of a clean up to get ready to take on something else the next day. Remember now, back then a reconnaissance company, a lot of people back in the rear were critical. What is a recon company doing in all these combat fights? That's not their job. The whole notion of reconnaissance is a small four,

seven-man team or companies operating on patrols or even in July we had a couple of battalion-sized operations where Lieutenant Van Cleave would take two companies plus the battalion headquarters up into the hills west of Da Nang. So, the whole mission, the nature, the types of equipment were being challenged. We worked for the good in a very short period of time.

KC: You talked about the checklist you have to go down. You talked about sitting down, looked at your watch, getting a drink of water, finding out where your men were, taking care of those who were wounded, if they're wounded. Finding an ambulance for them one way or another and all these things. You make your way back to the base area. At any particular time, do you look back at the performance of the men in your platoon and say, "Okay, here's someone who was outstanding that I know or someone that I trust told me what they did." Also, do you recognize anyone who had not performed up to the standard that you think they should perform? How do you deal with both those who excelled and those who, perhaps, didn't excel?

CD: Your question is a good one and a timely one but hidden in that question is something I've forgotten to this point. It's to identify and attribute—the strength of the Marine Corps is always in their staff NCOs. I talked about the experience levels and the good fortunes serving with Captain Pat Collins who had Korean experience. In that recon company, starting from the first sergeants, the three platoon sergeants were all first-grade staff, non-commissioned officers. Superior. Pat had hand-picked them. Some of them were from Korean vintage. They weren't as spry at getting around as some of the younger troops that they commanded. We had the good fortune and a blessing of superior and brave feelings of staff NCOs who really looked after their troops. Many of these staff NCOs had been in infantry battalions. They were used to forty-man platoons. In the reconnaissance battalion there were eighty men in the company. To work in a small group, I remember, I mentioned that initially we started sending out patrols. The only two people that Pat would put in charge as platoon commanders was the platoon commander himself, a lieutenant or the staff NCO. They would take out these seven-man teams. So, we had the blessings of good staff NCOs. When you have leaders like that, the troops tend to emulate them. So, we had minimum disciplinary problems. Ironically, and this may sound naïve, I never saw a drug problem, I never heard of a drug problem in 3rd

Reconnaissance guys all during 1965. These stories about drugs and everything, my sense even related to us was most of those infractions of justice, slovenly attitudes, cowardly attitudes, all occurred toward the rear areas. And so, the message is, people who have time on their hands, especially young troops, tend to get in trouble. Better than those gainfully employed and happy in their work. So, we did not have any of those drug-oriented questions because of superlative staff NCOs. The troops were gainfully employed doing something that they took a lot of pride in. They didn't have time on their hands. They were happy people. Did that answer the question?

KC: Sure, sure. Absolutely it does. Of course, as a lieutenant you depend upon your NCOs to look after.

CD: Absolutely, especially if you operate in four- to seven-man groups. That's a very tight operation that you run with somebody anywhere from three to seven days. Everybody has their assigned tasks. Particularly doing the movement phase. When you exit the helicopter at night and when you're moving toward patrol base to operate out of or observe from. Each of those young Marines had a specific job in the tasking and your trust on them is implicit. And they on you, they look to you for navigation and directing communications and the ability to direct in a firefight. More or less bring in over the radio to be able to bring in indirect firepower. You trained those troops, too. All of those troops in my platoons and other platoons, after a period of time in country, could bring in fixed-wing aircraft and could direct artillery. So, what I'm saying is, you move the way the battalion was set up on paper. On paper the officers were not supposed to go out. The senior man on each one of these four-man teams was a corporal. And the corporal was supposed to be capable of indirect fire support, patrol directions, bringing fire to bear. Pat always thought his brand to soldiering was, "No, no, wait a minute. A troop will go anywhere you tell him if you're two feet in front of him." So, we made sure that the officers and staff NCOs got fully engaged in patrolling.

KC: Well, why don't we stop there for today, Colonel?

Interview with Carmine DelGrosso
Session [2] of [6]
Date: 19 October 2010

Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Colonel Carmine DelGrosso. Today is October 19, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University and Colonel DelGrosso is joining me by telephone from San Clemente, California. All right, Colonel, I had to interrupt you there just a second ago before I turned on the recorder. You were kind of giving an overview of the time of transition, as you put it, in the early days.

Carmine DelGrosso: Right when I came back about Phase I of our dialog.

KC: Yeah, please tell me about that.

CD: I was trying to best encapsulate that. My assessment is in the period of early March 1965 through about July, for 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion and Company D, of which I was assigned. In general, most of the Marines who came ashore with the 9th Ex-Marine Expeditionary Brigade, was a period of transition where the doctrine under which 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion had operated, was challenged for what was working. We jettisoned large parts of it. We made tactics up as we went along and then made adjustments. Things like communications. We learned the limits of our communications, what we could do and what we couldn't do with the equipment. That, to a degree, dictated the tactical area of responsibilities, the distances that we could go and could operate by radio relay. At the individual level, our clothing, we learned what to jettison and what to keep. What was of use, what was a disadvantage to us. So, by July we also had learned that probably the correct number for a small unit, reconnaissance patrol, was about seven. So, by July, all the troops were comfortable with themselves. With their equipment, with their communication tactics. Much of the jargon that is needed to communicate and brief and understanding of the terms have been worked out. Perhaps, most of all, by July, the troops learned that darkness was their friend. The old term, "He who owns the night wins," was in full force. By July we had the battalion ashore and all four of the operational letter companies were working along swimmingly. We also knew the enemy. We could read the telltale signs that the VC had been in the area, or it was a

hardcore North Vietnamese unit that had been in the area. We could shoot, move, and communicate rather fluidly in that particular terrain surrounding Da Nang, Vietnam.

KC: Okay, let me ask you a series of questions here based on all those things that you've talked about. I want to get as specific information as I can. You were talking about the things that you would carry with you out there. The things that you would jettison and that you would keep. Obviously, you were looking for things that don't make much noise, things that are light, and things that are useful. You mentioned yesterday that the first thing you got rid of were skivvie shorts. What other things would you take with you? If you had to pack your pack or even if you would take a pack, what sort of things would you bring with you and why would you bring them?

CD: Well, perhaps the most important thing in the reconnaissance business was your map. It was a sacred piece of scripture, and you had to protect it. So, we learned early on how to write home and get people to send us Saranwrap-type material or plastic bags which that map could be kept. You would keep it inside, sort of like your breast plate. So, the map was just the central issue. Also, with that came accomplished people that got very, very proficient on the use of the compass. And third, their radio, to protect that radio. It was the key to all the American firepower. Also, by July, the rules of engagement in terms of use of artillery and in close supporting had been worked out. So, in a very reasonable period of time, a seven-man team could bring to bear if need be, artillery and air. Sometimes we would patrol beyond the artillery fan, the scope of the artillery capability. When that happened, again, we owed that radio. And that radio meant that everybody in that team knew how to use that radio. Every man in that team could call in close air support and knew the formula and the correct steps for a fast-moving aircraft or even a slower propeller-driven aircraft arrived on station to support them. The next thing was socks. Those socks were also protected and you brought one, two, three extra pairs of socks. When it rained, you were soaked completely through. Also, about the first ninety days we were beginning to be issued the jungle boot which was a great step forward. Between the socks and the new jungle boot, you had a greater chance of beating immersion foot. Always, even on a patrol, the furthest patrol once a day, we would stop and have the patrol, for an hour or so, be able to take their boots off in the rain and let their feet dry or at night in a safe harbor site. Allowed half of their troops to take their

boots off and allow their feet to dry. You cannot stay out on a patrol. Most of the patrols went anywhere from three to eight days. You needed to ensure that your feet worked and that meant immersion foot prevention. So, the socks came into play. Then there was food, what to carry for food. Most people would go through C-rations which were World War II C-rations. Even had Lucky Strike and Pall Mall cigarettes involved. What particular types of cans of food that they felt they could nourish themselves on and would try to eat only once a day. So, the amount of food, if you carried four or five of those C-ration cartons, they weighed about six or eight pounds. We would cut that down to maybe two pounds. Because at this time, these new C-rations where you just had water or you could eat on the run that are very light. A whole generation of controlled food that gave you sustenance, a degree of strength, had not been introduced yet. We were still operating in the field on the Korean vintage and all the C-rations. The food, the type of clothing you relished. You got rid of all your under clothing. The amount of ammunition you would carry, cleaning gear for your weapon, your map, socks, and your boots, and a decent cover. Now, I say a decent cover as something that kept the sun out of your eyes and kept the rain from running down the crack of your fan tail and clothing that could dry quickly when it rained, you still kept moving. So certain areas around Da Nang at certain times, you were constantly wet. You just patrolled and lived in the wet jungle. At night was the only time we had a chance where we were in a safe off sight to dry out your feet.

KC: How many rounds of ammunition would you consider adequate for a seven-man patrol?

CD: What we tried to do, again, and this was not in the table of equipment, was the M-79. We borrowed a number of M-79s because the M-79, if you were in an ambush, it was the weapon of decision. It allowed you seven men, if you were in a much larger force, particularly in a trail type situation in the deep jungle west of Da Nang, an M-79 could put a round, a hand grenade-size round in an aperture, one foot by three feet at eighty-five yards. So, if you had a proficient M-79 gunner, he was the difference that if you were ambushed, you could break out of that ambush or have a chance to turn the ambush back on the enemy. So, everybody else carried the M-14 and probably 120 to 150 rounds of ammunition. Most people also had a combat knife, and everybody had one or two hand grenades. That is still a significant amount of weight. That ammunition, that

rifle, and somebody with the M-79 trekking up and downhill for some times at highest 3,000 feet.

KC: Tell me about your combat patrol on your reconnaissance patrol. You say seven men. Why seven men and who were the seven men? What were their jobs?

CD: The seven men—we didn't have the luxury of a corpsman. So, somebody had had some knowledge and the corpsman back in the rear area. The battalion in medical aid staff would teach somebody enough about first aid. So, you had the platoon commander. This was usually an officer or one of the staff NCOs in the company. That accounted for the leadership of seven. The radio operator was the second most important man. So, the next five people would adjust the patrol. Which was usually the point and the assisted point. Then the patrol leader, then the radio operator. Then in a line of sequence the following two were following tail or the close ends. Really those two people in the rear could be vectored if you ran into an ambush on the trail. Left or right to sort of create a flank and then begin to flank what was ahead of us on the path as we would engage people. I've been in a number of those, too. You're coming down the trail and the last thing the North Vietnamese who had been operating ten to twelve miles west of Da Nang never saw a western face. All of a sudden it took a turn to recon patrol. Ironically, most of the time when we confronted each other, their weapons were sling-arms, so we had the advantage to be able to shoot first and create their casualties and then pursue them. So, we had the initial jump, usually on a patrol when we engaged them because we never thought we'd be that far west of Da Nang or southwest.

KC: So, you had that tactical advantage early on?

CD: Right, and again, to have that M-79, when one person carried bandoleers, he would probably be armed with about twenty-four, thirty rounds, and he carried a pistol.

KC: All right, now you also talked about the enemy and finding signs of the enemy. What were the telltale signs of the VC, NVA, and how could you tell the difference?

CD: When you get back in the deep jungle, you're basically operating along the path, very quietly at night. That's how they travelled. They only had their rubber sole shoes. Only the NVA had boots. But there would be paths. It wasn't that you were just thrashing through jungle, you went along paths. You would find little pieces of

waterproof cloth or plastic ribbons like the color blue, which indicated you were on the correct trail. They knew signs similar to the American Indian for direction, who had been through this area with a color code and by stacking pebbles and rocks in the vicinity of these pieces of blue plastic or orange plastic. Now, these were scattered. They'd probably be around two to four hundred yards. So, as you walked along the trail, you would see these blue markers, and you would know two things that you had a pretty good chance that that trail was not mine. And second, you were on the right track. But if you looked at the ground and studied the ground as you moved, even at night, you could see these markers. There were also hachures in trees. We had some people who were very proficient at reading the hachures and how—and the hachures indicated how long the last friendly VC had gone through the area. Sometimes the unit markings were hacked into the trees or by the arrangement stones on the ground.

KC: That's fascinating. How did you first discover this sort of thing?

CD: You just find it odd that why would somebody have a piece of plastic in the ground here? You know, if it didn't meet the eye, it'd be off the trail a bit, but it was visible. Why would somebody take the time to do that? And then when you find another one a little further down the trail, you see a pattern. So, it was basically pattern recognition. And also, the hachure marks on trees. The ability to see stones piled in a certain configuration.

KC: Now, that was the VC. What about the NVA?

CD: Oh, the NVA, they were a little more bullish. They had boots and they traveled in numbers. Nearly anywhere from twenty to a hundred. They had a tendency to—they used all sort of signs. They were proficient at reading. They were the signs that the VC used. But they also had a tendency to knock down a lot of things. Trees, tree cuttings. Sort of like an elephant going through grass and knocks down the grass and you can see them. Sometimes the NVA would sort of infringe upon the forest. They would sit down and hack out an area where they wanted to stay for a couple hours. So, you find an area that had four or five hachure marks in a course of a hundred yards. That meant there was probably some good-sized unit that had come through there trying to get off the mainstream trail. Using the camouflage in the overhead, sometimes it was triple canopy. But they still always got off the trail when they took a break. They didn't just sit down in

the trial. So, whenever we'd see these escarpments, these hachure marks, six or eight of them in a cause of about a hundred meters, would give you the idea that a large unit was using this trail and might have been through there in a reasonable period of time in the last day or two. If sometimes you're really lucky, you find a couple cigarette butts.

KC: Now, you mention the phrase, or alluded to the phrase, "Having to own the night." Explain that to me.

CD: Everybody has a (unintelligible) to the battlefield, a childhood dreams, and fears of the unexpected, nightmares and so on. When you get a unit that can work together and own the night, meaning they are comfortable, they have no fear or a modest fear which can be contained in their ability to shoot, move, and communicate at night and that the night was their friend. You've got seven guys and you're not sure what you're going to run into. The ability of your team to quietly move pretty good distances at night breeds confidence in a small unit and that they could go pretty good distances in three or four days. What I mean by that is they could travel eight, twelve, fifteen miles at night from your initial insertion zone, develops a skill. So, they look forward to being put in late in the afternoon, very, very late so that darkness is their friend and that the enemy could not pursue them with any success at night. It's the measure of self-confidence of a small unit.

KC: All right, you had mentioned yesterday, you talked about this initial engagement in which you were involved, and it was a hairy situation. You gave me a great blow by blow. You make it back to base camp and you're putting things back together. How long is it before you receive orders to go out on patrol again, typically?

CD: Remember now, I think on paper at full max, a reconnaissance battalion is able to field like the number was forty-four teams at one time, but that never happened. You have sick, you have people on leave. There was this brand-new concept starting called R&R (rest and relaxation). After six months you actually got to go somewhere for five days. So, you've got people on R&R. The reality is—and then you have to rest people, too, between patrols. Usually, we worked out like this. I'd say, looking back, you rested for three days and then those three days the first day back you'd clean up and get your mail, see the doctor, or whatever, account for your weapons and get debriefed. Where you had been, what you had seen. The second day was a little R&R to writing

home and so on. The third day was to get ready to go out for a patrol. It was three days back and anywhere from five to eight days out again. So, the duration of the patrols in Company D, we were able to field at any one time, had five teams in the field and two teams back awaiting to go out.

KC: Now, when you get back—because this is kind of a formative period for what recon is trying to do there in Vietnam. When you get back to the company HQ or the company area, do you, as a platoon leader, get with other platoon leaders and say, "Look, this is what we did, this is what works for us."?

CD: You share—the key was, when I say debrief, you would talk to the G-2—the S-2, the intelligence staff, and the S-3 operational staff. You would debrief them formally on your route for where you had been and what you had seen. They would plot and store this information historically. Well, the S-3 operational side would look to respond to new areas and intelligence coming down from the division on areas of interest where the division wanted to put the reconnaissance battalion. Now, sometimes these reconnaissance companies were assigned to a regiment, an infantry regiment like the 9th Marines or the 3rd Marines. That was the case with Company D working for the 9th Marines doing reconnaissance work in front of their lines south of Da Nang. We did that for about six weeks through 1975. Also, please keep in mind, there are different methods of entry from ground reconnaissance. That notion of parachuting in and all that, that's just a method of entry. The name of the game in reconnaissance, you get on the ground, and the same with the infantry; you shoot, move, and communicate. In today's Special Forces and all this sort of thing, I see too much emphasis on the method of entry. Whether they swim in, whether they jump in, whether they're going to use HALO (high altitude, low opening parachuting) techniques, you've got to stick with the basics. Get people in on the ground. We were inserted not only by helicopter, but often by truck to a furthest point where we ran out of road. We offloaded a truck and then we went into a jungle area, or we walked in, maybe ten miles to where the area was. We would walk it at night.

KC: What sort of things did other platoon commanders or other companies, even, come up with that you guys hadn't thought of on your own?

CD: Yes, there was a good fair sharing between the comradery and rapport with the other lieutenants and the other junior officers in the battalion. Remember now, the 3rd Recon Battalion I had mentioned had one company thirty miles by Phu Bai area, about thirty to forty miles north of Da Nang. It was another company operating down in the Chu Lai area so that left two letter companies in Da Nang and the other two outlying in Chu Lai and Phu Bai. We were co-located with the 3rd Recon Battalion staff, just in the shadows of Hill 327, which was where the 3rd Marine Division had set up from early June, their division headquarters. So, there was quite a bit of sharing and understanding techniques which, when you went back to for three days you would have a beer at night, and the battalion contemporaries and information was shared.

KC: Was there any specific piece of information or any specific approach that someone else had stumbled upon or decided to work best for them that you implemented in yours? Is there anything that stands out?

CD: You know, I can't think of something where we borrowed from another company offhand, but I remember lots of stories on what not to do.

KC: Okay, tell me some of those.

CD: I won't name him, but we had one platoon commander who was out on a patrol up north in the Phu Bai area who was kind of frustrated on where he was and trying to correlate his map to his actual position on the ground. So, he had his team, I don't know, it was four or seven men, strung out along the trail in defilade position hiding. And he climbed the tree to see where he was. So that he could get his coordinates, bearing coordinates with his compass. That he was in the correct place he thought he was on the map. So, he's up in the tree and here come a number of VC down the trail and stop right under the tree he was in. He got his pistol out and got a round or two off before the VC realized, by looking up, there was somebody up in the tree. That type of a story intuited, don't climb trees. Those are the kinds of things, the dos and don'ts; that's a good example of a don't.

KC: What happened to him, by the way? Was he okay?

CD: Yeah, he got a shot off. His first round jammed in his .45. The second round he got off, but by then the VC had cut loose that there was somebody above him in the tree and went back down the trail, they were pursued. There was no fire exchanged

except for Lieutenant Natrine. As I understand the story. They never found a VC, either. So he was a good officer, a very capable officer, but that was just something I could commiserate with his exasperation. Because he could read a map. You know, you learn how to read a map, this reconnaissance, particularly with the terrain it is the focal point. You need to know exactly where you are at all times on the map. So, to answer your question, we have a lot of dos and don'ts that we pass back, but mostly don'ts.

KC: Were there any other don'ts that you can think of? I know I'm asking you to think back forty-five years, of course.

CD: Yeah, there was one that was important. It is, "You must constantly break up the pattern for insertion." You know, I watched later in life in other tours, the Army operating down in the delta. The war would be over for the night, but in the morning, seven-thirty bright and early, here would come the US Army with a company embarked on helicopters sort of like from "*Apocalypse Now,*" riding out to be inserted somewhere. The VC always knew, seven-thirty every morning the war starts again. So, we would be very careful not to repeat insertion methods at the same time, the same patterns for insertion by helicopter.

KC: Well, of course that makes sense, stands to reason, obviously.

CD: Well, if you looked at *Black Hawk Down* I am convinced from reading historical documents from *Black Hawk Down*. And even seeing the movie, there was no need to do repelling into that part of Somalia, and they were like clockwork. Every day, here they'd come with their helicopters. They repeated patterns that were picked up and telegraphed to the opposition and they paid a terrible price. So, my point is, we would be very sensitive to the methods of insertion and not total reliance on helicopters, but to walk in or be carried in by truck to the area rather than reliance on helicopters all the time.

KC: I see.

CD: Also, about this time, we had been relying on the H-34, the Sikorsky helicopter. That was our method of insertion. We did not use anything smaller. There were no Hueys. The Hueys were assigned to the division, usually to carry VIPs around. The gunship had not arrived yet. We had no support from Cobra aircraft. It was just the H-34. We had the luxury occasionally of having an Air Force Bird Dog or some sort of

fixed-wing aircraft that acted as an aerial forward observer who could vector fast movers in the area. See, here's another thing, we could not talk with the PRC-10 directly to fast-moving aircraft. They were on a different communication system. What we would have to do is talk FM to the OV-10 or an H-34 helicopter in the area who, on another radio, on his dashboard, could turn FM freq (frequency) and talk to the fast movers. That was one of the limits of the system. Only later in the year, just after the adjustment period did we receive the PRC-47, I believe, which allowed us—we had an air-ground radio that allowed us to talk to fast movers, but that was at the company level.

KC: Did you find any difficulties with this communication system? There you are with the PRC-10 having to relay it to an airborne—

CD: First of all, to give you a scenario, it would go from the backpack of the men, seven-man team often through a relay, like we would put up a relay on the high piece of ground that could see back to the division area. So, you'd be further west relaying through an antenna that you would have to leave people from the company up on the relay sight. Manning that antenna to allow you to communicate, to communicate through that antenna, back to the rear area. So that was another draw down on where would that relay go if you were really humping further west. And who would operate it because they, too, became a target where the VC knew you were going to put your antennas on the high ground. It was often dangerous work, erecting a radio relay. But it was frustrating, but there were a number of occasions with fixed-wing Marine Corps airpower came to our assistance. I had told you a story earlier about in the very beginning I watched fixed-wing come to our area, not shoot, but rather come right over where we were, stand themselves over their heads, kicking their afterburners and going straight up. The noise and the dust would just panic the VC and cause them to pause, that allowed them to brake or disengage or get better cover during the firefight. That was VMFA-513. I remember that because after that day, going down to the bar, they were located at the Da Nang airfield, seeking them out in the bar and buying them a bunch of drinks to say thank you.

KC: How long did this tactic work? I mean, did the VC ever get used to it and know what was going on and just moved on and it didn't bother them anymore?

CD: These seven-man teams and this mode of operation, it lasted all through 1965, my entire time with 3rd Recon Battalion. I left a little after Christmas in 1965. By then, they knew what the ideal patrol was, they own the night, they could shoot, move, and communicate, the communication was improving, their ability to talk to air was improving, they could all read maps, and these basic skills were becoming embedded into the most junior man in the patrol. That is some medical ability, use of the radio, use of close air, the ability to direct artillery fire. Now, there was another bunch called Force Reconnaissance. There were two Force Reconnaissance Companies. Every man in these companies, oh, about hundred twenty people. Every man in this company was capable of being asserted by parachute and the majority of all their operators were scuba trained. We had scuba in 3rd Recon Battalion, but we were allowed six or eight quotas a year. In the battalion there were six or eight people who had this scuba ability. Nobody went to jump out of airplane school.

KC: Right, right.

CD: Now, the Force Recon people, when they were first supported offshore. They reported them sort of like vest pocket agency that worked directly for the commanding general of the 9th MAB. And they were giving targets, oh, into the Laotian border and they were going to jump in, but initially, remember when I told you about that transition period? They did not have good success at the beginning. Known to my mind there was only one successful parachute delivered patrol for the Marine Corps in all of the Marine Corps' history. It was done by a first lieutenant by the name of Jerry Paul. What had happened, initially, 1st Force Recon sort of overreached, they had good people, good training, but they did not go through the constant process of patrolling and patrolling. There were mistakes made and so on. So, the decision at the highest level is to take that first recon company, a Force Recon company, and for a while, put them directly under the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion.

KC: To gain the experience that you guys had put together.

CD: That's right, and Pat Collins having been an old Force Recon guy. They worked for Pat and for us. So, Pat put them on a diet of simple, basic patrolling and, oh, there was the moaning and groaning. "We're beyond that. We know how to do that." Nonsense, Pat treated them like billy goats. You're going to go out, you're going to eat,

and you're going to do the mundane stuff and you're going to build yourself up. So that went on, again, in the 1st Force Recon for about, if I remember correctly, maybe two months, reported directly to Doc Blanchet's 3rd Recon Battalion. After two months of doing what they perceived to be a mundane past and patrolling, were judged to have reached sufficient capacity on their own and self-confidence and any other test you wanted to be cut loose again and qualify in basic patrolling skills and techniques to go back to work for the MAB and the 9th MAB commander to do vest pocket deep, deep reconnaissance missions.

KC: Yeah, the 1st Recon of course, is a very proud organization.

CD: Oh, absolutely. The pride and "We eat nails, spit tacks, we can do everything." You know, the epitome of macho. Which is good, you've got to have that, but in '65 they stumbled a little. They didn't have the windfall that 3rd Recon Battalion had. Which was good commanders who started off slow and we went through a transition of about three months. Everybody was qualified in basic patrol. Again, qualified and shoot, move, and communicate as opposed to previous reliance on spending too much time on methods of entry. Parachute, swimming and all that sort of thing. They're all good valid, they're all great Marines, but I just wanted to recall the historic reading that they had to go through that reconditioning period. And I think it was for their good and it paid dividends for them later.

KC: Sure, sure. Colonel, what did you find to be the most difficult or challenging part of this transition period while you were there in '65?

CD: Well, I was lucky, I was young. I didn't know this was happening. Every day was an adventure. "I wonder what's going to happen next." And Pat, we were lucky, we were given missions all the way around TAOR, the Tactical Area of Responsibility on the periphery and beyond the TAOR of the 3rd Marine Division. So, each new patrol had a different spin, a different method of insertion, a different size, and occasionally we would go out in a company size. Then I remember one battalion-sized operation.

KC: Wow.

CD: It was down southwest of Da Nang.

KC: Tell me about that. What do you remember about that battalion?

CD: Well, we went with two companies plus the battalion headquarters. So now you've got two recon companies. So, what I'm saying—and that's a small infantry battalion. A lot of people in the classroom would debate, "That is not the role of reconnaissance. What are they trying to do? A mis-employment." And so on. There we were and it was a four-day, five-day patrol. It was southwest of Happy Valley. As you look at Happy Valley going due west from Da Nang, it was a direct artery for the Laotian border and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. So much of this stuff, looking back came into Da Nang probably by porters that were carried, came through Happy Valley. It was the main logistical supply line for the VC and the NVA operating that far south. So, the southwestern flank of Happy Valley was a set of hills. Colonel Van Cleave took the battalion in again, in trace. One recon company, maybe a half an hour later they had battalion headquarters and then the second company behind them. It was a trail system and went back up in there as far as we could. We were probably thirty miles from the southwest of the center of Da Nang and from the airfield. We had an engagement every day along the trail. Then finally, we reached the base camp. We were in a VC base camp with sort of under triple canopy. It was a large cut out area from the jungle, a forest. A clearing covered by canopy, but in that clearing under the trees were sheds, hooches, a makeshift hospital. It was like the last area where you could have a large VC unit under triple canopy before they broke down into small units and made the trek from that high ground, south of Happy Valley, as they came down the trail moving into Da Nang or to wherever. They were going to be assigned or reinforced or whatever. It was probably a battalion minor size area to be able to cease that basecamp. Oh, and the fires were still warm and all those telltale signs that they were just there and they had fled toward the west and gave us a lot of desire for pursuit of which we did pursue and chase them and shoot outs on the trails. It was an interesting couple of days. That was the farthest penetration that a reconnaissance unit in size had made, in my mind, during 1965 away from a friendly area. Just about outside the artillery fan.

KC: Now, because this was a battalion-sized patrol, I would assume that intelligence had already reported, "Look, we've got this VC base camp over here this close to the border and that's why you went out in force as a battalion."

CD: Yeah, but again, those intel, where did we get that intel? Back then the intelligence business was very, very sketchy. You were operating on somebody who might have walked in and was debriefed and usually debriefed by a Vietnamese who then sent across the street to say, "We have a detainee here. Said there was a base camp up somewhere vaguely in this area." So, the means and methods and covered sources were not as sophisticated as they are today. Even after Afghanistan or Iraq. How about this, the use of the ARVN, what did they do for us? Okay, Pat had the idea, "Let's get some dogs. Maybe they can help us." So, we got some ARVN handlers that had German Shepherds, and we would take them on patrols. The success with the dogs and finding anything back then, I remember distinctly, was 50/50. The problem with the dogs, ironically, translated into the dogs, the handler, and somebody had to carry all the dog food. You know, a dog has got to eat. So, if you go for five days with a dog, that means you have to bring along maybe ten, fifteen cans of dog food. Who's going to carry that? So, we explored the dogs' uses on the trail and could they sniff out anything in the village. We found them a hit or miss affair. I remember no incident where the dogs were an absolute success as they are perceived to be in the drug business at airports. We had no such success. But the ARVN in general, we didn't use them, we didn't work closely with them. We were on our own. Not that we despised them or we were offended by them, or we felt they were incapable. There was just no need to bring them or use them in a seven-man patrol. Or even at the battalion level, there were no ARVN on the staff. Rather, we got all intelligence feeds from the division, which I don't know was a good idea, but it was our only source. Now, where the division got their intel from the Air Force, the Army, MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam); that was all somewhat arbitrary. What I'm saying, intelligence was limited down at the operational level, we had no hot leads, but rather our intelligence was derived from our own probing. When we'd get done to that area, I just described what Colonel Van Cleave had realized, "Hey, this is a hot mess. This is probably the last jump off point for the VC to be able to follow the trail system into Da Nang from the southwest. So, your reconnaissance was flowing up because really reconnaissance is an intelligence gathering institution, but to support our daily patrols, it was just the wisdom of a guy named Pat Collins who said, "Look, let's go look at this area. This could be hot. There could be something here. It keeps us away from the

villagers." See, when you patrolled at night, you could work west of Da Nang with impunity. The darkness is our friend, but when you patrol south of Da Nang, you have a lot of maritime villagers, beach villagers, and fisherman. So, to be able to move with the impunity that we enjoyed west of Da Nang, was rather difficult because every one of us that has a dog and those dogs walk all night, all those dogs were black in color, and the troops would call every black dog a VC. So, to move with impunity, it was very difficult at night because of the villagers and the dogs. So, we would stay to the west and just by studying the terrain and trying to deduce which would be trails the VC uses. That generated our intelligence cycle and the ability to collect data and pass that up rather to receive stuff down. I maybe over-killed that question for you.

KC: No, no, no, that's exactly what I wanted to know about. When you discovered this base area here.

CD: Another thing, let me stop. What is household words in today's intelligence gathering cycle; overhead photography, intercepts of message traffic, communication interception, sort of à la NSA, other sophisticated means of overhead intelligence, none of that was available to us. It was basically deduction, studying terrain, deducing that these would probably be areas of interest or areas the VC would use. Then we would be delicately inserted into those areas. The idea being that we were the division commander deployed in a semi-circle from the airfield in Da Nang. The further out you could push that semi-circle to the west, the safer you are from incoming artillery or mortars. You could also enjoy the idea that technically on paper, at any one time, beyond his tactical area of responsibility, let us say there was a belt, a zone, and RAOR, a reconnaissance area of responsibility, a belt, say, of ten miles that was like a rainbow on top of his tactical area of responsibility. That is the Marine two-star division commander. In that zone could be sprinkled up to forty-four, seven-man teams at any one time with full max pressure was a great source of comfort to the division and know that you had eyes out there in front of your tactical units.

KC: Oh, I'm sure, absolutely.

CD: Like I say, like all we talked yesterday about where the division goes, that was our sign we had been (unintelligible).

KC: All right, let's go back to the discovery of this VC base camp. You're out there in a battalion-sized operation. You've found this, you talked about what it looked like. What do you do with the materials you find at the base camp? What do you do with them?

CD: Okay, we would gather those up and we took some wounded during that fight. A lot of casualties in the 3rd Recon Battalion. Have you ever seen the book—it's sort of an autobiography of 3rd Recon Battalion written by a gentleman named Eric Vetter, V-E-T-T-E-R. I'll get you the name. In that 3rd Recon Battalion, if you held it as an entity, over ten years existence in Vietnam, was probably one of the most decorated Marine units and took some of the highest casualties. So, taking that and bringing it back to your question, when we were evacuating wounded, we had wounded every day for firefights along the trail. When the helicopters would come in and you could evacuate those people—oh, by the way, those helicopters could come in in numbers, I remember distinctly. We had to hack out landing zones with either hand grenades or saws or machetes so that a space could be created of about thirty meters so that the helicopter could drop down its winching cord and we could put that Marine in like a basket, not a basket, but sort of a seat. Sometimes a basket and evacuate them out. We would hand him, in a plastic bag, a patrol report, some of this stuff, these documents we would find, and we would find them. The VC were not very good at document control. They left a lot of stuff. They loved to tunnel. Everything was down in the tunnel. All the tunnel routes you could see, that's very interesting. They always dug them for bomb protection. They were definitely afraid of the B-52. We would find these documents, we would put them in a plastic bag and strap them onto the body of the wounded comrade so everybody knew that these documents were coming out with the wounded via a helicopter and somebody would be sent down to meet the helicopter at what was called Charlie Med, that's where all the casualties were taken down in the Da Nang Air Field area.

KC: What kind of supplies did you find here? Any?

CD: Supplies?

KC: Yes, ammunition, rice.

CD: Yeah, ammunition, but even as early as '65, ammunition, we treated it—it was sort of a ground rule as tainted. There had been stories about the CIA (Central

Intelligence Agency). In fact, I read about someone recently where General Sinlov, he was a colonel working for SOG, Special Operations Group, (Studies and Observation Group) had, had specific missions because he was frustrated with his deep SOG missions in Laos found lots and lots of ammunition. He was frustrated that he could not blow the ammunition in place without giving that team's identity away. And he couldn't extricate it. So, the concept began—it was a British concept from the 1900s. Why can't we seed their ammunition with defective ammunition? So, you know, like an AK-47 round, you can make it defective so that when the enemy uses it and it blows up in his hands or his face, that serves the purpose to put fear in the hearts of the enemy. That their ammunition and equipment is defective. It makes them blink. So, when we found ammunition, we would just stay away from it. Either because it was booby traps or if it was too much trouble to blow it in place, but we tried to bury it and we treated all their ammunition as if it was defective and could not be used in friendly. You know, we had a couple of AK-47s also. We had picked them up as sort of contraband, a trading material let's say. Back at the base camp, if we needed plywood or something, it was amazing an old AK-47, what it could buy you in trade with rear echelon units. We kind of kept a couple around as barter that we had found or confiscated on patrols.

KC: Okay, now you also say you pursue the VC in this particular engagement. Tell me about how you pursue them. You say this goes on for a few days and you're receiving casualties. Tell me about that.

CD: Basically, because the jungle was so thick and we were operating along this trail, the VC would engage in a firefight, would leave people along the trail to shoot at us knowing the only way we could follow them was up this trail. So, these firefights were from rock to rock, sometimes as close as thirty to fifty meters while one or two VC held off the posse coming to get them, they pursued and went further west as far as they could onto other trails. So, we cleared up the immediate two people firing at us. Again, you could not bring firepower to bear because we were all in a line. You could not envelop these people on the trail because it was just too thick to jungle. So basically, you had to fight your way up this trail with sniping or throwing grenades at these people. They accomplished their mission, but they bought the enemy time to escape. And then we would pick up after that and continue on the same trail, never knowing what we were

going to find or if they had prepared ambushes further up. So, the battalion was kind of stimied with two companies not linear like you would like to fight in the open ground, but rather one behind the other on some jungle trail and only at the very point did the fire fight occur and the VC was sniping and shooting at us at the tip of this elongated patrol. Just to buy time so that their colleagues could flee further west and scatter back to some rally point somewhere. In that particular interest, we never found the rally point. After a while, the resistance that they were offering us sort of dissipated and all we could do was say, "Yup, we moved up that trail about two or three thousand meters beyond the base camp we've got uncovered. That probably went on all morning and then we moved back to the base camp and stayed there for the evening and the battalions sort of occupied their base camp. As you say, we then went on a search of these tunnels and hooches. They had cabinets of ammunition in the rooms and the walls that many times I remember, we were in the southern part of Da Nang that we were operating and would find a hooch and would set it on fire. The secondary explosions we got, nobody was in them, of course, but that was a great place to hide ammunition in the walls of a hooch or in the palm-like overhead roofs. So, in this instance, with Colonel Van Cleave, we had seized one of their base camps which was always the last safe jumping off point for the side unit. For the VC that was their own R&R area before entry down into their Da Nang area of responsibility.

KC: So, you're out for how many days? Was it five, six days you got on this particular—?

CD: I believe that operation was probably in August of '65. That may have gone five days. I offer that because that's the way you see a battalion, a recon battalion minus reinforced operating at a battalion sized unit in a reconnaissance patrol. I don't think it's ever been done since.

KC: That's a lot of guys to have out there on a reconnaissance patrol.

CD: Yeah, we had probably at least two hundred and fifty people on a reconnaissance. I think Pat used to call it a reconnaissance in force. It works. Looking back, we uncovered a whole bunch grid squares that we knew nothing about, nor did the division. We understood that reinforced our understanding of the patterns they were using like arteries coming off the Ho Chi Minh Trail over in Laos. It set back the VC and denied them that area for a period of time. And then the VC, too, we found some of their

supplies and food and rice caches and we destroyed those. So, it denied ground to the enemy and put them real cautious and realized again, who owned the night. That was being taken away from them. So, it slowed their momentum quite a bit.

KC: You've talked before about this, not really contradiction, but in some ways, it is in terms of definitions. Okay, we've got a reconnaissance patrol. How much combat should the reconnaissance patrol be involved with? And now you're talking about being on a company-size, you went out on this battalion-size. You see that you're being effective. What is your opinion on the role, the combat role of recon? Should you be getting involved, should you be limited? Should you avoid it all together? What circumstances dictate where you approach—?

CD: Your question, Dr. Crager, is a timely one and I suspect that, that question is still being hammered in the halls of the Marine Corps today in Afghanistan and Iraq. At that time, remember, what we inherited in the reconnaissance business was a battalion mission and a table of equipment to support it. It was Colonel Van Cleave and Colonel Blanchet who were very open-minded. All our trainings to that point on Okinawa or in Taiwan or the Philippines was of the idea that reconnaissance was a passive business. You were to be inserted, report enemy movements, and then—the model of the battalion was swift, silent, and deadly and to be extricated. To do this report, follow large groups or groups of the enemy. Pat Collins—and again, it coincides with that period of initial adjustment from March until July. As the division staff, people were realizing these recon people are becoming a great source of intelligence. They are very innovative. We were adjusting ourselves. So, at that point, the philosophy of being passive was shelved. The idea being, if you had an attempt at a shot at the VC, unless it was some (unintelligible), what would you rather have to say, "Oh, I just watched the VC platoon go by my position, or the opportunity to kill half of them." So, Pat Collins was of the opinion, I was learning as we went, too, is "A good one is a dead one." Now, as 1966 approached, now what always happens is doctrine sometimes turns into dogma, the patterns become, "Oh, we can only do this, but we can't do that." When you have that type of inflexibility, you have repetition, and the enemy has the opportunity to study you because you do the same thing. But Pat Collins subscribed to keeping a more balance, switching the methods of entry. We went off that if engaged or the reconnaissance patrol was compromised, that

we had the ability, for a limited period of time, to engage the enemy with firepower and bring supporting arms to bear. If we collected information along the way, fine, but preservation through firepower or engaged in a firefight if we were uncovered, that took the higher ground. So you had reconnaissance business in '65, being somewhat like a light combat patrol. We weren't looking for the enemy, but if we engaged them, we could fight rather than trying to immediately evade. We would rather engage the enemy and try to bring additional Marine firepower or airpower to bear on that target, then disengage. Now, probably today in the classroom, young majors and captains are still arguing, "What is the role of reconnaissance?" But for me, my experience was somewhat leaned towards to be prepared for a combat operation. The mission said reconnaissance, and you didn't look for trouble, but if it fell upon you, you would engage. You would not seek to disengage rapidly. You would engage until additional firepower or friendly supporting or reinforcing forces could be brought to bear on that target.

KC: And to some degree, this is a reflection of the philosophical approach of your officers, as well. Like you say, Pat Collins believed in going after them. Not necessarily going after them, but engaging them if they were there.

CD: Right, and that was Doc Blanchet's philosophy, too. Lieutenant Colonel, his relief when Doc Blanchet left, Lieutenant Colonel Van Cleave, he's the one that said, "Let's do this in the battalion size and see what happens." Again, still not a very exploratory move. I suspect that after the departure of Colonel Van Cleave, probably during 1966, things may have taken a different turn. In fact, I suspect some of the patrols may have gotten longer. The communications equipment was better. The food had probably reached a point where they had new instant stuff where you just add water if you needed. They took on more of a passive reconnaissance control, particularly further up north than I Corps. I think General Ray Davis, the most decorated Marine officer during my time, had every decoration, including the Medal of Honor in Korea. He used the battalion sort of like—he called it X-ray. Remember how I talked about on paper you would have forty-four of these teams that you could sprinkle out in an area? Well, he would do that. He would saturate areas with reconnaissance patrols. It's sort of like a day of hunting in Pennsylvania when hunting season opens. There's hunters everywhere. So he would sprinkle an area of reconnaissance by sectors. The two developed sectors. And

then being able the division. How much contact and exchange of fire are the recon people taking in relation to the NVA and how much artillery are they bringing? So the abilities on maps, to be able to show real time, where our patrols were. Who is in firefights with who and to deduce from that intelligence patterns, sort of Ray Davis's style. He would also blow the tops of a number of pretty good-sized mountains up in I Corps and put artillery up there, two guns. So we'd blow six or eight tops of mountains off, put artillery on each of these hilltops and mountaintops and surround them with an infantry platoon for security. You could create a zone where you could reach anywhere with artillery and then, in that zone, you can sprinkle these small reconnaissance seeds. Through their eyes and the NVA never being able to see them, they could direct artillery fire from these fire bases and that is the way a purist forms a very reconnaissance business where the teams are actually unseen and directing indirect fire onto the enemy from these firebases. That was General Davis's contribution to the reconnaissance. So that type of sophisticated passive reconnaissance occurred later in the post '66 period.

KC: Sure, as you would expect it to.

CD: In '65, it was a Wild West show. You could explore. "He who dares, wins." That's sort of the motto of the British SAS, but that's the way we operated. Now, how about this, one day we were worried about patrolling the north of Da Nang. It was what was called the Hai Van Pass, which, a thousand years ago separated the Viet culture from the Cham civilization which was based out of Hoi An. It was a very high mountain range. That if you were doing reconnaissance up in that area, you were surely to be seen. Yet, under that mountain pass, from Da Nang going north along the beach, was a railway. Pat even had the idea to beat being seen at Hai Van Pass during the day or at night, why don't we all go down to the train station, spread out, and just as the train leaves, why don't eighty guys jump on this train and take the train north under Hai Van Pass, this was a tunnel. And then we get to the other side, jump off the train and spread out and go on our business that way. I mean, that was the kind of wild thinking that guy had. We used to call it, "The great train robbery." We never got to pull that off because the train wasn't running and we were off to something else. Now, if you want to talk about a wild method of insertion, it's the great train robbery. Again, it never happened, but that was in our thinking. It made sense. Rather than going in by air—if we went in by air, they knew at

least the couple of grid squares you were in until it got dark. So, the name of the game in '65 was, "Unique methods of entry, whatever works wins and we'll go with that." So, it was fun to be a participant during a great exploratory phase of ground reconnaissance.

KC: That's incredibly interesting. Of course, you would expect it to become more refined with time and with experience and then, of course, the grinding wheels of bureaucracy and those things sort of appear. Then as you say, doctrine becomes dogma. A lot of things become set and stone. It would have been, like you say, a very fun time if that's the right word to use.

CD: Exactly. You know, there's an old Russian principle in engineering. Have you been up close to a Mig?

KC: No, I have not.

CD: If you touch the skin's surface, you say, "Geez, there's a warm feeling. What the hell is it? It's all bumpy and rough." The Russian engineering philosophy is perfection is the enemy of good enough. Now, we kind of believed in that. You know, back in '65 we didn't have to be neatly disguised as a potted palm or doing passive reconnaissance in a deep reconnaissance patrol. If you could get out every day, get your troops in the sense of being able to patrol self-confidence, shoot, move, and communicate, and use the darkness, you will deny great areas to the VC and the NVA. By doing that, it limited and hampered their planning in their ability to move in close to the Da Nang area. No less to deliver indirect-fire weapons in Da Nang, mortars. We went with that principle, just get out there and keep moving, explore, experiment, and if it seemed right in your judgment, try it.

KC: What else about that first tour there? You leave in late'65 or early'66.

CD: Well, like I say I was there, and I came in in the first airwave a week after the initial surface landing from the sea. I was flown there from Okinawa with a platoon to meet Vankat's platoon who was ashore and formed a new fist of the company. And then a few days later Pat Collins showed up with the company headquarters. And then the 3rd Recon Battalion came. But what was unique for me looking back, we were blessed with leadership. A guy like Pat Collins who served in Korea, was a tough Irishman that liked to fight, and he was good at it. He had been to Pathfinder school, Army jump school, a tour in Force Reconnaissance. Pat knew his stuff. In fact, how about this, that 80-man

company, in July we were running short of troops. Pat took the whole company out there one day and drew a line in the sand and said, “Who wants to extend with me for an additional six months?” The entire company stepped across that line.

KC: Wow.

CD: So, these guys were there anywhere from a week to four months left on their tour. Because of their trust in Pat’s abilities and his soldierly virtues and no-nonsense leadership, all stepped across that line, to include me. My tour was up, and I had reached Okinawa in July of ‘64 and it was a thirteen-month tour. So, my tour was coming up and I said, “I’ll extend another six months.”

KC: Why?

CD: Because I enjoyed Pat, the things we were doing, the novelty of it all, and started to see some of the successes of his philosophy.

KC: Hmm, interesting, that is really interesting.

CD: Like I mentioned to you in an earlier session, we had no drug problem. We had none of these racial issues. We were never idle. I’ve always maintained that idleness breeds—when troops have time on their hands, they get into trouble. Whether it’s drugs, picking on each other and all of these other nonsense stories, I never saw a fragging, that I heard about later in the war. We had no drug problems, and I attribute that to Pat’s leadership of staying busy. You didn’t have time when you came home from three days off patrol. To put your stuff together, debrief, get some sleep, food, get ready for the next patrol, and so on. Time flew when you’re having fun.

KC: Hmm, tell me about the time from which you re-up or extended, I should say, extended until the time you leave. What sort of developments did you see during that time? You’re looking at about six months there. What kind of things did you see?

CD: It took a physical toll on me. Like I say, I tried out for the all-Marine team in track in June or late May of ’64. By the fall of ‘65, I only weighed 127 pounds. But that’s okay. I had been hospitalized for four days for malaria or possible malaria. That was also something, too, the advent of malaria pills. Everybody had to take them. They were as big as horse pills. Looking in toward the close of that particular period—remember Vietnam is tough historically because what you have is a series of different snap shots. What we were doing around Da Nang, I had no idea what that did to aid or inhibit the

efforts of my US Army colleagues down in the delta or in the highlands and so on. So, it's a snapshot of that port and that port of time. The second half of 1965 was a period where the 3rd Marine Division and 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion was consolidating, streamlining, hammering out their doctrine to make sure it was correct. A development of a host of new tactical approaches; both to the infantry and the ground reconnaissance. The full integrations of aviation into the ground war in terms of close air support. I saw a lot of that. I really got to believe that the Marines are unique because of their ability of close air support. I felt very sorry for my Army colleagues who got to meet their Air Force support only in the field and never got to practice together. When they did practice together, it was once a month. Whereas, when the pilots came to support me with a helicopter or fixed-wing, I had been in the classroom with many of them. I could recognize their voices, I know who they were. I knew how far they would go for me and my troops. That's a wonderful feeling when you have that close integration of air ground. That's something that the Army did not enjoy, I believe. When you look at the US Air Force, they have five missions. The last one was close air support. They don't spend enough time together. I'm being critical of the Army and the Air Force, particularly the Air Force. The Army asked for it, but maybe it's gotten better in Afghanistan and Iraq, I don't know. But back then we had a consolidation of US air and ground. The helicopters were very comfortable in their role. Remember now, by '65, you had a tour for an aviator and a helicopter pilot in the Marine Corps was six months. By 1966-67, you had pilots on their third and fourth tour of six months. So, the air was reliable, it was available, helpful. We also, by the way, I remember an interesting story, use of naval gunfire on that Hai Van Pass and I was hoping you had a map. It's about eight thousand feet, Hai Van Pass. It's very steep and it's a natural geographic barrier between two ancient civilizations. We were at Hai Van Pass and now we're going to go west along the spine of the mountain. And sure, enough going up the trail we get in a firefight. Myself, and Pat, and another platoon. So, you can see from that high ground, right down into the harbor at Da Nang, a US American destroyer. No problem, we've got FM, we've got line of sight. We could talk to the ship, and we called for naval gunfire. The first time I know for naval gunfire to be used in support of ground reconnaissance. The problem is, along the spine of that mountain is where the two map sheets meet. At the end of the Da Nang area and the

beginning of the Hue, Phu Bai area. The VC, I'm convinced, knew that if we were to call naval gunfire or air, we'd be on two conflicting map sheets. So, we called naval gunfire, and you know how that works. From where you are you call for rounds out in front of you and then you half that and then you half that again and you run the target. Well, we can see the ship, and he fires a five-inch gun, and it landed right behind us. So, we're calling back to the ship to cease fire. We had to call off naval gunfire because we could not coordinate between ourselves, the difference on two map sheets which they had aboard the ship. The VC took advantage of that and were able to flee west and we couldn't pursue them for about an hour or two because of futile naval gunfire. That's another story that goes right up there with the great train ride. It's not mainstream.

KC: Right, and it's all around the Hai Van Pass for some reason.

CD: Right.

KC: What sort of technological developments do you see coming along for the rest of your tour there in the last half of 1965? What technologically is beginning to appear in the battlefields in Vietnam?

CD: The greatest was the verification of the M-79. It became a cornerstone of each Marine infantry rifle squad. The use of the M-79, the reconnaissance, was self-protection during firefights on the trail. That's at the lowest level. Technologically, the advent of the PRC-25 radio to replace the old PRC-10 which constantly had to be calibrated and was limited by line of sight. Weapons started to stabilize with the M-14, but there was a lot of noise that some of the infantry units were beginning to receive the M-16. Artillery or use of artillery and use of phosphorous. Phosphorous is a very terrible weapon. When you shoot it in the jungle, it'll stay there and burn on leaves. So that if you fire phosphorous behind somebody and you chase them in the direction of the phosphorous, it might rub off and get on their skin and there's no way to prevent it from burning right through your arm, except for a mud pack. You have to deny it air. So, the use of white phosphorous, sometimes, in support of patrols, in non-populated areas, I believe, was very dreaded by the VC. But again, you had to watch it. If you used white phosphorous in the jungle, you had to pick an area that you didn't have to go through until it could burn itself out after a few hours. So, individual equipment, the boot, the ability to adjust to new light utilities which dried very quickly during the rainstorms.

When it rains in I Corps, usually starts around November and months until February, it rains every day and it just rains. I think most Americans have no idea where it just starts raining and it don't stop for ninety days. That has a severe impact on you mentally and operating in that range. No less upon your body by suffering. Your feet begin—a foot immersion type disease. So, to answer your question I didn't see any major tactical except the refinement of processes everywhere. To gain the VC acknowledgement and coordinations and to fire artillery in certain areas was reduced from sometimes hours to minutes, the use of close air and the steps to engage close air and bring them on station in a short period of time. The resilience of the young Marines to be able to trust their weapon systems and their leadership and their knowledge and doctors became their friends. Were these technological? Some of them not, but it was just a process that was beginning to streamline, tighten up, and become greatly supported. The average trooper was the measure of all things could see these processes improving. I think for him that was a great technological advantage.

KC: You talked about the toll that the rain can have on you psychologically. It rains for three straight months or six straight months. Whatever it might be. What kind of toll does this constant patrolling, the combat, the terrain and the weather? Looking at how you are dealing with all these difficulties, what kind of toll does this first tour in Vietnam take on your psychologically?

CD: Take on me psychologically?

KC: Yes, sir.

CD: We had spoken about fear in different environments in different parts west of Da Nang. There is a very varied, from rice paddies to an eight-thousand-foot mountain. It is a varied terrain. The ability to operate in these different terrains, reconnaissance is best suited for the mountainous jungle type. Because of the ability to hide and be undetected using the natural elements. Reconnaissance groups did not do well in the populated agricultural maritime plane area because of the people. We used to joke about how we could operate down that. Be neatly disguised as a potted palm? You could not move well among the villagers because they had the dog's system, children, and water buffalo. So, when you did patrolling down there, which the infantry did, it was all combat patrols. And you'd pick up as much intelligence as you can with a combat patrol at night. To

operate in those varied terrains presented different types of fear and different types of challenges. Towards the end of my first tour there, we had a short-timers policy. We believe with two weeks to go everybody should be taken off of patrol. You would not send a man on patrol—or let's say thirty days. There were some patrols that were routine, things that had to be done. Never really any contact but had to be done setting X-ray relay post. Send the short timers on those because it's a psychological concern. "Wouldn't this be terrible? The last week I'm hear I get wacked?" So, to take that burden off of somebody by initially Pat's policy by saying, "Find out who has short-timers and make sure the assignment of patrols that so and so is placed on a less challenging roll to fully be able to cope with his psychological concern and his short-timer attitude." So that's how we did it. We used a short-timer policy on putting people on, let's say, lighter duty with thirty days to go. This, I think, was greatly appreciated by all the troops. It was a big of a warning by then. Somebody who had been in-country for six to nine months probably had anywhere from forty to sixty patrols. You know, you can kind of equate those patrols to the life of a B-29 pilot in WWII, I don't know. If you did fifty patrols, every one after that was like a waste, I would imagine. The same way with patrolling, when you started accruing certain numbers like a baseball average. You know, you say, "When is my time?" Everybody knows that if the good Lord wanted you, he was going to come get you. The bullet would go around the rock and find you. So, everybody believed that philosophy and gave them a bit of fearlessness. Whatever they do, the good Lord had plans for them, they were going to live, or they were going to die. So, it wasn't fatalism, it was just accepted, but you could help that the last thirty days by easing that psychological concern a bit by assigning them a less demanding task.

KC: Well, that brings up another good topic. What was morale like in the recon units that you served in?

CD: Well, in the company I was blessed to serve with Pat Collins, it was extremely high. We had a wonderful First Sergeant Harry Rogers who I had mentioned to you. Three terrific platoon sergeants and Pat, himself, and that story I told you about morale. The company commander draws a line, and he says, "Now, who wants to stay another six months to maintain the integrity of this company?" And everybody available

stepped across the line. I think that is the highest accolade to morale I could attribute to the leadership of Pat Collins.

KC: You also mentioned in passing, you talked about the Vietnamese and working through their villages. What was your opinion of the Vietnamese when you got there in '65? Did you know about them? Did you think about them? The Vietnamese civilians, that is.

CD: Yeah, what were we looking at? Well, when you got into these villages you saw the town, you saw shops, but you never got to go into Da Nang. So, most of our time that the average Marine in my company met a Vietnamese, it was an eighty-year-old woman chewing betel nuts, squatting on the side of the road or working in the paddies. We looked at them as agricultural folks. They had beautiful children; we felt sorry for them. We learned some—we realized that the water buffalo—oh, every rice paddy in I Corps has one corner of a dug out like a six-foot ditch. When the water paddies are full of water, two or three times a year, that ditch is to allow the water buffalo to settle in up to his nose because that's how he cools himself. So, the farmers, over a thousand years of agriculture, dug out that part to allow the water buffalo to cool himself off between tasks. Well, at night four corners of the paddy, you don't know where the water buffalo is. At night on the patrol, somebody fell in that hole. If it was a radio operator, you'd try to find the guy. The water was almost submerged sometimes. Looking at the Vietnamese, they were an ancient society, it was easy to see, but for example, I remember a couple of times we were in a firefight, and somebody will say, "Oh, look, I got one. I found some blood by this hooch." It wasn't blood, it was betel nuts. Somebody was chewing and one of the natives said, "Spit it." And they mistook that for blood, or somebody was bleeding down the trail. But the Vietnamese we met were friendly, but there were the horror stories that pursued, like down at Hill 55. There was a guy who was allowed inside the wire in an infantry company to cut everybody's hair. Then one night they get night attacked. Then the next day they found bodies on the wire a couple of weeks later and one of them was the barber. So, there was a little distrust. We found under every hooch; there was a bomb shelter where they could go from there. Their mud hut, about a foot off the ground, their bamboo hooch, and if there was incoming fire, it was a place to hide. But we tried to avoid them as much as we could, but when we went through a village, we were friendly.

They never presented a problem. But when you went to a village that had no young men, what I mean by young men, anybody under the age of twelve. That was a sign that maybe, maybe just maybe, that this village had pro-VC tendencies because of all the young men that had been coopted or Shanghaied by the VC. Oh, and the way they would look at you when you would pass through a village. If there was no friendly wave, then it might have had pro-VC tendencies. These kinds of small factors would grow in your mind. As you exited the village you'd say, "You know, that was a pretty friendly village." or "That village might be trouble in the future." But in general, the US Marines in '65, their only recollection is Vietnamese people is little people with conical hats in pajamas that chew betel nuts and squat on the side of the road. They had no understanding or appreciation for the fifteen hundred years history of the Vietnamese people. The beauty and sophistication that was Saigon, or the Imperial tombs which were waved, or the dynastic system with the Chinese. They had no appreciation or concept of all of that.

KC: Now, when your extended tour is coming up, and this is either December of'65 or January of '66, whenever it is, what did you want to do? Were you looking forward to getting out of Vietnam? Were you looking forward to going home? Did you want to stay? What were your feelings and what were your thoughts at the end of this tour?

CD: By August of 1965, I realized I'm in the business where initially I was offered a regular commission in Basic School at the PLC program. But I said, "No, I don't want to spend an extra year because I don't know if I'm going to be any good at this." So, by August of '65 I realized, "You know, thanks to the luck of the draw and being able to work with Pat Collins and others, I'm getting pretty good at this." I had been decorated a number of times in early '65. I said, "You know, I have the credentials now. I can walk the walk. I've done it, I've seen it up close whatever to war there is so I can share and teach others. So, I made the decision, I think I want to stay. "So, by August of '65 I signed on and regular commission was offered to me a second time. So, as I'm closing my career I'm looking, "Where can I choose to go next to be able to best influence the action and take advantage of my unique experience in 1965?" When I got back to the States in '66, I was one of the handful of people that had been to Vietnam. I

mean, I go to the 2nd Marine Division in North Carolina and few people, only a beginning trickle of people coming back to Vietnam. So, there I was, I'm now a first lieutenant and I was assigned a company. I had some ribbons on my chest and personal decoration. So, people gave me a little deference. I spoke with a little bit of authority. People wanted to hear what I had to say, maybe I could help them. So that's the kind of feeling I had and I was delighted. Except, North Carolina back then, I was a single guy, and it was very difficult. I liked to date women, but it was difficult to get a date. Then by that time, too, I had two Caribbean tours. I went on two floats with infantry battalions into the Caribbean.

KC: And when was this, in '66?

CD: Let's see, July all the way through September of 1956, I lived in the Caribbean on cruises. We would send a battalion, and we would visit the Panama Canal, the Panama jungle schools, and we would be based on the island of Vieques. Half of Vieques used to be a US bombing range. The other half of Vieques was basically a Marine camp and had one town, Isabel Segundo. We used to call it "the town that was too tough to die." So, we would spend time doing amphibious landings, practicing amphibious doctrinal techniques, and sailing at ports of call as sort of a Marine contingency battalion. We embarked on an LPH, landing platform helicopter, a big carrier, most of the summer of '66.

KC: All right, now let me take you back a little bit. You leave Vietnam, you get back in the States, and I guess you go to the 2nd Marine Division, you say, in North Carolina, and this is early 1966.

CD: Right.

KC: What position did you hold? What were your duties going to be here?

CD: Ironically, I was assigned to 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion. I commanded two companies: Company A—Company B, and then Company A. It was a skeletal organization. It did not have the full complement of troops. It was probably operating at about eighty percent of a table of organization as opposed to 3rd Recon that was probably operating at about one hundred percent. So, my job as a young company commander as the first lieutenant to train the second lieutenants. Sort of in the mode or the footsteps of how Pat Collins would have done it.

KC: So, did you see your job as one in which you were to get the 2nd Battalion, these companies in the 2nd Battalion in Vietnam ready shape?

CD: As best you could. You see, back then, too, in the 2nd Marine Division, even 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion, every day you probably didn't have thirty percent of your troops. They had to go to the rifle range, they had to perform mess duty, they had to perform camp guard duty. So administrative tasks, every day during that time, still to this day, when operational units are in garrison, they suffer drawdown. You have to put people on mess duty. People have to go for eye inspections, medical and family type things. So, a young company commander or an infantry reconnaissance longs for the day when he can get his unit away from that camp out in the field where he has unit integrity or maybe has ninety percent of his troops available to do things that the company needs to do. So, I had two skeletal companies and the operational draw down that plagues every unit. Then I did that until about July. And then, they needed a reconnaissance platoon to go with 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines as part of a battalion landing team. Every battalion landing team has one reconnaissance platoon. So, a battalion commander gentleman named Harold Keizer, also a Navy Cross winner, said, "I think you ought to go on that cruise, to make sure that we hold up our end and are representative to the battalion. So that's what got me out of the company commander business. Back down to a platoon commander, at least for that summer with the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines.

KC: How did you adjust to life in North Carolina with the 2nd Division as a peace time officer—not a peace time officer but someone serving stateside while war was going on having been on the war?

CD: Even by '66, I could see it was going to go on. I knew I was going back.

KC: You knew that at that time? You already knew?

CD: Yeah, I knew in early '66 that this was. And given the size of the buildup and the investment the United States was making, plus studying the political dynamics and the press on TV and in my readings, I just knew I was going back for—I'd be in the first wave of people going back for their second tour. I wanted to be the most professional Marine I'm going to be while I'm in the States and also enjoy myself and get ready for whatever my second tour might have brought me.

KC: I read yesterday, a short little article. I don't know if it was from a book or a magazine or what it was from. I can't even tell you who the author of it was. I didn't see the name of the author, but there was a story about a First Lieutenant Carmine DelGrosso, who had taken an unauthorized leave for a very short period of time and nearly had himself in a little bit of trouble. Do you recall anything about that?

CD: Yeah. (Laughing)

KC: (Laughing) Do you mind telling me that story?

CD: You know, if you punch my name into google, I think that story comes up.

KC: It comes up first, in fact. That's how I found it.

CD: I know who wrote it. I know him. I thought he took some liberties with all of that. It went like this, long story short. Again, I was a single guy and to go from Camp Lejeune on Friday, I enjoyed liberty in New York City. So, to drive all the way home and then have to be back by six o'clock Monday morning, I had a succession of three battalion commanders, two of which had Navy Crosses. The first one was terrific, the second one was so-so, but the third guy, his nickname was Black Jack. And he told me on a Friday, you know, I said, "Look, I haven't been on liberty. I've been in the Caribbean. I'd like to go on leave." "No, you can't go." I said, "Well look, I'm going to go, Colonel, I'll see you. I'll be back Monday morning, six-thirty." I think I was an hour late and he was going to read me the Riot Act and then he authored that article saying I was going to be court martialed and all that sort of stuff. It never really got to that extreme, but I was severely chastised. You know, in my heart I wanted to tell them, but I couldn't say so. What are you going to do, shave my head and send me back to Vietnam?

KC: Yeah, I thought that was entertaining. (Laughing)

CD: So, I thought I deserved an extra day. The troops were in good hands, and nobody suffered. I know we thought we needed a weekend in New York, that's all.

KC: Right, well I think that's a good point to stop there for today, Colonel.

Interview with Carmine DelGrosso
Session [3] of [6]
Date: 25 October 2010

Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Colonel Carmine DelGrosso. Today is October 25, 2010, I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University and the Colonel is joining me by telephone from his home in San Clemente, California. All right, Colonel, off the record a moment ago you were discussing this Caribbean cruise that you were a part of. It was part of the battalion landing team that was assigned to the Caribbean. Tell me about that time you spent there in the Caribbean.

Carmine DelGrosso: Right. Caribbean cruise was part of a normal cycle for the 9th Infantry Battalion stationed at Camp Lejeune as part of the 2nd Marine Division during the'65-'66 timeframe. What it consisted of is the Marine force battalion to include an aviation squadron in the form of a battalion landing team. That includes a reconnaissance platoon. I had taken one of those platoons. It was normally a four-month cruise that set sail for Morehead City, North Carolina, about forty miles north of Camp Lejeune. With the primary infantry battalion embarked on the landing platform helicopter, an LPH. We would sail down to the Caribbean with the primary ports of call built around Vieques Island, which was an island just east of Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, about thirty miles. The entire island, the one small civilian sector, was a US naval base. Half the island was a US Navy bombing range. See, the Navy would sail down to Vieques because it was the last opportunity it had to fire all its weapons and long-range weapons to include battleships, like the *Wisconsin*. Before it would sail east for assignments in the Mediterranean. The other half of the island was built around Camp Garcia, which was a Marine engineering camp. The battalions would come ashore for a few days and do fire and maneuver exercises and then reembark, again, having tested their weapons and then further sailing onto often Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where we would put in for two or three days and make use of the land there in Guantanamo Bay for exercise maneuvers. Also, visit with Marine colleagues. At the same time, this battalion was normally the United States maintained a Marine infantry battalion, also from Camp Lejeune also at Guantanamo Bay to reinforce the fences and patrol the 125-mile perimeter over the entire

base on both the leeward and windward sides of Guantanamo Bay. So, there were probably eight hundred Marines ashore at Guantanamo Bay for probably a four-month tour and then they would rotate back to Camp Lejeune. After Guantanamo Bay we would set sail off for the Panama and the United States would land on the east side of the Panama Canal. Select companies from the rifle battalion would participate in the US Army's jungle school, located in the United States controlled Panama Canal. It was excellent training when the entire battalion would break down to squad size and then once it's in the jungle, on individual survival skills, compass marches, navigating in the jungle for up to ten days. So, the entire battalion cohesively could participate at the squad level in their training. We would then reembark—oh, then we would go on liberty, on the west side over Panama City by train and be recovered by train after a day or two days in Panama City. Get back, reembark on the east coast of Panama and set sail for other places in the Caribbean. Depending on the battalion four-month cruise, and in my case in June of '66, we went to Panama, Guantanamo Bay, and San Juan. It was very worthwhile in the sense that many of the troops then, by June of '66 had not yet been to Vietnam. So, for them to get out and work their combined arms and reinforce their squad training and identity and allow platoon company commanders and the battalion commanders and staff to exercise those troops, made for a good unit cohesiveness, comradery, and was a great step to get troops ready to follow-on assignments in Vietnam.

KC: Which is something, obviously, that the Marines needed, based on your experience there already.

CD: That they hated?

KC: No, that they needed.

CD: Oh, basically I think warfare has been this way for two thousand years. When a company is in garrison, as a unit, their tactical integrity is often marginalized by garrison assignments. For example, the camp guard. Somebody has to do the cooking, so you have mess duty. There's people all the time on temporary additional duty or going to school. There were times, particularly in 1966, where a company commander would go out to see his company and what was available may have been as low as 30 percent of the troops. So, any great plans about going to the field are always compromised by garrison down commands. So, the joy of being able to get away from Camp Lejeune with your

rifle company or your battalion having operating levels of 85-90 percent of the troops available is a good thing. You could do what was necessary because you had to choose strength and presence to accomplish that. Since there were so many troops there, say, 90 percent while afloat or assigned away from Camp Lejeune, you could build integrity, you could build a squad communications around each other and basically special trust in confidence to each other.

KC: While you were on this float did you—

CD: By the way, sometimes a division would be so desperate, they would tell a battalion, "We're going to designate you," for example, "3rd Battalion, 6th Marines. In a regiment of the 6th Marines, you're going to do a crappy little job that is demanded of the regiment so at least we can maintain some integrity in the other two battalions." It's a heck of a way to operate, but when one third of a regiment has to pick up all the junk from the camp guard, police. Whatever it took, the division demands the working parties you would have to provide. You would basically have to lose your tactical integrity depending on the nature on how long you had that assignment. Usually, it was a month or six weeks. Keep in mind, at the same time, too, a battalion that was about to go afloat, you had to maintain, and it was very important that you maintained their personal integrity that you didn't treat them as a treadmill. So that the person you trained would say twelve weeks prior to deployment with the same guy twelve weeks later that got on the ship. You could not continually train from squad through company to battalion level and then have this routine drawdown because of administrative constraints or prohibitions or extracurricular activities. You had to get eight hundred Marines that were not going to be reenlisted, not going to get out of the Marine Corps to attain eight hundred people and keep them together in a pipeline is no easy task for division command and personal people to match—mix and match that combination. Once people are there, it's usually twelve weeks before afloat that those people are locked down in their battalion that allows them, as a whole, perform they all go through squad level training together. All through platoon, all through company training. So that you sail as a unit and then stay together in the Caribbean or whatever, for the duration up to six months. It's a thing of beauty not easily attainable. So, every infantry battalion, even in

base time, is constantly nipped at by administrative drawdowns which is fatal to building unit integrity in the tactical sense.

KC: While you were on this cruise in the Caribbean, did you have any chance to interact with any of the native population, the citizens of the countries you visited?

CD: Oh, absolutely. You know, the old "join the Navy and see the world?" That applies to the Marine Corps, too. The troop particularly enjoyed Panama. One of the reasons the troops enjoyed certain places, and I've seen this in other parts of the world. For example, in the Far East when we go to Hong Kong, it was a beautiful place, but everything was so expensive. What the troops enjoyed most was the ability to go to the Philippines where beer was cheap and so it was the opportunity to meet women and, you know, a twenty-dollar bill would go a very, very long way. The same applied to the Caribbean. The troops enjoyed Panama because at the cost of living, the price of beer, the cost of transportation and getting around and getting food. So, they really enjoyed going into Panama City for three days and taking the train across from Colon, the port on the east coast of the Panama Canal. Vieques was tough. There was nothing there except beer and the beach. They enjoyed San Juan, going into San Juan and stopping in "Gitmo" (Naval Station Guantanamo Bay) was of historical interest and there was a slop shoot there, but there were no women. No ability to interact with the Cubans. Although you could watch the Cubans come and go through the fence every day for work. The troops thought that was historically interesting. The base was staffed by Cubans that every day, had to exit the base, and lived in the nearest town on the other side of the fences.

KC: You were talking earlier before we started the recording, about seeing the troops who are guarding the fence or guarding this very tenuous border. Tell me about that. Tell me about the conditions there.

CD: I remember now, in Guantanamo Bay there were certain beaches that the troops could use. But if you took your troops to the beach you had to register with the provost marshal. The standard rule back then was, if anybody saw bubbles in the water, the standard operating procedure was to drop a hand grenade on the bubbles because we were always concerned about infiltrators through the leeward side into Guantanamo Bay. Often, a battalion, as part of its four-month deployment, would be called upon to help man the fences at Gitmo. Now, there was an entire Marine battalion. 2/9 of the 2nd

Marine Division, one was afloat, and one was in Gitmo, reinforcing the perimeter. Often, these troops from Camp Lejeune, because of the way life works out, had not been to Vietnam yet. So, darkness for them was not quite their friend and they were a little nervous for Cuban infiltrators and the Cubans would get quite close to the fence and some of the guard towers and would throw rocks. So, we constantly at night had rock throwing incidents with the Cubans. I had heard a story once, but I had never seen it. A one rifle company who had supposedly erected a catapult and would be throwing rocks back and forth with the Cubans. Anything to keep up morale while also doing your job. Remember, much of Gitmo was very heavily mined, but still, the Cubans would try to infiltrate. You don't know whether that was out of a desire to reach US territory or just to harass people assigned to guard duty on defense. But at night, Gitmo was a busy place in the summer of 1966 with lots and lots of incidents along the fence. The rules were, too, if there was somebody infiltrating over the fence and the Marines had live ammunition, that is even the visiting Marines who were sent to reinforce the fence. Now, if you shot one, make sure that the body fell over into US property so that you could claim that that was infiltration of the United States property. There were often instances when somebody was shot and fell back over the fence, back into Cuban territory. Which that was frowned upon because that meant the other side could make great political hay about, "Well, you shot a person who was on the fence." There was even a cherry picker there on standby that if a body was shot on the fence, the cherry picker could be rushed out. There was lots of fence, probably sixteen miles of fence to recover the body other side if there was a shooting incident on the fence.

KC: What was the attitude of the citizens of the Caribbean toward the Americans in general and the Marines in particular?

CD: There was no animosity. The US Marines were welcome. First of all, it was an economic injection into the local culture. Whether it was in Isabel Segundo, the little town on Vieques, where back then you could buy a Pepsi Cola bottle full of rum with no cap and you'd have to walk around with your finger in it because it was a message from God that if there was no cap on it, you had to finish the bottle. You could buy a full bottle of rum back then for ten cents. So, there were no animosity with the locals outside of maybe a couple Marines got a little rowdy in the bar but buy paying whatever the

breakage was in the bar to chairs or tables. Life went on and the Marines were an integral part of the economic life of that town. The same way in Panama. When they completed the jungle school, we would load the entire company reinforced of almost three hundred Marines to take the train right across Panama. The Marines would give them liberty and only had to check in once a day. After three days they'd party around Panama City, never any problems. We would match a number of Marine officers as part of the shore patrol alongside the Guardia National, which was the Panamanian Army. We would walk the streets of Panama City in tandem with our Canadian counterparts. We never had a problem with the Marines. We would go into San Juan the same way. Come over from Vieques by LST, it was about a four-hour ride, to Roosevelt Road. Take taxi cabs—you'd see a hundred taxis out there picking up two or three Marines and taking them across the island over to San Juan, spend three days in San Juan. No incidents, again, working with the local authorities. So, there was no political animosity in any of the liberty spots with the local personnel. They were not resented. There was no communist feeling or Cuban sympathizers or problems with Venezuela that would interfere with the normal process of liberty and the Marines getting a little time off with a couple of beers with their friends. Then again, seeing parts of the world that would have been denied to them if they had been in another occupation.

KC: Now, when your time on this cruise comes to an end, are you disappointed that it's over and that you have to go back to the States to another assignment or are you glad to get off the ship?

CD: That's an excellent question. Nobody likes the ship because, let us say for example, I'll give you a little story—in the officers' mess, you go on the ship for thirty days, you buy into the officers' mess as a junior Marine Corps officer. The quality of the food is not that great. A lot of hot dogs and bug juice and that sort of stuff. But when the Marines get off because it's the same mess, the ship's crew, and the remaining ship's crew eat very well on the Marine money. So, if I buy into the mess for thirty days, they scrimp for twenty days and then when I get off the ship, they eat steak for ten days. That process was somewhat resented. Now the troops, they always ate pretty good, no problem. But everybody enjoyed the cruise. It was always a new adventure, a new port of call. You're the same buddies so you develop deep ties among those people. At the end of

all cruises—please keep in mind at that time in 1966, married Marines were only probably ten percent of the force. There was an old saying, "If the Marine Corps wanted you to have a wife below the rank of sergeant, they would have issued you one." So, below the rank of sergeant there were not many married Marines. Today's Marine Corps, probably I would suspect has eighty percent of battalion below the rank of sergeant is married. When you see a Marine battalion when they're about to go afloat in today's Marine Corps, that parking lot where they have to find areas to park a thousand cars. All the troops have to leave their automobiles somewhere that is safe in that area guarded by the, again, regimental staff that provides the people. Back in '66, where the Marine rifle platoon was, one officer, forty-six enlisted and the Navy corpsman, there were maybe only two or three automobiles in that whole platoon. They were usually owned by somebody who had a couple of bucks, a rich kid. So, when the Marines were afloat and they weren't married and they did come back, their regrets were, "I will have to go back to routine camp life." A lot of shitty little jobs. But at least those who were married had the opportunity to see their families. You know, four months away from your family in the Caribbean and you're supposed to be on a state-side tour. It's detrimental, to a degree, sometimes often, a family relationship. Sort of like there's a small portion that looks forward to revisiting their families. For the average young, I remember back then the average Marine was about nineteen years of age. They looked forward to what would be their next assignment when they got back to Camp Lejeune because they knew that battalion probably would suffer degradation. Many of the troops would go on for addition of duties, on new assignments, had been in that battalion for two years and were starting to move to another assignment whether in the fleet Marine forces or outside like recruiting at a Marine Corps recruit depot or whatever. So, everybody knew there would be some sort of a degradation to the battalion as they knew it doing their four-month experiences.

KC: You bring up a question that comes to my mind. You're onboard ship or on this cruise for four months. It's not always onboard ship, but what was the relationship like between the Marines and the sailors on these ships?

CD: It's a broad question. I think it fits the traditional response; there was a little friction. The Marines would look at the Navy and say, "What kind of life would you

have? Do you have to chip paint all day long?" There used to be an old saying, "If it don't move, paint it. If it moves, salute it." You know, we used to look at Navy life and say, "Gee, why would somebody sign up for that?" Where the Marines you knew, even the Navy would go to ports of call, it was sort of—even then in the Navy, too, even in the Caribbean, the sailors spend so much time down below deck that they had pale. They didn't have any tan or complexion. The Marines just did not like that type of a lifestyle. But there was no major frictions. They looked at us to be transported. We looked at them as just sort of bus drivers. That's the way it went. During your time on the ship, you made the best of it. Sometimes on an LPH, a landing platform helicopter. On the carrier deck, the second deck where they kept all the Marine helicopters, at night there would be a movie. The Marines looked forward to the movie. You couldn't drink in transit to the next port. So, life was really simple. Clean your weapons, do calisthenics up on the flight deck, and a nightly movie. A little funny story, I remember when one night, the funniest thing I think I ever seen. As the movie was announced every night it was called the eight o'clock reports. And the eight o'clock reports were over the loudspeaker. You could hear different sections in the ship would report in that everything was safe and secure. And then a boatswain's mate would announce what the night's movie was, so the Marines would know what the movie was. One night the boatswain—to this day I think he never realized, he said, "Tonight's movie is, "Henry V-I-I-I." (Pronounced every letter of VIII) So, you know, you had that kind of a jocularity you laugh a little on ship. But there was no air conditioning back then either except maybe in the medical ward. But the troops slept sometimes on an LPH, seven decks high. You have to climb up and during it was kind of tough in the Caribbean. The weather now, the fringes would try to sail away from it, but a hurricane and I remember being on the fringes when hurricane season starts in August. So, in the post-August time of year, the probabilities are running into some pretty rough weather in the Caribbean grow exponentially. To be in some pretty rough weather where troops get seasick in their bunks. I had one first sergeant that was running around giving a lot of the troops—the process was, you would stay in your bunk with your helmet on and boots on. A lot of troops would get seasick and the first sergeant would run around and give them anti-seasick pills. It was basically a placebo. The troops thought it was—it helped many of them, but it was just an aspirin. So, life on the ship could be

discomforting particularly in tough weather and the troops, they just played cards, cleaned their weapons, and got ready for the next port call. You ran a lot of classes on the ship. You would see your troops maybe two or three hours a day where you would hold class on all kinds of subjects from personal hygiene through law classes. So, a little dull on the ships for the troops, but it was a new experience, and they'd walk all over the ship. Now, that was on a bigger one, like an LPH, but some of these auxiliary ships, usually an amphibious ready group, had three ships built around the LPH with the Marine embarked battalion. It was probably a thousand people. Plus, a five-hundred-man Marine helicopter squadron. On the auxiliary ships, like an AKA (attack cargo ships) or an APA (auxiliary personal, attack ship), was embarked part of the battalion's artillery supply and logistics. The life on a smaller ship was a little tougher. It didn't have the big movie every night and it was a little more cramped, which is a tougher ride than a bigger ship. They probably ate a little better, but that's the advantage. The good news being in the Caribbean, you never went more than ten days a float where you ran into some other port of call.

KC: All right, you finish your four-month Caribbean cruise. What's your next stop? You come back to the US; you come back to North Carolina. What's your next stop?

CD: Well, the next stop is depending on where—assignment to the 2nd Marine Division, at that time, was minimal of two years, possibly three. So, in the course of two years or three, depending on which battalion you went to. Say, you just went to a battalion that just came back from the Caribbean, and you were at the beginning of the lock on cycle to start the process again to build up to deploy within the next six months. It could be Med Cruise. You would go and deploy to the Mediterranean and sail from North Carolina, hit many, many ports of call in the Mediterranean and that was normally six months. At all times, the United States kept the battalion in the Mediterranean for six months and also, you had to have one battalion getting ready to go. So that battalion that sailed out of the Mediterranean was met by—usually it rode to Spain, an oncoming battalion that was headed into the mess for six months where the ports of call were varied everything from Rhodes to Venice you would get off and make six or eight landings in Turkey, Italy, North Africa, and Spain itself. Many troops enjoyed that cruise because

they really got to see a good chunk of Europe and Africa and also as Far East as Turkey in the Bosphorus for six-month Med Cruise really welded a battalion together. They knew who they were. Their weapons, they got to train together, and combat wise, that was a first-rate battalion ready for combat and deployment and fully trained. At the same time, we had this Caribbean operation. So, depending on when you go to Camp Lejeune, in the two-to-three-year process you could expect at least one, six-month Med deployment and probably two Caribbean deployments in the course of three years. Now, think about that. At max that's about fourteen months afloat from North Carolina on a three-year state-side tour between Vietnam. So that didn't leave much time for family and other things.

KC: Right, right.

CD: When you came back from that process out of the 2nd Marine Division and you were transferred, you would go from one of the three Marine Corps special services if you were enlisted, which is the drill field, recruiting duty, or even Marine Security Guard Battalion with all the embassies worldwide. You would go onto Headquarters Marine Corps or station somewhere else. So, troops, depending on their MOS, military occupational specialty, would be transferred from sort of, you might say, a Class A billet which was Fleet Marine Forces to a B billet that is shore duty elsewhere recruiting, the drill fields, headquarters, and Marine Corps. You then went from B billet and then back to an A billet which was Fleet Marine Forces. Rarely at that time, because of the needs of the Marine Corps, was somebody ever assigned from a B billet to a B billet. To go from recruiting to the drill field. That kept you away from your occupational specialty, particularly infantry for up to five or six years. When you would come back from that process, you were completely out of it. You had to be completely retrained. Of course, new weapons and new tactics and so on.

KC: What about you? You come back from the Caribbean; you go back to the 2nd Division. What is your new position? Where are you going? What are you going to be doing?

CD: Again, I had been eighteen—well, almost two years in the Fleet Marine Forces in the 3rd Marine Division, plus extending with the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade. Then I've got a year in the 2nd Marine Division and then the time with Carib

Cruises I also went to jump school, I went to scuba school in Key West, Florida, and jump school with the US Army in Fort Benning, Georgia. So, for a Marine lieutenant, that's all I've known now. Since I got out of Basic School in June of 1963, it's now mid-1966 so for three years all I've known is the Fleet Marine Forces. I don't know another part of the Marine Corps. I'm also a single guy at Camp Lejeune. I would like to get out of Camp Lejeune to meet some women.

KC: You mentioned that before.

CD: So, the opportunity came up to go to language school. I went to see my monitor and I took the language aptitude test, and I qualified for Chinese. I said, "Wow, that sounds pretty sexy." So, there I find myself in January 1967, in the classroom studying Mandarin Chinese in Washington, D.C., for forty-seven weeks. That's six hours a day with four guys in my class. So, you can't really fake a hangover. So, I studied Chinese for five hours a day at a place called, The Institute of Modern Languages. Now, back then the Defense Language Institute was broken into West Coast and East Coast. The Defense Language Institute on the East Coast was in Anacostia, Washington. But it was so flooded with people learning Vietnamese and other languages, many students were farmed out on subcontractor to language schools in the Washington, D.C., area. I was assigned to a place called The Institute of Modern Languages up in Northwest Washington, D.C., It was in civilian clothes, five hours a day, and that's all I did. I reported every morning at eight o'clock and studied Chinese until about two. Ten-minute breaks, five straight hours to go to lunch and all that nonsense. Then I went home, and I had an apartment in Washington, and I studied my Mandarin Chinese and worked on my characters and everything else for a year.

KC: Now, why did you choose language? Was it something you had an ear for? Was it something you wanted?

CD: That's a good question. I remember way back in February 1965, I was assigned on an exercise, a platoon-sized—a reconnaissance platoon and was dispatched from Okinawa to Taiwan. I was matched with the Chinese marines. I had an opposite number, a lieutenant and he had twenty-two Chinese marines. We operated from the very tip of the bottom of the island of Taiwan, north for a hundred miles. My two lance corporals worked for his two corporals. His two corporals worked for my two corporals.

So, there we were, two platoons. The only one who spoke English was the Chinese platoon commander. All the rest of us did not speak any Mandarin. I found that a fascinating experience where you got to work with a lot of arm and hand signals. Live off the land, work as a four-man team. Two of which were foreigners who spoke no English. It was some pretty rugged terrain. It had about a dozen types of hemotoxic and neurotoxic snakes, exotic animals, thick jungle rainforests. Very reminiscent of what I would go through in Panama in 1966. You know, I went on that operation for three weeks and I developed an appreciation of the Chinese government on Taiwan. The build up to that, we learned a number of Chinese characters, memorized sayings, "Thank you, and appreciate it." Probably each of the Marines learned a hundred-word vocabulary that if they inserted into dialogue at the right time, maybe it would work and be helpful to them. So, in a short period of time for two-week operations in three weeks, I got the taste of a little Asiatic society up close. When the opportunity came to study language moving forward two years later I said, "Maybe I have the ability and the scores to do it. To participate and learn more about Asia through the Chinese language." That's how I backed into Mandarin Chinese.

KC: Interesting.

CD: And then the beauty of it is that this is something very hard. When people go to language school, you would think that the government made an investment that they would actually go to the country or into a follow-on assignment where they got to use that language in some capacity. That is rare, that doesn't happen. Many people are sent to language school to fill quotas because you use it or lose it. The Marine Corps is given so many quotas a year in different languages. I actually got assigned to the country. I was assigned as part of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, known as the MAAG. I was assigned to MAAG China in 1968.

KC: First off let me ask you, how well did you do in the language courses? Were you a success? Was it difficult for you? How well did you do?

CD: I did well enough. I had a big of an aptitude, maybe it goes back to my Jesuit education. As an undergraduate I had six years of Latin and two years of Greek. I knew enough French to be dangerous.

KC: (Laughs)

CD: To be assigned in 1968 as one of four team advisors assigned to the Chinese marines—the Chinese marines at that time were the second largest marine corps in the world. There were some fifty thousand of them located in southern Taiwan near the port city of Kaohsiung which was a million people back then. And on the outskirts of Kaohsiung was a place called Tsoying, T-S-O-Y-I-N-G. That was the home of the Chinese marines. There were fourteen advisors, I was the junior guy as a captain. I was the only single guy. Ironically, the only one that spoke a little Chinese. So, I didn't live in a compound with the other officers. I lived in a town with the Chinese people. I lived in the city of Kaohsiung for two and a half years. So came five o'clock every day in my job, I was immersed back into a Chinese Mandarin environment. You either spoke or you didn't eat. So, I got to be somewhat proficient in the language and accustomed to it and even some of the sub-dialects of Taiwanese. But the Chinese Marines were an interesting institution. There were two full divisions, very much structured like the US Marine Corps. One division was on the island of Taiwan in the Kaohsiung area and the other division was out on the Pescadores, the Penghu Island, which were halfway between Taiwan and the mainland. An entire division of twenty thousand marines. Strategically, if the communists had invaded, there would have been a bypass. But that's the way—Chiang Kai-shek was alive then, too. He actually ran a party every May and he would invite the entire advisory course. I actually met Chiang Kai-shek back then.

KC: Is that right? Describe that meeting for me.

CD: Oh, I found the Gimo interesting. That's a good story later. I actually went to his funeral. I went in my greens, and I put on a black armband as respect. When I got to the lines for his funeral, which were around the block, they immediately saw me as a foreign soldier, and I got rushed to the front of the line unwittingly. So, I went in there and I did what's called Jugong. I stood in front of the casket, and I bowed three times. Well, wouldn't you know it, that hits the TV. So now, every hour, and they have three days of national mourning. Every hour for three days, there's Del Grosso bowing three times in my greens. The sub caption underneath is, "Foreign soldiers come to pay respect to the Gimo." Needless to say, everybody on that island who was in the military advisory group got to know my face and I was the bud of many jokes for a long time thereafter.

KC: I'm sure that you were. (Laughing)

CD: For me, as a young man at that time, I was twenty-four years old assigned to a foreign country for three years. Speaking Mandarin on a daily basis. My role was an infantry advisor and a military assistance programmer. Which I'll explain in a minute. I also had a function; I was the ground reconnaissance. I was assigned to help them and each division had a reconnaissance battalion of probably about eight hundred Chinese marines. So, there were about fifteen hundred Chinese marines in that business. One of my roles which explained to them some of my types of training that we were going in United States reconnaissance units from jumping out airplanes trying to get to the Chinese army jump school to allow so many Chinese marines a year to get on quota. Also, swimming underwater and doing basically patrolling. Long range and short-range patrolling. I enjoyed that immensely, plus I was treated, I had a superior Marine Corps colonel, and I was just a captain. Then after that was the colonel, lieutenant colonel, all the rest of the majors and myself and another guy were captains. I was the only single guy. So, my life in liberty were pretty good. At night, I would have no problem. Of course, at that time in southern Taiwan, there was a curfew every evening. They were armed troops with bayonets in the streets after eleven at night. The whole interior of Taiwan was off limits to many people because of the governments fear of infiltration by Chinese communist guerillas up into the highlands and coming across from the mainland by fishing boat. So, at night it was sort of martial law. That forced the point when I often get stopped at these roadblocks. I would have a lot of trouble with the roadblocks or speaking the language which, after exasperation, I went to the chief of the staff of the Chinese Marine Corps, General Yuan Guozheng, and explained the situation. He said, "Give me thirty pictures of yourself, little three by threes." He said, "Wait four days." After that at night, I could drive around and ran into a roadblock, and somebody was sticking a bayonet in the window. I saw the guy with the clipboard turn the page and there's my picture. That would allow me to go through the roadblocks. So that's how I was able to navigate at night getting home from a late-night assignment at work or in the field. But it was a delightful time to be in Taiwan. Of course, for those people, their mission, again, was the mainland and they had so many perceptions of the mainland. The whole island was near a martial law footing for that period of time. I also often got to visit out to the Penghu Islands and see our advisory effort for the 1st Marine Division at

that time. Those divisions out on the Pescadores, they would rotate every two years. But one of my primary roles, too, was of interest and this leads into my second tour in Vietnam. One of my roles was, for years, we had to buying Chinese and Korean government, their forces. Military assistance programming where we would designate their tables of equipment and we would fill those tables of equipment with US hand-me-down equipment or brand-new equipment to outfit the entire Korean and Chinese Marine Corps, took years. Every year they would have so much dollars, which would be turned into a priorities list of what they could buy and they couldn't buy. Again, this was a way that American equipment because if we ever had to work with those people, they would have the same equipment, same ammunition, and there was great joy in having commonality of equipment when you're fighting with an ally, which even holds today. So, for the United States to take much of their older equipment and provide it through military assistance to a host nation and surest commonality. There was another concept that, as nations would begin to reach economic status, back then, Taiwan was not a very rich country nor Korea. The idea being, if those people had US inventory, when they finally did get money, they would be able to transition from openly given free military assistance equipment to purchase foreign military sales. So now, this becomes big business, and you could see what Taiwan is today and Korea. That by the initial offerings of military assistance equipment back in the sixties and probably in the seventies, countries moved from military assistants into foreign military sales. There was a cutoff point that the United States, and the host company would determine. "We no longer need US military assistance, but rather as a show of good faith, we will continue to buy our equipment and supplies in the future." But what that meant for the United States was good business. That meant that that host nation would continue to buy American. So, back in '68, my role was to basically figure out what equipment the Chinese marines needed in what priority order, in what quantities, and to make sure they did not ask what things could not be given to them because the covenant was—and this is very difficult for the Marine Corps which is an offensive machine. Our mission on Taiwan, and still is to this day, the United States is committed to the defense of Taiwan not to help that government retake the mainland. That was always the rub, the political friction was on that very concept of offense versus defense. So, my role in'68-'69 was to assist in

military assistance advisory to provide equipment, particularly, trucks and vehicles, to the Chinese marines. Now, this is where, if you can hold that for a minute and please try and keep me on track here. At the same time in Vietnam, it's now '68. The United States has been at war for three or at least three years, Marines been ashore. In Vietnam, garbage is starting to build up. We're starting to have a lot of old equipment, sitting around the country and junkyards or cantonment areas. Now, there are people who were assessing this equipment like M-35, six-by. To take that six-by from Vietnam and the closest place you can fix it is the US depot in Sagami, Japan. Is it worth it to the taxpayer to take an old M-35 six-by truck, somehow get it on the ship, sail it all the way back to Japan, fix it with the cost of Japanese labor, and get it back to Vietnam? Or do we just bury it in Vietnam? Then the question becomes, "Well," this is grassroots ecology back then, the word didn't exist. "What do we do with this equipment?" We bury it. And a gentleman named Major General Ciccolella, who's chief of the MAAG in Taiwan has a lot of division. He's up in Taipei. I'm at the other end of the island. He says, "What if we took the junk out of Vietnam, brought it back to Taiwan-on-Taiwan shipping, and gave it to our Chinese counterparts in the Chinese army and the Chinese marines?" They get to fix it with the tools they already bought them. We're replenishing their inventories and filling up their short falls with American equipment that has been repaired by the Chinese themselves. It is in first rate, it's a little older, but it will work and it's serviceable. We could cut down quickly on other moneys, the military assistance, equipment, saving the United States money. Number two, getting our junk out of Vietnam, and number three, reequipping our allies and giving them the experience of fixing. Particularly our allies in the maintenance business fixing equipment. I thought that was a brilliant idea. So, junk becomes big business. Now, somebody has to get down and do this. So, I'm volunteered by the Marines because of the language and I'm the only single guy. So, I accompany Major General Ciccolella, and we go down to Saigon and I'm a marine and I'm with this little fellow General Ciccolella who eventually went on to get four sons in the Army. We go out to MACV, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, in '68, and I'm in sort of their Pentagon. I'd never been there. We had breakfast out on the trail behind MACV with some guy named Creighton Abrams. General Abrams who had the biggest hand I think I've seen in any man. When he shook your hand, your hand had been shook. Just a bear

of a man, but good natured, very thoughtful. So, I found that very interesting. A Marine captain there with the chief of the MAAG, the two-star, and General Abrams, the four-star and we're talking big time about junk. So, that's the deal. Abrams will alert all the junkyards, particularly Long Binh, which is the US Army logistics center just north of Saigon. A huge sprawling piece of property. I don't know, I guess its five hundred acres, but all the US logistics occurred. At any one time on Long Binh, there's at least twenty US generals. That's how many flags are out by the headquarters. I say logistics, everything coming into Vietnam, all the paperwork and so on, the United States does the logistics so well and so did the US Army. Also, Long Binh was the area where all these carcasses, broken trucks that were beyond being able to fix it the first or the second echelon. There's probably about five echelons in maintenance. So, the deal is, Ciccolella, if I have any problems in-country, I'm to report to General Abraham's office personally. This is a very interesting command arrangement. The Marine captain, in the chief of the US Army in Vietnam's office and also, I have a friend in Saigon who was the Chinese ambassador to Saigon. If I have any problems and I am assigned six Chinese mechanics. So, I take these mechanics and I'm talking Chinese to them all day. That was another reason I was chosen as language. My job is to go around Vietnam assessing the junk yards of what we can get out of Vietnam. And once a month, we would bring in a Chinese LST (landing ship, tank) into the port of Newport, which is the port of Saigon or to Da Nang. I am to fill up those LSTs with having my six Chinese mechanics make assessments of the worn out, discarded, US equipment in the junkyards of South Vietnam and getting somehow, that stuff down to the ships to load off these LSTs which come in anywhere from thirty to sixty days. I found that very daunting as an assignment.

KC: I'm sure. Let me ask you this—

CD: I get the Chinese billet and my six people out of the junkyard. The US Army (unintelligible) is very helpful to me. We go around every day assessing particularly M-35 six-by's and Jeeps. Then they make an assessment, "Yep, I could fix this here or we should take this back to Taiwan, and I can fix it there." Now I live in Saigon and every day I commute out to Long Binh junkyard, but my vehicle, the Chinese, we build right there, a couple of quarter-ton vehicle Jeeps. I had to rebuild from the wrecker, an M-52 wrecker. So sometimes I would drive, no license, nothing, but it was very serviceable. I

would drive my wrecker into town and park. Nobody was going to steal a wrecker, a Jeep they would steal. So, I would live in Saigon. I did this for over four months, but I would fill up every thirty days. I asked General Ciccolella. I said, "Look, the whole key to this operation is the guy moving junk around the junkyard." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I've got to be able to go to that corporal, pushing that wrecker and moving junk around and say, "Look, this piece of equipment here, can you be a little careful with it and move that over to this area where I got my Chinese mechanics?" I mean, it didn't matter to that corporal. There was no skin off his nose pushing his bulldozer around. So, I said, "General, how about you send me down about sixty cases of Heineken a month on the LSTs and I'll use that as a cumshaw or as we say in the Middle East baksheesh." It is the grease that makes the skids work. So, I could approach a young man on a bulldozer and say, "Son, look, if you take care of this piece of equipment and treat it a little tenderly even though it's just junk, how about would you like a case of Heinekens or a couple of six packs?" Boy, I made a lot of friends, but I was able to move huge amounts, I'm talking hundred, a hundred and fifty vehicles a month. Whether M-35s or Jeeps out of the junkyards. Just using these six mechanics. Oh, I'm also there during—I've got the same operation going, I split my mechanics. I got them up on the junkyard in Da Nang doing the same thing. So, I'm coordinating two junkyards, all transfers from ships coming into Saigon and moving a lot of junk. We were there for Tet, February '68. That was really something. The Chinese mechanics, they didn't understand what was going on when the ammo dump blew up in Da Nang and then were up in the junkyard and Tet's going on. It kind of threw a kink in our operations for a couple of days. That was basically five months of that. Then some other liaison trips back and forth for them, was the essence of my second tour in Vietnam. Also, during that time traveling between Da Nang and also exploring new junkyards at Nha Trang and Qui Nhon up at Phu Bai. Anywhere where I could find junk that could be quickly repaired, serviceable, and moved to the port and referred to evacuation back to Taiwan was basically the outline of my mission accomplishment—oh, and by the way at this time, now, the Korean MAAG, the United States MAAG to Korea, see's what we're doing on Taiwan and they want their mechanics in junkyards, too.

KC: They need a piece of that action, don't they?

CD: Yeah, so now we've got priority and fighting over junk. Between the Korean marines and the Chinese marines and the Korean Army in the junkyards of Vietnam we have this little skirmish, but myself and the Korean advisors, their MAAG advisors were really trying to keep both of these countries on team mechanics at arm's length from each other at fighting level that they perceived to be national equipment that they were redeeming and evacuating back to their country. So, it was very interesting I found and I'm glad I'm a US Marine. I get to do some interesting stuff, but I was treated very well by General Abrams. I was in awe of the man. I never really had to break fire or glass to get to him. I could call the colonel that worked for him and the colonel and I would handle it and General Ciccolella I thought was a real prince and treated me professionally. He always was responsive. When I wanted a Chinese LST at the MAAG level, he would get that Chinese Navy to send that ship down there and we would fill it up. Now, you could think about that. You could probably put somewhere in the neighborhood of forty-eight six-bys inside a Chinese LST and then sprinkle it with a bunch Jeeps and other kind of vehicles. But eventually, my understanding was—I even kept statistic on it, that that program was most helpful to both nations, Korea and Taiwan, and able to replace faster, their inventory. We critically needed, mostly US made transport equipment at no cost to the US taxpayers. At minimum cost to the host government was a real sense that the host government could actually get a lot of maintenance training and repair work training through that program. It went on, probably, until 1970. But on a bigger picture, too, you want to talk about someone with ecological foresight that General Ciccolella had the sight to say, "Wait a minute, we'll leave Vietnam and it's going to cost us money. We can't bury tanks and Jeeps. We have to excavate." You see that later in the Iraq war, how much stuff and how cleanly the United States evacuated stuff that had even been confiscated by the Iraqis in Kuwait and how quick and sensitive the United States was to perform evacuations to leave the battlefield in general, as clean as we found it as best we could. That the seeds of ecology were already at work in Vietnam.

KC: That is a really fascinating part of the overall picture that you don't hear anything about. I think that is a really cool little story.

CD: Because I worked with the Army very closely as a Marine, I remember now. To give you an example, of scale. The United States Army trains at Fort Knox with more tanks than the US Marine Corps owns. The Marine Corps only owns forty-eight tanks in the battalion. So, three battalions of tanks is a total inventory. So, for a US young Marine officer to get an appreciation of size of the US Army and particularly their logistics arms, it really reinforced how, we won World War II, that logistics is really our bread and butter once you get the United States going. The size of the US logistic efforts. I found this amazing because when I realized what it took to supply eight US Army divisions and two Marine Divisions in the field Vietnam, it all went through Long Binh. So, the size of their logistics headquarters and the amount of people dedicated to it I just found overwhelming, but appreciative and in admiration of the logistic systems of the United States Army. So, for a young Marine captain to navigate that in the name of an Army general, I thought that kept me busy for a while. I thought that I was helping.

KC: I would think that would keep you incredibly busy, especially when they opened up the second junkyard, so to speak, up in Da Nang and you got to deal with that. Like Phu Bai and Nha Trang.

CD: Yeah, I would fly up there on military aircraft. I would go to MACV and say I need a seat on the next aircraft north. They would get me a seat, and I would have mechanics up there. They would meet me and off we go. Vehicles that they had made, they made in the sense that they found these hulks, refurbished them, and they were serviceable. They had transports and lived right up there in the junkyards. They lived right out on the field. So, I'd spend my time between the two and I had a little office in Saigon. Anyhow, as I handed off that project to others, it probably grew, but my sensing is the junkyard, and the pickings was probably starting to get thin by 1970. At this time, on comes Vietnamization. Already you could begin to see the wheels and the winds of change where lots of logistics is coming on all to be given to the ARVN and the Vietnamese forces. In the beginning of the drawdown and the measured phase was the US logistics silhouette in Vietnam started to decrease.

KC: Right, plus what is there, is the Chinese nationalists and the Koreans aren't getting what the Vietnamese still might need to fix themselves, I would assume, as well.

CD: Right, the relationships again, remember the Koreans also have a lot of weight. Because there was the Blue Dragon Division, which is stationed south of Da Nang. There's an entire Korean division which we paid for heavily. All their transport. We even built the Koreans a PX (post exchange). They had their own PX because they were using their PX system and abusing it. So, the political decision was we would make them their own PX. But their sectors down there, around Hoi An, which is a UNESCO sight, a very interesting town. Sort of like Williamsburg would be in Virginia. They had a good track record. The North Vietnamese did not like screwing with the Koreans. They had a very fierce reputation, and I think the North Koreans—there was always a quiet sector. I think the people in that sector they controlled also, stayed away from the South Koreans. They didn't screw with them. But the point it, Korea had a presence in Vietnam, a large one, and the Taiwanese had none, except for political support and a small quiet logistics evacuation program.

KC: Now, a couple of questions I want to ask you here at this point, Colonel. One, you mentioned that when the Tet Offensive kicked off in early 1968, that you were in Da Nang. What do you remember about the Tet Offensive from your vantage point there in Da Nang?

CD: I knew—well, we were kind of isolated. That was a tough three days with stored communication. See, at the same time I had colleagues in the 1st Marine Division operating in the area. I also had a brother there, too, but in the junkyard was when I happened to be in Da Nang. I was not in Saigon at the time of Tet. When we started to see the ammunition dumps explode, I knew something big was underway. I did not—and I was sort of isolated. I couldn't travel into Da Nang. I had to stay out in the junkyard with my mechanics. First of all, they were getting nervous. I had to tame them down. Then we had enough food out and everything, but it was not a safe time to go on the road. It took me about two days in the junkyard with some of the Americans running around to understand not only what was happening locally, I thought this was an attack of sorts on Da Nang. I did not know until almost the third day that this was countrywide because communications had been broken, too. There was curfews. The ammunition dump burned for about three days, but only after the third day was order restored, and the Vietnamese people come out on the roads. Commerce began again in the sense of the daily market.

For three days, nobody sold anything. All the stores were shut. There were no farmers coming to market. The roads going north up to Hai Van Pass and a town in Da Nang because the junkyard was outside of town or was sort of eerie with no traffic instead of high-speed vehicles armed with troops or whatever moving by. It took almost the third day, even on the radio, to get an understanding that this was a nationwide, coordinated assault that probably occurred in over a hundred locations.

KC: You mentioned that the Chinese that you were working with there at Da Nang had some difficulty with some circumstances that Tet Offensive created. Can you get into some of the details about what you experienced and what they had to deal with?

CD: These mechanics, remember now, in 1968, you still have Taiwanese who had fought Mao Zedong in the late forties through the truce of '47, the collapse of Hainan Island, the evacuation of half of the Nationalist army from Hainan in the early fifties. Some of these older mechanics I had, they were master sergeants and sergeants had been people that had been at war for maybe twenty-five years. They fought on the mainland. Now, they got along with the local people because you'd be surprised how many Vietnamese, in urban context, near the proximity of Da Nang spoke Chinese. So, I mean, Chinese is basically a southern—some Vietnamese disagree, but to me it's it southern sub-in. Cantonese, which is a dialect of Chinese that was put on the Western script by the Jesuits in 1887. So, most of the old Vietnamese documents or even traveling around Vietnam, there was so much Chinese writing. You can go to any cemetery. Most of the characters for the tombstones that are over fifty years old are in Chinese. So, I had to benefit the ability to read the Chinese tombstones and many of the signs. The same way with the mechanics. Some of them were from the South of China, had the ability, oh I don't know, it's a polemic analogy it's like a Portuguese talking to a Frenchman. There were roots in the language that were somewhat synonymous. And they were pretty good; the Chinese did pick up some Vietnamese working down there. So, they had the ability to understand through their Vietnamese sourcing and their language and their own instincts that something major was underway. We're in the right place at the right time. You know, it comes more and a natural instinct, how are we going to go back to Taiwan and the safety of Taiwan working with this young American here. And does he have the juice or what we call the guanxi, the baksheesh, does he have the juice to get us out of here if

this turned very nasty? But that was their only concern, and it was temporal. It was passing and when I could explain to them what it was and that it was under control. That's the way life is. Once in a while you're going to see an ammo dump blow up. They were okay with it.

KC: All right, my next question to you, Colonel, and I want to preface this question by saying it sounds like you were involved in some really fascinating work. Something that is unusual, something that no one else had been doing, something that was very important, but you were also trained recon. I mean, you were a guy who should be out in the jungle. You are a guy who should be out leading troops, finding the bad guys, reporting, engaging whatever it might be. Now, all of a sudden, you're the superintendent of junkyards in Vietnam. What was that like for you?

CD: Well, it was fascinating. I had my trigger time. Somebody else had to get a shot at it. I knew I was going back, but also, I remember, I was there as an extension of my personal decision upon leaving the fleet Marine forces to study Chinese. I felt myself very, very lucky to find myself gone to the country to become a little more proficient in the language and hopefully to the point where it became indelible and involved in something. I knew when I looked at all my other contemporaries there in the MAAG and the Army and everything, who knew Vietnam better than I did? I had just come out of that environment eighteen months before. I knew my way around the country. I thought I was given an interesting mission by flag officers on Taiwan ahead of the MAAG. I had a Marine colonel who condoned this sort of thing and understood it and said, "Yeah. Go help the Army do this." So, I was on my own, I had a degree of independence to report to anybody except the flag officer who lived in Taipei. So also, from time to time, like on the way out to the junkyards, I could also drive across town and see friends of mine. Denny was Major Roger Simmons who was the CO of 1st Force Reconnaissance Company. Roger had been my first company commander when I first got to Okinawa in the summer of 1964. So, as I had progressed up to captain from lieutenant, he had progressed from captain to major. So, to be able to see my first company commander, that was a luxury allowed to me, I'd just tell the guys in the junkyard I'd be back in three hours and go right out to see Roger. One day, Roger said to me, "Look, we just had something come up on the radio. There's a medevac, would you like to come?" I said,

"Sure." It was on a Sunday. I was flying around, here I am flying around with Roger just trying to help evacuate somebody. I found it an adventure. So, I was tuned in and I could talk to my brother in Da Nang. So, I was sort of in-country, that kind of counted. I knew I was coming from combat support. You know, you've got combat, combat support and combat service support. That's how the Marines look at the three levels of engagement. I'd been in the combat role, and the combat support is sort of your engineers and that sort of thing. Your combat service support is your logistics and supply people. So, I found myself in a combat service support role foreign to ally government, getting proficient in the language that I had chosen. Also, being able to check in with colleagues. Actually, standing in Da Nang still drinking Vietnamese beer if I wanted it. I knew that after this tour, when I went back to Taiwan, and that's indeed what happened. I left Taiwan in May of 1970 and within a month I was back in Vietnam assigned as an advisor with the Vietnamese marines. So, I mean, early on I could see that Vietnam was going to go for a while. So, to be able to take it out be sent to the 2nd Division and go through the language training, all the while I'm sensitive to stories of people now. You're starting to get Marine officers that are on their second and beginning of their third tour in Vietnam. And I think that today, when I hear these stories about young officers in Afghanistan and Iraq for their fifth and sixth tours, I have an appreciation of what they're going through in terms if they look at warfare through generations in terms of a decade. So that's the way I looked at my time in that Chinese logistic project was, "I'll be back, and I'll be in the combat role again so enjoy this while you can." And that's what I did.

KC: All right, you were also in a very good position here because you weren't going out on combat patrols, you weren't leading a company. You had this degree of independence, and you traveled throughout South Vietnam quite a bit. We're looking at 1968 here. How had the war changed since you were there in '65 and '66 compared to what you saw in 1968?

CD: Now '65 was an exploratory time. We began to stretch out, we began probe, and we would have engagements. There were clashes, there were some casualties. But by'68, the Marine Corps itself had been rotating through we had draftees there. On occasion in'68 and'69 and as you know, there were weeks where the United States Marine Corps was taking two hundred casualties a week. So, the first thing that it

changed was the casualties; an alarming rate of casualties, two hundred. Which was indicative of the size of some of these firefights, particularly because the 3rd Marine Division had already moved more up into I Corps. There was some huge fierce battles going on there by'68 in the north. Two, was the influx of new Army unit's major components into the Central Highlands. There was the advent of heavy mechanized US presence tank divisions. Not only the lightly armed 173rd, the 82nd Airborne, but these were the "Big Red One" (1st Infantry Division), the 1st Cav, these were major US Army units. I would think, back then, the United States would have had eighteen infantry divisions in the US Army. At least half of them were deployed to Vietnam. That was a huge increase in people and a personnel turnover of a manpower pipeline. Many of them were draftees. I remember there was the emergence of these horror stories I would hear. Which were completely alien to my first tour. Like fragging of officers, I'd hear stories about that. Desertions, possible mutiny, drugs, advent of drugs. I didn't see much of it, but I would hear stories with a constant drum beat in the background. The US Army would experience these isolated in to raise personal concern about what was happening to my Army. On the Marine side, what problems we did have in terms of racial, some drugs. Most of my colleagues who were in combat units in the 1st Division, when I would visit them and we would chat. I was on the listening move. I would say these are basically in general relegated to rear area troops, troops that are idle. Whereas the quality of troops, even though some of them are draftees on the front line out in the actual line units, the infantry battalions that are tromping around in the countryside. There's not a problem. They're allegiant, their loyalty is first class. They don't have these problems. They're still fighting for the right goal. Basically, you know, when the sun goes down and you're fighting mom, apple pie, all of that sort of goes out the window. You're in that foxhole or in that situation and preservation of yourself and your immediate buddies is your primary motive for fighting. That still was strong and was at a high tide. That was not an issue. So that was the 3rd Flag. So the casualties, the change in the ideological complexion. The fourth thing that I found that most Marines didn't have, because of my travels all over, I was moving all around Vietnam and getting to see the different cauldrons. A firefight in I Corps Marines had nothing to do with some guy who's slugging away in a rice paddy down in the Delta. So, by travel, through logistics, I was able to view some of the

different cauldrons of activity. I could sort of like take the temperature of that caldron of how the Army was doing there, what was their attitude. Did they just want to get out of there? Were they giving it a professional try? I sort of got a sampling of the temperature in different spots throughout Vietnam over great distances. So, I could get in and I could sense ideological sensing that things were beginning to shift. So, so much so that at the beginning of 1970, Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho and all these fellows, there was talk of some sort of a way out, a compromise. This wasn't going to go on forever, that it was difficult to measure progress. There was a backlash in the American Congress, and it was the starting of the Church Amendment and that sort of thing. So, you could see it as an ideological winds in the United States. You got to remember what Tet did—and this was clear to me after Tet; it didn't take long. I realized ten days after Tet when I read all those reports and talked to people, that the North Vietnamese had made conscious decision to sacrifice their entire Viet Cong infrastructure in massive frontal assault in that at not one frontal assault or battle, waged by the Viet Cong infrastructure against South Vietnamese or US forces, casualties, not one succeeded. The United States got their nose bloodied, but the entire Vietnamese, Viet Cong infrastructure, which probably took twenty-five years to build, had been annihilated. That the United States, in each of these little pockets had met the threat of the surprise attack of Tet and met it well and destroyed lots of Vietnamese. They had accomplished nothing on the ground tactically. The only thing that had happened was at the strategic level. Thanks to guys like Walter Cronkite, they made us blink. I'm a firm believer that the North Vietnamese at that time, that Tet, even two weeks after, had a lot of casualties on the south and east side. It was clear that Tet was an absolute tactical failure. That was some eleventh-hour gamble by the North Vietnamese to throw a surge onto the South Vietnamese government and hopefully the South Vietnamese government would panic, and parts of the government would come over to the cause. That was a miserable failure. So, on the ground, Tet, to me and my colleagues, was an absolute blunder of the greatest proportions. That they had wasted so much blood and treasure and carefully built-up infrastructure on a one-time gamble. At the other end of the hourglass, back in the United States and the press, and Walter Cronkite had created the idea that, "Chicken Little, the sky is falling. This is going nowhere, and they caused us to blink around the world which then triggered a number of questions in the Nixon

administration. How do we get out of this now?" How do we end ten years of blood and treasure? That Tet was a catalyst to cause us to ideologically blink and to questionable values and to reverse our process. Our thinking was, "How do we extricate from Vietnam with the least amount of friction, blood, and loss of treasure to ourselves and our allies?" Which that spawned the onset of the concept of Vietnamization. Given as much as we can to defend ourselves and then say, "Sayonara."

KC: You mentioned that you were able to, your words were, to take the temperature in these different places.

CD: Please say that again.

KC: You used the phrase "Take the temperature." That you were able to take the temperature of these different places in Vietnam there in 1968. I Corps, you're going down to the Delta, etc. What was your diagnosis? When you left this last—at the end of this particular tour, when you ended your time in'68, what was your diagnosis of the war? The way the war was being fought?

CD: Okay, that's a good question. Now, at the end of the individual level, as I was closing out the Chinese logistics project, I knew I was going back to Vietnam. I was trying to angle for my next role. Could I influence the action to get me into a situation and my next combat tour that I would like and that I would relish and enjoy? In my travels around logistics, when I was in Saigon, I would go over and drink while they were in town. With the US Marines assigned to the Vietnamese Marine Corps. I found them a great bunch. I said, "Gosh, if I ever come back, I wonder if the Marine Corps would let me do that. Go from one advisor role to another advisor role." So, I began to agitate and drew friends back at headquarters in the Marine Corps. If I've got to leave Taiwan and I'm a single guy, how about I run a volunteer. Whatever it takes, I want to go with the Vietnamese Marine Corps. I know about military equipment logistics programming. There's got to be a need for that and equipping the Vietnamese marines and bringing them equipment. I've got the Chinese language and on and on and on. So, in my mind I'd be building my case to be able to go with the Vietnamese marines if I could. Otherwise, I would gladly go where the infantry battalion is. But remember, I could see that those battalions were beginning to leave by 1970. The 1st Marine Division had declared "We're going home." So, I began to see that if I went with the Vietnamese marines, there could

be a point where, hey, I'm the only one left with a handful of residuals has the effects on Vietnamization. It had no effect on the advisory efforts. There was the US Marines, probably sixty to eighty US Marine officers that were assigned advisory effort to the Vietnamese Marine Corps. That would be a whole brave new world. The 1st Marine Division, the 3rd Marine Division gone. We would be the last Americans in country. So, when I got to the Vietnamese marines, I detected none of that animosity. Even though those Vietnamese officers saw that the United States was drawing down. The United States was leaving none of those Vietnamese marine officers to which I had to work with ever resented that, they understood, and it had nothing to do with their war, and they would fight on and soldier on. So, I did not see a Vietnamese resentment with my new colleagues in these marines on the concept of Vietnamization. Ironically, they said, "This is great. We're going to get more new toys." They could have used new handout equipment and individual equipment and new artillery. They saw that as an injection of new equipment and renovation. So, I guess that aspect of Vietnamization works where to grassroots fighting level, the Vietnamese themselves saw that as an opportunity to refurbish some of the equipment that had been worn down through the years. Ideologically, for me, I worried about China. Again, I had a new lens on what China left. I still wondered, and it took me a bit longer until I got back to the United States, to understand exactly what Tet was. I did not fully understand Tet until maybe four or five years later in retrospect. I can go into that if you think that's appropriate now, Doctor, or I can wait.

KC: No, we were talking about the Tet Offensive earlier, so go ahead and give me your perspective on that. I think it would be a good time for it.

CD: It came by 1976, I'd find myself sculpting ahead in graduate school, studying, ironically, Chinese history. Studying part of my master's and then hopefully later, if I could, a PhD in Asian history. It strikes me, and I was able to corroborate back into the'68,'70 period of Tet. To run a war—and I go back to logistics, a certain amount of logistics is needed daily. Let's pick a number, let's say to supply the US Marine Corps takes twenty tons a day. So be it also with the Vietnamese, North Vietnamese. But their perennial clients are the Soviets. In my mind, we were able to reconstruct, that by 1968, or no, by the middle of '67, the Cultural Revolution in China, I mentioned to you, wasn't

great, it wasn't proletarian, and it wasn't cultural. It is an opportunity to maintain Mao Zedong power in whatever it takes. And whatever it takes then creates a bedlam in the student societies across China. But reapplying that to the Soviets who is the patron of the North Vietnamese, there are only three ways to get logistics at the necessary levels to sustain warfare into Vietnam. A, it has to go from the Port of Arkhangelsk around the top of Finland all the way down through the Suez Canal or around Africa to Sihanoukville in Cambodia. And then overland from Sihanouk into the Parrot's Beak, which is west of Saigon. That's how the furthest southern areas of Vietnam are supplied by the Soviets to the Vietnamese. The second route is right through China down to Nanning and then from Nanning by railroad transfer into North Vietnam. By '67, Chinese students are stopping trains, ripping equipment and stealing it off of these Vietnam-bound trains from the Soviet Union and for those who sit in Moscow. Say, I would say that this route is no longer tenable to send equipment from the Soviet Union to Vietnam through China directly. The third route is from the port of Vladivostok to sail it to Hanoi and then down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By that time in '67-'68, we are bombing Hai Phuong on and off on everything that sails into Hanoi or further south goes right under the scrutiny of the 7th Fleet. So, from the Moscow vantagepoint the three main supply routes moved a modest amount and daily logistics into Vietnam are compromised. This is also, in '67, the Suez Canal is closed. Mysteriously to this day I still don't understand the USS *Liberty*. Who sunk the *Liberty*? The Israelis, and why it is still under great clouds. The fact is, if you're sitting in Moscow, we can no longer use the Suez Canal. We have to now make that line from the Arkhangelsk by going around Africa. So, for some mysterious reason, by the middle of '67, all logistics of the North Vietnamese is in jeopardy. I choose to believe in my readings that the Soviets, then, went to the North Vietnamese and said to them, "We can only continue to supply you on a limited basis. You must take your on-hand stocks and calculate what to do with them and maybe make a giant attack against the US presence in South Vietnam and hope for the best and keep your fingers crossed. All bets are off, it's up to you." I think with that knowledge, probably in the fall of 1967, those in Hanoi that makes these kind of decisions say, "We can no longer keep this going. We're under tremendous pressure, but it looks like we're going to lose because there's no logistics and the Soviets are going to write us off because they can't be supplied." Then

there's a set of political decisions. Probably in the fall of '67, which cast a fate and said we're going to try it. We're going to sacrifice the Vietnamese infrastructure by the mass coordinated terrorist attack by the country which is known as Tet. So that, over the years, is my brief of why they would insanely sacrifice the Viet Cong infrastructure supported by some North Vietnamese units because they had no other choice and it was the only die they had left to cast and ironically, and thanks to the American media, that's the third time I mentioned Walter Cronkite. "Oh, the sky is falling." Worked for them. It caused the United States to psychologically blink. But that is my explanation of Tet, it's rational, why it occurred, but I didn't come to that cohesive explanation until maybe four or five years after the fact.

KC: When do you come back to the States after this tour in Taiwan?

CD: When do I come back to the States?

KC: Yes.

CD: Let's see, I went with the Vietnamese Marine Corps. I just missed Cambodia, which is another very good—Cambodia, the invasion of Cambodia, the incursion, most of my colleagues were there in May of '70 and I got to the Vietnamese Marines in June of '70. I came back to the United States in July of '71.

KC: So, you stayed in that part?

CD: 12-and-a-half-month tour.

KC: Okay, so you stayed there with the nationalist Chinese Marines until '69?

CD: No, no, no, I went back to Taiwan and then finished that tour out. I stayed with them until May of '70.

KC: Oh, okay, okay. Very good, very good. I understand now, I see now.

CD: So, my time in the United States—I've got ten days in the United States between March of '68 and July of 1971.

KC: Okay, very good, very good. Now I've got the timeline down here.

CD: So, I'm getting to be quite the Asian hand.

KC: (Laughing) By the sounds of it, yeah, I'd say so. Well, why don't we stop there for today, Colonel?

CD: All right, Charlie.

Interview with Carmine DelGrosso
Session [4] of [6]
Date: 26 October 2010

Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Colonel Carmine DelGrosso. Today is October 26, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University and the colonel is joining me by telephone from his home in San Clemente, California. Okay, Colonel, when we left off yesterday, you were talking about your time in Vietnam, essentially running these junkyards throughout the country or working with the Nationalist Chinese Marine Corps. Something that you found to be very fulfilling and incredibly interesting. Now, pick up the story from roughly the end of your time there in Vietnam and going back to Taiwan and finishing up your time with the Nationalist Chinese Marines.

Carmine DelGrosso: Well, my Vietnam episodes were almost six months of working at junkyards. It was an ongoing successful project that was probably ongoing for another two years or so to my understanding. I returned to Taiwan to my normal posting as an advisor with the Chinese Nationalists Marine Corps and then received orders, again, to the advisory duty, with the South Vietnamese Marine advisors. Now, when I left the Chinese Marines in Kaohsiung, Tsoying, Taiwan, I simply, because I was a single man, returned to the United States, saw my family for about ten days and then went back to Vietnam. Before I left, I stopped at Camp Pendleton. I tried to learn as much Vietnamese as I could in a two-week period of time. I reasoned that the Vietnamese was very similar to grammar and structure to Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese. I went to Camp Pendleton every day during leave. See, because I had heard that many of my contemporary proprietors spoke Vietnamese easily giving them an abbreviated language course or what was called a MATA (Military Advisory Team Academy) course at Fort Bragg or Quantico, Virginia, and learned Vietnamese culture and language. So, I did a little Vietnamese on my own and then reported into Saigon. I initially was assigned to the advisory staff. I worked for a Colonel Frank Tiff and Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Patrick McMillian. I had known Lieutenant Colonel McMillian who had been the attaché to the Chinese Naval Attaché to the—assistant naval attaché to the Chinese government in Taipei in ‘68. So, he spoke Chinese. Later, it was interesting because there were a

number of occasions where in the field, I would get chewed out in Chinese by Lieutenant Colonel McMillian, which I always relished. But because he had known that I had served as the military assistance programmer for the Chinese marines and understood the structure and the workings of military programming, I was assigned to the staff in Saigon for about ninety-day period to help unravel and rectify their military assistance program. The Vietnamese were also in receipt of US military equipment as sort of a patron of the US Marine Corps just like the Chinese marines were a patron of the MAAG. The influx and the distribution of the military assistance planning and equipment for the South Vietnamese Marines was sort of a sub project for the US Marine Corps to begin to furnish them with equipment and artillery pieces. They didn't have much, the South Vietnamese Marines, outside of armed weapons and individual gear. But there was a need to set up and look up that account for programming purposes. So I worked there on the staff for about three months hoping to reconcile the ongoing program which the commander in chief's Pacific, CINCPACs (Commander-in-Chief, Pacific), a database to make sure the right amounts of equipment at the right time in the right quantities were right for the South Vietnamese Marine Corps. Interesting work, but very small compared to the amount of work necessary to run a fifty thousand man Marine Corps on Taiwan.

KC: Sure, sure.

CD: But I relished it and I thought it was a good way to ease into the situation to appreciate just how much a language was going to be necessary in the field and hear the stories of my colleagues coming and going back into the field. Most of the people who went right to infantry battalions and there were nine infantry battalions and three artillery battalions. Each battalion was staffed either by two Marine officers. One was a senior Marine, usually a major, and the junior advisor was a captain. Now, they would call them advisors. It's a nice term, but there wasn't much advice given. Rather the essence of an advisor at that time was that you were the link to the massive amount of US firepower that was available in Vietnam. You and your radio operators—you were given a radio operator, a driver, and a cowboy/batman, which I'll talk about in a minute. You and those three people would be assigned, and you would live with the Vietnamese Marine battalion in the field for as long as they were in the field. You would eat their food three times a day and you would try to be present for all their tactical meetings and so on and

be available on an as needed basis to the battalion commander in terms of advice or his personal link to US firepower which ranged from B-52s to combat shipping offshore. No less use US artillery. Also, as a liaison, to friendly US units in an area where the Vietnamese marines may have been operating to make sure there was no conflict or coordination issues. So, it was an interesting lifestyle. You were outfitted in their uniforms, ate their food, and commenced as much as you could to speak Vietnamese. Then you hopefully were accepted by the Vietnamese and occasionally they would actually seek your advice. In my relationship as a junior advisor and then worked with Major Dick Hughes and I spent all my time with the XO (executive officer) of the Vietnamese Marine battalion. It was interesting in my case because I made a special request. I asked that my radio operator speak Chinese. So, keep in mind that a good chunk of Saigon is Cholon, which is the Chinese part of Saigon and many Chinese and Mandarin speaking as well as Hakka and Cantonese. So, we had a situation where my counterpart and the battalion commander's counterpart spoke no English, but the battalion commander himself spoke French. So, I asked that my radio operators spoke Mandarin. So, on many occasions, I could speak to my radio operator who would in turn, explain that in Vietnamese to my counterpart and also, I could read French. So sometimes the orders or communiques were written in French, and I could read those from the battalion commander. So, I had a windfall of an interesting logistics arrangement which I thought worked to my favor. There was also a lot of respect that came with that, too. At night, many times we would sleep in the cemetery and the Vietnamese, knowing this, with this the Chinese background would come to me and ask, "What did the tombstone say?" So, I was able to interpret the tombstones and who was buried here and when and the dates. So, there was a special respect or rapport that I had that windfall because they also understood, too, that I spent a lot of time in Asia. So, there was a kinship knowing that I had great loyalties to Asia and things Asian. That worked to my advantage. When I was assigned to the 1st Battalion, their motto was "*Cu Dem*;" it was the oldest Vietnamese because it was the 1st Battalion and *Cu Dem* means "night owls." I found that the Vietnamese had respect for me, they treated me fairly. I was invited to every function. The only functions I would avoid is when the battalion commander diminished the non-judicial punishment. It was somewhat physical. So, I would just quietly go the other way

and read my newspapers and let them administer their judicial approach to military infractions. I found them to be very brave individuals, no nonsense. They were literally tigers, they were fearless, most of the Vietnamese. All the stories I'd heard about the ARVN units and the ARVN in general and how they would flee and so on, I found that not the case. There were times where I felt I was just as safe with the Vietnamese Marines as with my own US Marines. At no time did I ever see them in a combat situation flinch. They always attacked with vigor and professionalism. They were tough little fighters, and their subsistence is worth comment. When we would travel and the Vietnamese Marines and the Vietnamese airborne was somewhat held as a strategic force by the central government in Saigon. That is, there were certain projects they wanted handled, certain areas classified. They would send the Vietnamese Marines. So, prior to—well, from 1966 to 1970, an assignment with the Vietnamese Marines would find you in the Delta down south in the U Minh Forest down south, in the Central Highlands. You really did get to see a lot of real estate, even in a short, one year tour. My time with the Vietnamese Marines, I got to do some traveling. For the most part, it was up in I Corps, we were one of the first initial battalions. Later, during Lam Son 719, the entire Vietnamese Marine Corps was dispatched to I Corps. So, they had eight or nine infantry battalions and three artillery battalions fully engaged in I Corps. When you were on the road, if you were in the Delta, rice was available. Because you lived as part of their mess. What they ate, you ate. So, when you were in the Delta, there was always rice, three times a day. You could get fish, fish were plentiful. When you moved to the Central Highlands, you even had salad, tomatoes, and you had cooked vegetables and so on. When you were dispatched to I Corps, much of the food there was expensive for them. The price of rice doubled. I remember, it went from forty to eighty piastres. Rarely could you get fish when you were engaged inland in I Corps. So, your diet suffered somewhat. There were times when rice was delivered by helicopters because the weather could not get to your positions to unload some rice or fish or whatever. So, we spent a lot of time eating grass soup on the trail with the greens we could find that was cooked into a soup. We lived on that. To give you by relative example, when I started a tour with the 1st Battalion, I weighed probably about a hundred and sixty-five pounds. When I completed my tour at the South Vietnamese Marine Corps, it was down to a hundred and forty

pounds. That was just a question of diet and heat. What I'm trying to note is, depending on your location, because so much of their food stuff was from the land, depending on where the battalion was assigned, relegated the degree of the caloric intake and value for your diet. It was healthy food three times a day. Also, I had a luxury of a driver/ bodyguard. Kind of a batman in the old British system. When I needed something to go look after and get it for me.

KC: A cowboy, I believe is the phrase you all use.

CD: That's the word, cowboy. Yeah, my cowboy/batman. I never abused it, but he was always there, and he would look after me in a protective sort of way, like a bodyguard, which I greatly appreciated. Particularly sometimes driving through an urban context in an automobile or a Jeep. My radio operator, again, he was from Cholon. He spoke Mandarin, that little trio we got along splendidly. I thought the rapport with myself and my counterpart with both the battalion commander and the executive officer that was correct and cordial, and was professional, and I enjoyed the experience thoroughly. So, in the advisory I felt the unique opportunity to compare. I'm probably one of the few people that was assigned to two different advisory efforts. One was one a more conventional sophisticated level of the Chinese marines and a large organization that had left that type of fighting that the Vietnamese Marines were undergoing probably in the late forties to move to a Vietnamese Marine Corps which basically just simple structured, just battalion level. Fully engaged and often committed to combat at critical points. I also worried that those people, when I got there, some of them had been fighting eight and nine years. Yet, it never affected their attitude. They never looked tired; they never sought excuses. I thought their judicial system of administering judicial and non-judicial punishment was superb. The average trooper came from all parts of the country. I had great respect for his officers and his staff NCOs. Like I said, they were at it a long time. Early on, I realized I could teach this guy nothing, but rather he would come to me when he wanted something and that's basically the way we operated. Once in a while I was asked for tactical advice and I would give it readily, but I would end it. I would not peer into his business nor seek to command his troops. I was an advisor and again, I made sure that my equipment and my links, my radio links to US supporting arms was always available and I knew where all that was and I could get it for him if he required. So again,

the rapport was correct and cordial. When we would stand down and come back out of the mountain, they'd come back for thirty days in Saigon. That was basically free time. When they got back to Saigon, they had families. So, it was easier to get out on liberty and see their families. So, the battalion basically dispersed. We didn't do any training, per say. And after thirty days or two weeks, they would come back as any normal fighting organization from liberty and leave posture and reported. There were never any UAs (unauthorized absence). They always came back and then we'd redeploy. But the policy was, when they were back in Saigon, their time was their time, and I never tried to sell anything to them or try to encourage them or practice with their weaponry. None of that, it was their time, and they deserved it. They enjoyed that. I was often invited during the downtime to a battalion or a company party where they would roll out their best. They would even have ice available, which was a big thing, *nuoc da*. If you had ice, it was a symbol of things are looking up. So, to be able and go out and have ice with a beer with my counterparts and the different companies in the 1st Battalion. It was always a pleasure. By the way, this is a great distinction, having come from an Asian background and served in Taiwan for three years, I was allowed to have an insight into Vietnamese society, particularly Saigon, where ninety-nine percent of the US Marines never had that chance. Their perception of Vietnam was you were put into I Corps every two weeks and maybe a helicopter drops you a case of beer. The only Vietnamese they ever met was old farm people in black pajamas and conical hats chewing betel nut. They had no concept of the Vietnamese society. That when it was very sophisticated history of proud people highly developed in arts and music. So, my window into that society, that introduction was made by the Vietnamese Marines by inviting me to certain Vietnamese parties in the greater Saigon area so I could see that they, too, had a family life, a sophistication, a set of cultural standards that were thousands of years old. All the time I would see the Vietnamese, I would see that this was really an imprint of Chinese civilization. Even when we went to Hue, it was remarkable at the Citadel at Hue, in many ways, it resembled the Forbidden City in Beijing. This also interested me in terms of gentry systems and how Vietnamese society operated prior to the war and gentrified a society with peasants, bureaucrats, and mandarins at the top. And of course, I came to understand this through Taiwan and really what you have is an extension here of the Chinese gentry

system stretching down from southern China into Vietnam. Then I got into the history, the Viet's versus the Cham versus the Mir. How Vietnam was put together by patchwork. Also, imprinted on us was the hundred-year attempt by the French to impose and build a colony there. The amount of time the French put into it, in blood and sweat, and even the construction of the roads and the telephone lines had that French imprint. I found that a very interesting society. Again, that was not probably allowed from my colleagues in the US Marine Corps who were fighting up in the north, and I Corps was just out in the jungle, period. There from time to time I was allowed insight to the French, Vietnamese, Chinese civilization in the south, particularly in and around the Saigon area.

KC: This has just been a terrific overview of the way you saw this and the way you approached this. I've got some questions. I want to take you back.

CD: But what I'm saying, I began to look at Indochina. As a whole and I had great fascination about Laos and how the Cambodians fit into it. I remember my colleagues, I got there too late. When I got there in June of 1970, they had all just come back from the Cambodian incursion. This is where Nixon was on the radio saying, "There are no US personnel in the Cambodian incursion. It is all being done by the Vietnamese." Meanwhile, six or eight of the Vietnamese battalions were dispatched into the Parrot's Beak in Cambodia and crossed the Mekong at the Neak Loeung Ferry and were deployed around Phnom Penh, but never went into Phnom Penh, but there was US advisors with them. I missed that opportunity by probably thirty days, but I did get to participate in the incursion into Laos in February 1971 on Operation Lam Son 719.

KC: Which, of course, is one of the most famous, if not infamous actions in the Vietnam War, of course.

CD: Yeah, it was. I can comment on if you think that's appropriate.

KC: Well, if I may here, colonel, let me interrupt you and take you back a little bit here for this tour as an advisor. I certainly want to spend a lot more time on Lam Son when we get there. Let me take you back a little bit because I've got some questions about all the things you've discussed so far today. The first question I have for you is, at the end of your tour with MAAG on Taiwan, why were you interested in going back to Vietnam, and this time, in an advisory capacity? Why did you want to go back to Vietnam as an advisor?

CD: That is a good question. The first is, I had to go. My tour on Taiwan was not considered an overseas tour. I filled the bill of an accompanied person. Now, in the Marine Corps, logic back then was if you filled a tour between Vietnam tours and you filled a role where I could have brought my family and did not, the logic was, I'm sorry, that was a company tour. You go from a combat tour to a company tour back to a combat tour.

KC: Okay.

CD: So that was the progression. I had to go. I was interested in the advisor efforts. Maybe because the lieutenant colonel and McMillian was the XO and I had chatted with him at a few conferences where the allied Marine Corps in the Pacific would meet at CINCPAC once a year and talk about programming. Different equipment and what the US policy was. So, you had representatives from the Koreans, the South Vietnamese and Colonel McMillian would come, myself for the Chinese Marines and the Korean Marines. We would discuss techniques, policies of US distribution of equipment to allied Marine Corps in the Pacific. See, this whole idea of the MAAGs has got to be seen in a context with a greater CINCPAC, the Commander in Chief of the Pacific plan to reinforce our allies. Now, remember to this day the bedrock of this specific relationship is the US Japanese treaty, the oldest and the strongest and our commitments to defend Japan with MacArthur in 1945. So, during the sixties much of the United States foreign policy's containment of China was predicated upon a number of proliferation of US bases throughout the Pacific interlinking and the underpinned structure of our allies through the South Vietnamese, the Filipino's. Please keep in mind, also in 1965 is a tremendous culmination of communist attempts in Indonesia. Some people say, "Ah the Vietnam War this and that," but for me, with a focus and a sensitivity to the things Asian, a tremendous victory of the United States in 1965 by promoting the Jakarta government was able to defeat the PPK, the Indochina communists. That saved Indonesia. So, one of the little sort of things of, "Why were we in Vietnam?" Because it saved Indonesia, and this all has to be seen laid out against the backdrop of the Domino Theory. There were dominoes and some of them profited by that windfall and moved out of the communist orbit. This also included the Philippines and Indonesia. So, maybe I'm straying from the point, but I got into the South Vietnamese Marines maybe because Colonel McMillan

said, “Put in Fritz, and we’ll get you a job. You can also bring you secondary to us on our programming matters.” So, when I asked to go to Vietnam, I received a set of orders to advisory duty.

KC: So, it seemed like it was something that not only were you interested in it, but because your previous experience, it seemed like a very good place for you as well as your facility with languages.

CD: Yeah, it actually might have been good for a Marine Corps perspective at that time and that place. I could have gone back with a US infantry battalion, but I looked at it as a windfall that it was a round peg and a round hole. I had an appreciation of the culture and where this whole thing fit into the Asian context. I brought a skill, a secondary skill and the programming that was necessary. Besides being able to fulfill, since I was an infantry officer in that time, that infantry battalion was critical for me and my career path.

KC: All right, you find yourself in Saigon for the first three months, for the first ninety days you’re working in a different capacity then maybe we generally think of when we think of advisors. None the less, it’s an important one. Tell me about the challenges you faced there in Saigon for the initial period of your advisory tour there in Vietnam. What sort of things did you do on a daily basis? What kind of obstacles did you have to have to make this run more smoothly?

CD: That’s a good and timely question. Remember, just in sheer numbers, the Vietnamese Marines had two advisors per battalion. Nine infantry, three artillery. So, there were twenty-four people in the field, and they were also organized into brigades. So, there was a Marine advisor at each brigade level, and they had one or two helpers with them. So, on the field at any one time, there were probably forty Marine officers. Meanwhile, back in Saigon, there was staff. That staff had between twelve and fifteen officers on there. They had an engineering advisor, it had a supply advisor, and it had a motor transport advisor. And basically, a G-4 logistics advisor that overlooked maintenance and motor transport and so on. In the programming capacity, I reported to the G-4. So, the staff as a whole, we were co-located across the courtyard from the South Vietnamese headquarters. South Vietnam Marine Corps at that time was commanded by a three-star, General Khanh, K-H-A-N-H. So, the challenges on a daily basis—first of all,

we lived in a hotel. It was comfortable, I actually had a bed. I also had access to bars. We also, as Marine officers, were part of the Navy advisory group in Saigon who had no curfew all. My Army counterparts had to be in every night at twelve, wherever they were in Saigon. The Vietnamese Marine officers were understaffed. And those who were back in town when that battalion was in a down period, had caught lunch on liberty at night. So, we got to see a lot of Saigon nightlife which really made time go by. During the day, my preoccupation with the program and my colleagues was trying to assist the South Vietnamese Marines in basic staff functions and coordination. The Vietnamese Marines were a little different than US Marines. They were lock, stock, and barrel, part of the South Vietnamese Navy. Every time they wanted money or equipment, some had a Vietnamese Navy had to play a role in that and that was difficult to work with service to service. What our challenge on the staff was, particularly in the logistics business, was to try to force them to make the overall national logistics system work for them. They would constantly come to us, "Can you get this for me, and can you get that?" Some advisors thinking they were doing the right thing and actually would go into a Chinese word called cumshaw. "Oh, yeah. I can get you some plywood. I can get you some tin sheets." So, they would circumnavigate the system and short circuit the system by running around and scrounging these things for the South Vietnamese Marines. Not big pieces of equipment, but just the basic things you need to operate a basecamp for plywood, barbed wire, sandbags. Instead of making them, which is harder, use their burgeoning supply system that was just beginning to come online as a nation. Remember, one of the problems for the South Vietnamese was that when we got there, we imposed upon them our military logistics system. I had seen all the nightmares with that, eighteen months earlier out at Long Binh. I also understood that. I had my contacts in the junkyard business. But the United States made a strategic mistake in terms of saying, "Let us look at this thin, fragile force which is beginning to emerge the Vietnamese Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, and even in the Air Force. Let us try to build them a logistic system which is flexible, not too heavy, responsive that could work to their needs." That's not what normally happens. Rather, each of the services were grafted on to the US sister service and all the paperwork that came with that huge, cumbersome, bureaucracy and different hierarchic levels was what the Vietnamese was put in as a client that had to sink or swim in that particular Air

Force, Navy, Marines logistic and supply system. So, there were many gaps, hiccups, and inability to get the right amounts of equipment into the hands of the needy, in my case, the Vietnamese Marines at the right time and the right quantities. To make sure none of that equipment was stolen or misplaced. The idea of maintenance was just almost alien to the Vietnamese. Their idea of maintenance was to throw it away and go ask the Americans for a new one. So, trying to get any spirit of maintenance taking care of their toys, hand me downs were okay, was very difficult in the Vietnamese forces. In a way, you could never blame them because they were constantly in the field to learn these skills and to put them into practice when they're fighting for their existence was very difficult. Some Americans never learned that. They treated the Vietnamese as sort of little brown friends that were sort of just customers rather than trying to appreciate what their unique situation was and how in all our might and majesty as Americans, that we can somehow better provide them with the resources necessary at that time for their success.

KC: And, of course, I would assume a culture of the Americans providing so much over the years anyway that there was never any incentive to try to learn to fix things because the Americans would unquestioningly and unhesitatingly, until toward the end, provide those things.

CD: Right, I'm going to share with you a story that I learned on Taiwan. When once a Chinese officer—now, keep in mind the Chinese had German advisors in the thirties. The Chinese, only on Taiwan, to this day still goosestep. The story went like this, "You Americans make terrible advisors." I said, "Well, why is that?" He says, "Well, when we got a flat tire, the Japanese would come and they'd teach us once. If we didn't learn, they'd hit us with a cane. The Germans would teach us once, teach us twice and they'd kick us. The French would come and teach us once or twice and they'd just leave. You come, you teach us once or twice and then the third time you say, "Get out of the way, I'll do it myself." (Laughter) And that type of spirit of the frustration of Americans. When they see something broke, if the host couldn't fix it or do the right thing the American way, we would get exasperated and say, "Get out of the way, I'll do it for you." Just to make sure it's done right. So that permutation ran throughout the advisory effort. Do it the right way or don't do it at all. The Vietnamese kind of sensed that. "These Americans, they'll take care of it." First of all, their priority was their own troops'

lives and safety and that they could come back every four or five months to see their families. Somehow, despite that, they were very brave people that knew they were engaged in the national (struggle) with the north for at least a decade. So, the United States wanted to help us on the periphery by fixing our toys for us and doing these things. Be my guest. It was a reticence to learn and it wasn't promoted. They got promoted in the officer corps by their bravery, not by their maintenance ability or the logistics skills.

KC: There's not a lot of incentive for them to learn those things.

CD: Right, and so many of my colleagues, American marines were good, solid infantry officers. We sent good staff officers, we sent good engineers, good supply officers to try to help them. But that role in Saigon on the staff was somewhat muted from the start because the Vietnamese were not available. They did come over, or my staff colleagues would make the rounds to their staff counterparts. The staff counterparts would hand them a list and say, "Can you get the following for me?" And he would be frustrated with my staff advisor. He said, "Wait a minute, have you tried the Vietnamese system? Have you worked with the Vietnamese Army to get this maintenance request?" "Yeah, we tried. That didn't work. Go get this for us." So, the staff tension was generated out of—a degree of staff tension, not between individuals, but the system. The staff tensions were characterized by frustration by the American advisors. And two, the Vietnamese tended to be nonchalant and could care less because they knew in the final analysis the Americans, in terms of supply management and maintenance were not going to let them fail. So just to get out of the way and the Americans will fix the stuff, or they'll get us through stuff. So, life on the staff was nine to five. We played volleyball every day at noon, and we would play often with our counterparts. We towered over them, but they were out there. So that was sort of the high point, to play volleyball with the counterparts and the Vietnamese and Marine advisors. Colonel Tief was a good senior Marine advisor. Colonel Tief, by the way, had been a naval attaché to Italy. So, he spoke beautiful Italian, but he understood the issues when managing and working with a counterpart system. You could see he had his frustrations working with the Italians. So, the Vietnamese, to him, all professional and all respect, he still had the patience necessary to work with the given and his counterpart structure. The Vietnamese profited by his and Lieutenant Colonel McMillian's presence, the rapport among the staff was

correct and cordial with the Vietnamese. You got to wear their uniform. Except, in Saigon you ate what you want when you want. There's another thing, the cuisine, the Vietnamese cuisine in Saigon was superb. Never had a bad meal.

KC: You mentioned Saigon a couple of times. You talked about how things were a little bit more open for you. Describe Saigon, 1970 to 1971. What was Saigon like then? What sort of things did you see and do?

CD: Saigon itself was a bustling metropolis. It probably, at that time, was built by the French for a million people. It probably had three million to four million because of the refugees and the implosion of the agrarian suburbs onto the city itself. It was crowded; it needed a coat of paint. The telephone system, the wires. By the way, it's the same way with telephone wires. When it rang you never knew who was on the line when you were speaking on the telephone. It was a crowded bustling city, it had the French architecture, it was laid out with parks, it had a beautiful, new, which today is called the Reformation Palace, but the Presidential Palace was a first rate. I had never gone into the palace, but we'd walk by it every day on the way to work. But it was a city of history. The post office, which it's still at today, was designed by Peter Eiffel, the guy who designed the Eiffel Tower. So, if you were sensitive to the French architecture and took the time to see that the French at been at this laboring since the 1880s, in a colonial way, but it was laid out like a French town. Of course, I could go over to Cholon, and you could see the heavy imprints of overseas Chinese. Which the word overseas Chinese means flower bridge, *Hoa Chau*. Flower bridge." There was a vibrancy in Cholon which characterized other Chinese oriented communities throughout Asia. Singapore, Taipei, Kaohsiung, Hong Kong. They were all vestiges the way the policies which drove Cholon, how it was managed on a daily basis. In the old age, Cholon, by the way, the Vietnamese government was pretty successful. Chinese New Year in Saigon used to be thirty days. Now, around the world Chinese New Year is only three days. But in the old days, you would settle in for thirty days. That was just starting to evaporate in the early seventies up for a long Chinese New Year. But it was an Asian city built on a French structure, and I thought it had a lot of charm. It still had a little hole in the wall restaurants so you could—and everybody would be riding around on their Vespa transportation. There was lots of noise in the city, but every day you had access, if you wanted to. Baguettes,

French bread. There were bakeries. The French had inflicted baking into the South Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese diet is a well-known secret. To me, it's southern Chinese food. Which, a cuisine, the sprinkling of the French experience from baking to soups was all present and you could find wonderful little restaurants in and around Saigon. Now, occasionally that would be broken by a siren or a hand grenade going off, but the only way you could get killed in Saigon was to fall out of bed and impale yourself on a chopstick. It's a very safe place. Now, there were others who were not advisors. Now remember we wore a South Vietnamese uniform. We had carte blanche, we could go anywhere we wanted at night. Those who were on the curfew or were just new to Saigon, they always saw shadows and something sinister about the town and preceded about town very cautiously. And armed, because I was part of the Vietnamese effort, I felt somewhat protected by the uniforms, which was well respected when I went around town with that uniform. I never tried to dishonor it in anyway, but I basked and enjoyed the recognition of that uniform by the Vietnamese people. So, it was a great town. In many of the streets it was overcrowded, it needed paint, the electrical wires were just in shambles, but they worked. The airport was on a town called Tan Son Nhut. It was a major, major airport with aircraft coming and going. On the fringes of town was MACV, Military Assistance Command Vietnam Headquarters, which was a three-story mini Pentagon with BOQs (bachelor officers quarters) outside of town. Not that far out, but on the fringes by Tan Son Nhut Air Field where hundreds of Army officers and staff officers worked and later reported back to Washington, and so on. Some of them never even getting a chance to go into Saigon to share what I was given in terms of a very rare opportunity and inside to the Vietnamese culture. I enjoyed that opportunity and I would have liked to have seen that culture succeed.

KC: Now, you've talked about how much you've enjoyed the Vietnamese culture. You talked about how you enjoyed this position and staff there. You found it challenging, all of these things. Nonetheless, as a Marine advisor, did you desire to get out in the field with Vietnamese Marines?

CD: Oh, absolutely. Remember I knew that I was assigned a temporary penance by Colonel McMillan and Colonel Tief. "We need you right now to help get our programming and logistics program with CINCPAC on track. When you clean that up

and fix it, we'll let you go to the field. Then you're on recall if we ever need you and the program goes haywire again." Which you designed. I thought that was a good deal. I said, "Okay." So, after a couple of months, you're free. You can now go to the field. I proceeded to the field with the 1st Battalion the entire time. Only once and they were right on the mark. They pulled me out of the field, they said, "Pack up, get on the next plane from I Corps. Come back to Saigon, you're on a ticket tonight to Hawaii to go to a two-day conference to fix the program in Hawaii and then come back, back to the field." That's what happened. There I was in I Corps eating grass soup for breakfast. By night I was on a plane to Hawaii and spent two to three days in Hawaii which was just a shock for me. Then back to Vietnam and back to the 1st Battalion all within in a course of five days.

KC: The price you pay for being a visiting fireman, I guess.

CD: But they were also two seasoned veteran officers who understood, because I was an infantry officer, I needed to be in the field to display those credentials so I could continue on as an infantry officer that had been in the field and assigned with fighting Vietnamese units and not just being abused on the staff because of a skill I had brought from a previous assignment.

KC: All right, now you're going to be assigned to the 1st Battalion. Describe for me, you're coming into the 1st Vietnamese Marine Corps Battalion. Who was your counterpart? Again, you're with the 1st Battalion and as I understand it, the battalion was largely split into two companies with the battalion commander leading two companies and the XO generally leading two companies, as well. Was this your experience?

CD: Yes, I was inserted individually, I didn't meet them in Saigon. I had met them right away in the field. I showed up and my relief departed. It was a very brief change. I was introduced to the battalion commander and his executive officer. As we would travel, I met them, and it was in a rainy season. I was just getting pressured. When it starts raining, it just rains, but we started right in the rain. The way they would operate was in columns. Particularly in the jungle areas of the mountainous I Corps. It gets cold there at night. People think of Vietnam as jungle, but there were times in an ambush where your teeth are chattering it's so cold. In terms of traversing, their tactic was to split the battalion into two files. The battalion commander and his senior counterpart was one

file of two companies in line. The junior US advisor would go with the XO to the battalion and your remaining two companies and Headquarters Company in a line. So, you might say traveling in the jungle we were two lines separated by maybe a few hundred yards or occasionally one line was in trace of the other until we reached the next firebase or area where the felt they were going to deploy at night. One story that characterizes for me. I was on the third day of patrol in I Corps and we were in an area where there were large crater holes from B-52s that had been full of water from the rain. You know, maybe four or five feet of water with some of these huge craters. Which were just random craters. The front of my column I heard these grenades going off and I ran up there trying to encourage my counterparts to find out what the hell was going on and probably say something about tactical supplies, we're supposed to be quiet in this area and why were people throwing hand grenades? Be he saw me coming and he laughed. He said, "Don't worry, there's no VC around here. We're just fishing. There are actually fish in these ponds." So by throwing grenades they would stun these fish, small little minnows. Again, their diet in the mountains had no fish and they loved their seafood and operating down in the Delta. So, to be able to get small fish and then be able to get them on the fire at night, for nutritional value of those small fish, they thought that was worth a tactical tradeoff for throwing hand grenades. The idea, at that time we were traveling with two separate files: one commanded by the battalion commander and the other by the XO. Moving around jungle trails up in I Corps fishing.

KC: You've already mentioned the basic set up of things and how you were welcomed and how you enjoyed your time with them in respect for the Vietnamese Marines. Tell me about coming into the unit. You've got to replace an American Marine Corps advisor. What kind of relationship did he have with the XO and maybe even with the battalion commander? What kind of relationship did you build on? What sort of things did you have to change? What sort of things did you do differently or the same? Describe that relationship for me.

CD: Well, when I arrived it was very clear to me that I was on trial, they were all watching me. I had to do the right thing. I also was very thankful that my presence and acceptance was due to the hard work of six or eight people before me, my predecessors with that unit who had been helpful to them and was treated in a soldierly way by people

who were thankful for their presence. So, I was riding on their coat tails. So, the first thing I tried to do at my counterpart, an interesting little man who was very dynamic for a South Vietnamese and had a lot of hands on. He was smacking and pushing a lot of his troops. There was a catastrophe in his personal family. Within the first six weeks or so, we went back to Saigon. He had a young son who he had sort of a baptismal that he invited me to. I went out to his shack. They lived in a place called Dian, D-I-A-N, but the D is pronounced like X. Dian, which was out near Long Binh on the northeast portion of Saigon, that was the Vietnamese Marine basecamp. They lived in very modest shacks, nothing special. It almost reminded me of Indonesia, but they were very poor. We had one advisor who was on the staff. His name was Gene Harrison who the people at MACV would always come out to see Gino. Gino's project and everybody who came to MACV was wheeled out to see Gino. He was the pig farmer. He was trying because he was from Arkansas or whatever had a skill with pigs. The Vietnamese Marines, we thought at that time, could be of help to them by building them, you might say, a commissary system. Dairy, by raising and showing them how to raise a pig farm with some of the troops and their dependents in the rear would, in some small way, add to their diet, reduce the price of what meat would be on the civilian market, and by having their own interdepartmental sort of dairy. Gino was the pig farmer. So, everybody from MACV had to come out and see Gino's farm with the pigs. I mean, people would come from MACV and get off the plane, and the press would come out and so on. But the true intent of that project was a good one. It tried to set up, you might say, the basic beginnings of a commissary/PX system that they could raise among themselves and help their diet. I went out to see my counterparts who had lost a child. The child had died two or three weeks after birth. So, there I had been to the birth party and then I was invited back for the funeral. By my presence at the funeral, that built up a special bond between him and I that carried on during our relationship. By doing the right thing, that's all an advisor would do. To demonstrate prudence when necessary and to step forward and do the right thing. Transcend all linguistics issues. They know and you know in conscience what is the right thing to do at the right time. But by just being yourself and practicing tradition and virtues of truth telling, honesty, and integrity, integrity, integrity I was quickly able to build an acceptable level of rapport with my counterparts.

KC: What was the Vietnamese Marines' general impression of Americans that you could tell?

CD: What was the general impression of Americans?

KC: Yeah, what did they think of the Americans?

CD: They didn't share that much, but my own personal instincts were that the Vietnamese Marine Americans, the advisors, the Americans who were there and then the advisory capacity to them and wore their uniform were one of them. All the other Americans in MACV and so on, those were the Americans, but you, because you wore their uniform and you ate with them three times a day and you worked with them and went to the field and same hardships and so on and share a beer and talk stories and had an interest in them, you weren't an American. It was a most an interesting distinction. But when you were part of them, you were not subject to criticism. They would mouth off about, "The United States this, the United States that." Not in a bitter way, but the point is they differentiated between you as an advisor—oh, it was not lost on them. When we would pass an American advisor, who was an advisor to their Army units. For some reason, the US Army did not spend all day long with their counterparts. And when it came time for food, many of the American advisors would bring their own food. They would eat separately from the Vietnamese. This, to them, was a major tactical mistake. It was not lost on them. That is the Vietnamese Marines, how their advisors lived and slept as opposed to the Vietnamese Army who had advisors that were nine to five and ate their own food. They didn't appreciate that, and they didn't respect it.

KC: I've heard other people who were in your position say that the Vietnamese counterparts could be a little standoffish because they anticipated that maybe the American Marine advisor would be there just to advise and to be more than just that connection to firepower, to artillery, to air that they watched the Americans and said, "Okay, what kind of approach is this guy going to have? Is he going to try to tell me what to do? Is he going to advise me, is he going to sit back?" Were you aware of maybe that kind of dynamic with your counterpart?

CD: No, I had a wind full of them. My individual case, anybody who could read tombstones in Vietnamese secretary knows a little about Asia. Because he knows little about Asia, he knows how Asians act. He understands the Confucian relationship

between brother and sister, senior to junior, when to speak, when not to speak. They assumed that I understood the Confucian principle of relationships. In Asia, everything is based on relationships. Nothing, nothing can happen in Asia if you're in the sales business until you have rapport with your counterparts. I watched later in life, in business, I watched people race into Asia with contracts in one hand and pens in the other, "Sign here." Nothing happens. You need to establish your rapport and understand your relationship in reference to the whole. I had heard stories about some Americans who transgressed that line and tried to command the guys' battalion for him or did something tactically without his approval. They probably paid a terrible price in terms of isolation or abhorrence. But in my case, I was quite lucky again. I was expected to fit a mold of my predecessors and also understanding the Asian virtues in for integrity and command relationships or having the presence of mine. When he was chewing out his subordinates, I would go get lost. I would not be there to watch him chastise a junior. That would mean his loss of face that he had to castigate one of his own in the presence of foreign guests. So, just bringing to bear the common principle which I had awareness of for three years on Taiwan in that environment, there is a very close relationship again between the Chinese and the Vietnamese ethical relationships in terms of rapport and what constitutes face. By then, it became natural to me. I don't know if that answers your question.

KC: Yeah, absolutely. All right, now you are up in I Corps. You're with the 1st Vietnamese Marine Battalion. Take me out on a typical patrol.

CD: Okay, we were operating just in the shadows of the towns of the demilitarized zone. It's due west of Quang Tri and Cam Lo and so on. I'll be operating out just a little south of the old Vandergrift Marine Base in Nui Ba Den, a mountain. On patrol we would walk from Cam Lo. It's a two and a half day walk up the back side of the Nui Ba Den Mountains. The Nui Ba Den Mountain is about twenty miles due east of Khe Sanh, but it is a critical juncture in Route Nine that you can look down and observe everything on Route Nine going east, west, and you can look due north about eight minutes and see the Rock Pile. There was a firebase there. By then, fire bases were well established in I Corps. So we would walk to that fire base and have an entire battalion up there. There would also be South Vietnamese Marines artillery battery. So, the battalion

would operate there and they were also able to provide that battery security and also that battery would be that artillery fan. The range of that gun, which was nine miles, they could patrol safely within the fan scope in that battery from nine miles in any direction. Without having to resort to artillery or supporting arms from the United States or other friendly reliance. What I'm saying, they had their own guns, and they could talk directly to their own guns. So, we would man that fire base. There was fire artillery missions and then we would go down in company-sized patrols off that mountain in different directions laying ambushes. It's usually anywhere from five to seven days in the company just doing lots of saturation patrol in that area. That would go on for about six weeks depending on the weather and then we'd move to another firebase or be redeployed elsewhere. Let me best characterize it. There were days in I Corps where you would be looking for Indians all day long. No Indians. There would be other days in I Corps where you weren't looking for Indians and there were three behind every tree. During that period of time when I was with the 1st Battalion—remember, this is just nine months prior to the Easter Offensive. It was relatively quiet in I Corps. We had our firefights here and there and so on, but only in the buildup in February of '71 did we start to receive a lot of resistance and there were Indians behind every tree. Then this culminates Operation Lam Son 719. But prior to February '71, patrolling that winter in February of '70 up in I Corps was somewhat ironically for I Corps. I thought benign, given my '65 experience and then after Lam Son 719. So the patrolling was routine, it was not heavy combat, but it still had to be done and you had to have troops out there saturating the area.

KC: So, you're out for four or five days out on patrols. Then you go back to your base camp. What do you do when you get back into your firebase? What do you do when you get back in?

CD: Back into the firebase?

KC: Yes.

CD: Refurbish ammunition, try to spend a lot of time with your boots off. You know, because of the rainy weather you always have to worry about immersion foot, cleaning your weapons, and listening to the radio. See, at that time there might have been four or five other Vietnamese Marine battalions all located west of Cam Lo doing

patrolling or up toward the DMZ. So, on the radio net—now remember, these brigades, three battalions reported to a brigade. Like the brigades were numbered 147 which usually represented 1st, 4th, and 7th Battalion. So, 147 is the brigade that looked over the 1st, 4th, and 7th Battalion. So, I would have my radio and my radio operator, and I shackled codes so I could report to my counterpart at the brigade, usually a major. The status of the battalion, how many people. You know, like I say, these little Vietnamese, when it rained for three or four days and no resupplies, their clothing was ragged, and it was just rotting off of them. So how we were going to fix that. Or a lot of people were just sick with head colds or flus and influenza and so on. How I could, somehow, on the next available helicopter covering that fire base, if someone could send me five hundred aspirin would sure help the cause. Now, keep in mind, this is worthy of comment. During that time, all the Marine aviation was gone. Our aviation, the US Marines with these Vietnamese battalions. Our aviation was solely supported by US Army aviation. They were magnificent. There was a concept of that time in the US Army, you had flying warrant officers. That means warrant officers weren't exactly your Marine Corps pilot. Your pilot, even helicopters, had eighteen months of training in Pensacola whether fixed or jets and so on. Whereas the average Army warrant officer was only twenty-one years old, had about four months of training, and there he was, driving a Huey helicopter. He didn't have an instrument card and wasn't really qualified to fly at night. What he lacked in skill that the Marine aviators proudly had, he made up for his balls. They were fearless. I remember one time when we were stuck out during this period. A tremendous hurricane—a typhoon caught us and the battalion was just ravaged with sick people while in route. I had an Army warrant officer come in and pick up seventeen troops and take them all out. He did that five times in a tough zone. He broke a helicopter. He said, "Don't worry, I'll be back with another one." I wrote the guy up for a DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross). I thought his aviation skills were a little wanting, but he sure made up for it in terms of willingness and just a great skill, daring. Unfortunately the Army as peace time came around in the post '72 period, the Army phased out the warrant officer program and went back to having more seasoned pilots and commanded their aircraft in Army aviation. During this period of time in I Corps,'70, we were solely supported by Army aviation operating out of Quang Tri City. There's an airfield there by

young warrant officers who were fearless. I remember one evening up in Nui Ba Den. In order to make a fire, the Vietnamese would take the pellets, would go to support artillery and when you put a round in a 105 howitzer, they would put in this bag of ignition. There were these little pellets which created this burst of the artillery rounds. They would sprinkle these on wet logs and ignite them. This ignition would be so powerful that it would start the wood on fire, and it would allow them to make a small fire, allow them to cook the rice that they somehow kept dry. One night, a young Vietnamese Marine with a pocket full of these pellets in a sack bag walked by another ongoing campfire and it exploded in his pocket. He was burning to death, so they were able tame him down. He had also wounded another person. So, there was two of them and another guy that had suffered this hand injury in the same fire. This is just making a fire trying to stay alive to cook. Now the problem was you're on top of this mountain which is, I don't know, I'd say five thousand feet, and it's fogged in. How do we get these casualties out? So, we worked the system where I was able to navigate the casualties down the side of the mountain to get below the cloud cover. We were able to direct the artillery batteries on supporting hills to fire illumination shells at two thousand feet, spaced every hundred meters like a line. So that some warrant officer explained to him what was being done, would fly through the clouds solely looking for these flares placed in front of him at two thousand feet on a straight line for so many miles and then be able to drop down below the clouds and evacuate these three people. That's the kind of pilots we had then from the US Army. I was very proud to serve with them. And we did that, we got those three guys, and they lived. I had been able a couple of months later back in the basecamp at Saigon, I was able to meet them, they had burned and one of them burned horribly, but they were alive thanks to the efforts and coordination of a young warrant flying aviation warrant officer.

KC: That's a great story. Was there a particular patrol that you went out on with the 1st Battalion that stands out to you in terms of the activity or the enemy you encountered or a particular fire fight? Is there any one that stands out?

CD: At that time in I Corps, no, not really. It was just constant patrolling, a lot of sniping. Not until Lam Son 719 did things really start to heat up. We're throwing that period, let's say, November through January 1970 was just a cold winter. I think the VC

were the same way. It got cold for them, too. Just to be able to survive through the winter and then look forward to some sort of spring offensive might have foremost in their planning and the name of the game was to stay healthy and maintain so the levels of contact patrolling—oh, yes, one patrol very much so. We were on a patrol, and again I'm with the company commander of the XO. We run across this guy on the trail walking toward us. We gush this guy. He's a North Vietnamese surgeon in the North Vietnamese Army. He had been walking three days east from Laos to run because he only wanted to surrender to a Vietnamese Marine battalion because he had known as a South Vietnamese Marine that at least they were possessed by some valor and soldierly spirit that they would treat as well. Now, when I radioed back to my brigade to say, "Guess what. We've got a guest here and he's a North Vietnamese. I have a special request." "What's that?" "Well, the battalion commander wants to hold onto him for a day or two to talk to him." The brigade commander said, "Oh no, we've got to get this guy back to Saigon. He's going to be a gold mine." It turns out, he had been five years in Laos as a regimental surgeon with the North Vietnamese Army. The battalion commander wants to keep him because they're both from the same hometown.

KC: Really?

CD: Yeah.

KC: Isn't that something?

CD: Yeah, well you see historically, many of the South Vietnamese Marine officers were born or had strong ties to the north. Ironically, this guy stayed with us for about a day and a half when I met him. A young man about forty, looked in pretty good shape and wasn't beat up or anything. Through the interpreter and the radio operator, he was able to share some stories, which I'll get to in a second. They wanted to talk, sort of like a civil war. I can imagine that was my recollection. It was like watching somebody from Atlanta with somebody from the North during our Civil War and they wanted to reminisce for a while before that person moved onto stockade or whatever. But we chatted, we kept this guy for a day, and a half and MACV somehow found out and were going crazy that they wanted to get this guy back from Saigon to interrogate them. We treated him well; we gave him the food we had. I sort of sat on the periphery of that conversation while the battalion commander and the XO chatted with him on terms of

hometown, where he went to school. In their own way, I think he probably did a job better as an interrogator of what that surgeon's unit was going through. These stories came to me sort of secondhand. He thought that the North Vietnamese was terribly afraid of the B-52 coming down the trail. That they had tremendous streaks of malaria and casualties from the Long Haul. Most Americans, who were in Vietnam, had no idea, none, about how big Southeast Asia is and what the trails and the mountain networks through Laos down the Ho Chi Minh Trail were. It is quite a journey, even without the harassment of American airpower or known tribes or whatever. But just a physical journey of coming from, let us say, a starting point of Hanoi, all the way down through Laos into the Ho Chi Minh Trail to be able to come out behind Da Nang or Khe Sanh was just a physical challenge. It made the Appalachian Trail pale by comparison. So, we listen to his stories of field medicine and treating the wounded and the sick. All this time with artillery H&I, harassment and interdiction fires going off all around him, I thought was noteworthy. So, I had respect for this North Vietnamese surgeon. No less than he had purposely sought out a South Vietnamese Marine unit to which to surrender because he'd know he'd be treated like a soldier before his final internment down to Saigon. I found just amazing. So that was kind of a highlight of patrolling about Christmas of 1970.

KC: Now, what became of this doctor? How long did he stay?

CD: He stayed with us two days then a special helicopter was sent in and the battalion commander made sure he sent an officer with him as far as that helicopter down to Quang Tri and to make sure that he was probably put on a C-130 en route back to Saigon for further interrogation. I never heard of him again, nor did the battalion commander ever mention him. But the very fact that he was a North Vietnamese and shared a hometown relationship, meant the battalion commander said, "Well, we're just going to delay the process a day or two until we've talked to him." I found that just amazing.

KC: Yeah, that is really cool. Well, why don't we stop there for today, Colonel?

CD: Okay.

Interview with Carmine DelGrosso
Session [5] of [6]
Date: 2 November 2010

Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Colonel Sean DelGrosso. Today is November 2, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University and the colonel is joining me by telephone from his home in San Clemente, California. Okay, Colonel, when we left off last time, I think we had you on the edge of the operation known as Lam Son 719 in early 1971. If you would, please, take me through that entire operation. And I mean start from the second you find out about it through the operations and intel. Take me through every last bit of it that you can recall.

Carmine Delgrosso: Lam Son 719, let me start about November 1970. I was in the field with the 1st Battalion of the Vietnamese Marine Corps. We were operating in I Corps in some pretty tough weather in the rainy seasons and it gets quite cold in those mountains. Just sort of the area called Nui Ba Den Mountain, which lies about twenty miles due south of the Rock Pile just as Route 9 turns west toward the Laotian border. It was somewhat quiet in terms of contact and there were lots of patrolling. Then, all of a sudden, because it was in the fields, began to hear word of a major Army buildup. So then through the month of November and December and January, I was learning this from some aviation, US Army warrant officer pilots who I would chat to, and they would stop at different LZs to drop off supplies to us. The Army was planning to bring quite a few helicopters as far south as the Delta to support an operation of the South Vietnamese. My deduction by Christmas of 1970 was that the Vietnamese were going to be allowed to do a major operation, probably against targets in Laos. This would be the first visible sign of Vietnamization and all the equipment that we had given and provided to the Vietnamese forces of Vietnamization in the field. So, for me, it seemed to me it was going to be a test, could the South Vietnamese, on their own, hack it against selected North Vietnamese targets in Laos. Now, Laos for the South Vietnamese at that time was sort of like Disneyland. A place that was, and they've heard about. So, to be able to even just walk around in Laos. Operate even in a non-combat situation. Psychologically, for the South Vietnamese forces, no less the South Vietnamese government, would have

been a very visible strategic sign of their ability to succeed under Vietnamization, do something on their own, and a positive sign that they actually had the ability to maneuver and therefore was a step in winning and beating the North Vietnamese. So, with this major test there was a buildup through most of January. Later I had heard, this was probably toward the end of February, that a number somewhere in the neighborhood of probably seven hundred to eight hundred aircraft had been mustered by the US Army to support the Vietnamese in their efforts. I guess for the United States to support them with aviation transport, it was just sort of a slight crutch, an aid that they weren't going to do it all on their own. Because the Vietnamese wanted to fly into Laos. Now, you have to bear with me. I have to describe the geography and the terrain. When you leave Khe Sanh and move west, it's sort of like, let's use the analogy a keyhole. So, to get over into Laos about thirty-five miles, the strategic target was—and there are two spellings of Tchepone or Xiton one was, X-I-T-O-N, and on maps it was T-C-H-E-P-O-N-E, Tchepone or Xiton. Now, was there anything there? Well theoretically Xiton or Tchepone was the last switching yard, as you might say. As in a railroad analogy. For the North Vietnamese moving stuff down the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos and then come out with exit points in Vietnam. So, the ability to control or destroy or disrupt the North Vietnamese efforts in the Xiton/Tchepone area, would have been a major psychological step for them. To achieve this, I believe I recall the number of—they had dedicated seventeen Army battalions that would be flown by US forces from landing zones as far east as Quang Tri, Cam Lo, and Khe Sanh. Through this keyhole, which was about twenty miles long with mountainous terrain on both sides three thousand feet, to be flown through this keyhole in the Tchepone area. The lift began probably sometime in late January. Now, to move seventeen battalions by air, and when I mean air, I mean Chinooks and Hueys, UH-1Hs and Chinooks, took quite a bit of time. In retrospect, I would have said it probably took five to seven days using US Army access and the minimum South Vietnamese aviation assets. To move these seventeen battalions into the Xiton area—now Xiton terrain, once you get out of the mountains in Khe Sanh, becomes relatively flat as is a good portion of that part of Laos. Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese, were observing this whole thing. So, when the Vietnamese landed their seventeen battalions—the South Vietnamese Marines, were to be a strategic reserve. This was going to be, for the most part, an all-South

Vietnamese Army show. The South Vietnamese Marines there, about six battalions there at the time, were to be the strategic reserves and to serve as anchor points to secure the flanks. One was in a geographic area called Coroc, C-O-R-O-C, its high ground which overlooks this keyhole corridor into Laos. Now, when the operation started in early February, the rains were setting in and that was not good. The South Vietnamese, again, I was on the ground with one of these Vietnamese Marine battalions up near the Laotian border and it was my sensing that what happens, that they poured seventeen of these battalions into Laos that sort of landed sporadically like oil spots. Wherever there was an LZ, they'd dump the battalion. So, what you had is seventeen battalions, like oil spots, that upon entry into Laotian areas. I heard all the stories of glee with some of the higher-ups in the South Vietnamese government to include Nguyen Cao Ky came and proclaimed victory. They failed in their planning to establish legitimate strategic targets on whether to occupy, control, or destroy them. There they were, spread out around Xiton and they failed to interlock their positions. Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese, and I believe it was two infantry divisions. I think, I think one was 326B. I can't recall the number of the other one. Sensing this, simply got online like a steamroller and began to push east, overrunning each of these small oil spots. These oil spots South Vietnamese units failed to consolidate their position or link up and reinforce each other now began to suffer the steamroller effect on two Vietnamese divisions pushing from west to east back in that general direction of a Lang Vei, the border town, on the South Vietnamese side, and Khe Sanh itself. The South Vietnamese, now, did not want to walk out. The felt that the US government has given them a ride to the big show in Laos and now they started to ask for mass evacuation by air. Now, to put that much demand on the air assets, given the weather and the rain and the fog and the panic and the inability to control their mass exit stampede east, began an inability to bring artillery support to bear on the oncoming North Vietnamese. Saw an almost panic-like situation. The North Vietnamese began to wipe out some of these battalions and a lot of young, brave Army warrant officer pilots were taking some serious hits as they were picking up. For example, an aircraft say, a Chinook size could hold twenty-four Vietnamese given the weather and the altitude at that time. They were trying to jam forty to fifty people on the aircraft. This resulted in a lot of US aviation casualties. Again, getting back to the keyhole, the only route in and out of the

positions that they had temporarily occupied in Laos was on the east-west axis for the American aviators. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese began to bring in what was called the "golden hose," which was the 37-millimeter anti-aircraft guns. These guns were very, very effective. They could knock down planes of tens of thousands of feet. Typical communist tracers, green. So, you could see these guns along that corridor and move them up toward the higher ground and began to engage US helicopters to include gunships that were on the east-west axis trying to move a group of South Vietnamese. In my mind, seventeen battalions is probably somewhere in the neighborhood of over ten thousand men. I would estimate that in a North Vietnamese division was probably seven thousand men at full strength. They were probably from fifteen thousand Vietnamese in gross numbers engaged against ten thousand retreating and broken, non-coordinated South Vietnamese forces who were trying to move along the ground, waiting for aviation to come get them. It was only broken and non-coordinated South Vietnamese forces who were trying to move along the ground or waiting for aviation to literally come get them. There was only at the last minute when they started to really break badly to South Vietnamese forces. They started to exit by foot along ground rounds in a very broken and ragged formation. So now we're witnessing even Hueys at ten thousand feet by the golden hose and into the aircraft. We're witnessing a complete route on the ground with the South Vietnamese. They mass exited. In my mind I just had a brief historical thought, "I guess this is what Dunkirk was like." Meanwhile, ourselves, the South Vietnamese Marines were serving as a strategic reserve and as an anchor point, started to get a sensing that, "My gosh, if these North Vietnamese keep coming east and we don't get told to move back or occupy alternate positions further east, we could get swept up in this rabble run. Then we would be outflanked by the North Vietnamese." A lot of message traffic now flies between our battalion our brigade control and South Vietnamese headquarters in I Corps. It reaches a point where the South Vietnamese Marines have a battery, an artillery supporting battery on Coroc, C-O-R-O-C. It's a very high piece of ground just located right inside South Vietnam, almost on the border that can provide artillery, if need be, into Laos to support the fleeing South Vietnamese forces. That battery attached to the Brigade 147, which was composed of the 1st, 4th, and 7th Vietnamese Marine Battalions orders those guns, because there was no air transport that

can move the guns, because all the transports are dedicated to the evacuation of the South Vietnamese Army despite those guns. This is very painful for the South Vietnamese Marines that they have to leave. They have a very US Marine attitude towards equipment. They take care of it, they don't leave it in the field, and they don't abandon it. But it was an amazing decision for them to spike those six guns so that they're not falling into the hands of the North Vietnamese and then to literally break down and begin to E&E, escape and evade, west to link up with friendly forces of the 147 Brigade. The word still doesn't come by the middle of February. So, what you have is these South Vietnamese Marines getting a little nervous now in the sense that they're not getting decent coherent directions from senior Vietnamese headquarters. They're watching the possibility growing that they could be enveloped by the North Vietnamese who are just having a field day. Again, I use the analogy steamroller, rolling up these non-coordinated South Vietnamese Army battalion in haste and port arms fleeing east. US aviation is now taking some serious casualties. It almost reaches the point—afterwards I find out in February when the US Army decides to count their losses of these seven hundred, eight hundred aircraft that were employed and brought up from all plots of Vietnam South of the Delta to support the South Vietnamese by aviation. If you could bring a piece of the aircraft back, that doesn't count as a loss. So, some pretty interesting accounting in terms of what the actual losses are of US aircraft began to stir a curve. Meanwhile now, the rainy season is nearly in full force. What I mean by rain, in a twenty-four-hour period, it would not rain maybe four hours. So, to be able to fly in that foggy weather and rain, there are some very brave, very brave US aviators trying to assist their South Vietnamese counterpart in a mass evacuation under pressure taking a lot of anti-aircraft fire from the oncoming North Vietnamese force moving at a pretty good pace from Laos in pursuit into South Vietnam. The distance involved from Xiton to Khe Sanh is probably about forty miles. The North Vietnamese are covering ground, fighting, and destroying Vietnamese Army battalions. By estimate is probably ten or twelve and suffered severe battle casualties and rendered incapable. Probably three, maybe four, are completely destroyed. This rages all through January and into early February, I believe. My recollection in cases, but my sensing is probably by mid-February, it's all over from Lam Son 719. What was probably allowing two, maybe three-week operation of Phase 1 moving into Laos, two,

engagement with the Vietnamese, and three, the withdrawal phase probably told me, or my sensing tells me of about three weeks. During that time, I'm on the ground with the Vietnamese Marine battalion. We're moving our position against the strategic reserves or not engage. Although, two of my colleague battalions do move up closer to the Laotian border and move into Laos, again, to provide a strategic blocking point. The US advisors are not allowed to step foot in Laos. They can, however, assist in delivery of ammunition, small supplies, and medicine to the South Vietnamese on the ground. We have a few Marine majors that were battalion commanders and went to my mind with Major Bob Martin and Carlisle with the 2nd Battalion, Major Carlisle. All these gentlemen spend a lot of time on helicopters flying in and out to support the South Vietnamese Marine unit just inside of Laos at the strategic reserve around Coroc. They never set foot on the ground. That's the ground rule, no US ground advisory effort will occur. The only US participation is supposedly aviation assets. All casualties for the battalion are not out of the ordinary, but again, sickness with the weather and cold, pneumonia. The rest of the brigade is in about the same situation. The South Vietnamese Marines only participate in the strategic reserves, get to witness this whole debacle, and serve and assist in the evacuation and link up with some South Vietnamese Army units and bringing back stragglers to safe positions for the east in Vietnam. To sum up tactically, this is brilliant by the North Vietnamese who manage early on to see that the South Vietnamese had no strategic plan except landing in Xiton. So, the jumping up and down like Hitler would celebrate with his railway car and then realizing that they were unwilling to walk out of Laos, but somehow the Americans could put them in by air and had to take them out by air. The Vietnamese had a good sensing in it because I think the ability to be able to intercept communications was superb. They also, then, tactically on the ground aligned their two divisions and in a piecemeal fashion, defeats the South Vietnamese forces at a staggering loss of probably three or four battalions and the moralization of taking about ten to seventeen battalions and a fight for quite a long time. So let me stop with that. That is my recollection of the battle of Lam Son 719. With a guy on the ground, sort of witnessing this, not fully engaged as an advisor with the North Vietnamese, but in the battlefield area with a great vantage point to see it all, particularly the aviation debacle.

KC: What, in your opinion, as you're looking at it from the time, what in your opinion was the primary problem? Why did Lam Son 719 go so wrong?

CD: There are probably three or four reasons. The first was a poor choice of strategic and tactical objectives. What were the Vietnamese going over there to do? For example, to reestablish the flag? Break the North Vietnamese Ho Chi Minh Trail pipeline for a set period of time? Xiton again, is just a village at that time. It's nothing much. It's a spot on a map that just had magical fascination for that. It was just a spot on the map inside Laos that they could demonstrate the ability to, in a swaggerly way, with new American equipment and support, have freedom of maneuver into Laos. So, one is poor choices for the strategic objectives, two is the weather, poor timing on the weather. Three is the complete reliance on US Army aviation for transport into the battle area. Four, no alternate plan. No strategic plan of link up. Once you put seventeen battalions on the battlefield, they should be at some sort of a tactical formation or reinforcing each other rather it was like putting oil spots out there that was not coordinating. Put oil and oil together in order to safely defend your territory and preserve your force. They did not do that. Fifth was their decision that they would not throw these oil spots together and form a column and then fight their way back into Vietnam and conduct a retrograde, under pressure, very not easy to do, but rather they all sat individually in place waiting for the American aviation assets to come deliver them and then pick them up. Sort of like a day *Deus ex machina*. That was totally wrong. And during their consolidation phase, they really didn't have any. They didn't use phase lines or whatever. Lastly, they failed to appreciate the rugged terrain in that part of Laos and South Vietnam and how to have alternate ways out of the battlefield area. There was only one way in for them and one way out. Which is not a good situation.

KC: Right.

CD: So those are about six vulnerabilities there, fallacies, or failure on the battlefield from a strategic level. That is, whoever is in charge of those seventeen battalions, probably I Corps, whoever the South Vietnamese general was at that time, was I Corps. It failed to perform any of the performance and steps and there were about six or seven reasons. Now, it was painted Lam Son 719 as a great success politically in the press and it was linked to how well Vietnamization was going. The United States

government, I believe, used that as cover safety of our overall withdrawal—a drawdown of US forces. In South Vietnam is just going swimmingly because the South Vietnamese could now carry the load themselves. Not only that, they're carrying the fight to the enemy and able to get over to Laos and cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail pipeline. On the ground, that was not the case. To me, Lam Son 719 was a failure.

KC: Do you think the entire operation as it was conceived was faulty? That why Laos, why Xiton, why there at that time? Did that make sense to you when you were hearing about what it was going to be?

CD: Again, I go back to it and on my poor choice of words that Xiton to them in Laos was sort of like a sacred hunting ground. No South Vietnamese had been there, and it was like going to Disneyland and going to the top of Mount Everest. They were just so infatuated that they actually climbed Mount Everest. They got over into Laos and were able to cut or temporarily disrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail at a very critical artery. See, at Xiton—sorry I used the words switching yards. It's where supplies are coming from North Vietnam or went from North Vietnam themselves due west into Laos and then in Xiton, it was decided how these supplies would go down the trail further to a point even with Da Nang and then go west or receive all the way down into Cambodia. So, for them to be able to turn the switch off at Xiton, which was the source of their national toothache, they perceived as a great victory even though they only occupied Xiton and kept the North Vietnamese silent for three days. They were in the state of absolute euphoria. During those three days, I believe that the North Vietnamese assess the situation correctly that the South Vietnamese had extended themselves too far from their supply line. That the only way in and out of this position of putting that many battalions into Laos was about forty to fifty miles further west than their supply line could handle. The only way you could supply or evacuate was by air and the North Vietnamese correctly assessed that, so they brought pressure to bear by bringing in their anti-aircraft and shooting down a lot of US helicopters. Remember, escaping and evading is very difficult given that that pipeline is only one way in and out of Laos through the Vietnamese terrain at that juncture it is an east-west corridor surrounded by five thousand foot hills on either side. So, one thing that we mentioned is the absolute bravery some of these young Army aviation pilots who in the face of great danger, terrible weather

conditions who—often fog and the 37-millimeter golden hose flew very bravely and professionally.

KC: What was the net effect of the failure of Lam Son 719 as you saw it in Vietnam? I'm not talking about the Marines that you were with or about the ARVN, but what was the net effect of this failure?

CD: It starts from the lowest level in my battalion and at the brigade level. By now, there was a decision to move all nine Vietnamese infantry battalions to I Corps. So, for the Vietnamese Marines they said, "Wow, our entire force and large chunks of the airborne were going to I Corps." It looked like the South Vietnamese government took to both of their positions and employed their strategic reserves which was the airborne and the Marines into I Corps. The initial outcome of 719 was all Vietnamese Marine units were going to be in I Corps and probably for a very, very long time. At the next level up, the South Vietnamese government went through an assessment, and it wasn't much in the press, it was almost a blackout on this startling effect, they probably lost four or five battalions. They were wiped out by the North Vietnamese. The US Army scrambled to play a numbers game with just how many helicopters were lost in the world and the US press and in the foreign press, Lam Son was kind of painted with mixed results. The initial part of it was covered with great fanfare and seizure of strategic South Vietnamese targets in Laos and their temporary occupation of a number of key towns in Laos. I think that spread a lot of hope among the South Vietnamese people. The outcome, they were gone for two to three weeks and became very murky. You really had to dig, I would suspect as a historian or somebody who followed, to get the actual numbers or results and how did the battle unfold and who won? A lot of that was just cut off in the press. But the reverse side of that in the US press, Lam Son 719 began to be painted maybe by the administration as the first successful evidence that Vietnamization was working. This might have had some impact on the Paris peace talks at the time. I don't know, it might have put some leverage back in the hands of Kissinger and company. It is fact that if given your right around the coaching, equipment, and support, the South Vietnamese could hack it on their own. But for me, the reality on the battlefield was, the ineptitude of the South Vietnamese forces to successfully conduct or analyze and understand what was happening to them. That there was a need for successful retrograde actions in mass that

had to be coordinated so that they didn't lose great chunks of their forces. They failed to do that at the cost of probably four or five infantry battalions. So, I would think the dead was probably somewhere around two thousand. Quite a few South Vietnamese dead and then again, a staggering toll on US Army aviation.

KC: What toll did it take on the Vietnamese Marines that you worked with? Granted, they were there just there as a strategic reserve as you mentioned. But what about their morale, for example, as a result of this failure?

CD: I don't think, at the trooper level, maybe I'm going out on a limb here, but the troops didn't care because they didn't like the Army. And two, they didn't physically see this, so many of the South Vietnamese troops. And third, what did they care? Their unit was okay. They didn't suffer any casualties. It was just another day in the life of a South Vietnamese Marine. Which is an amazing concept that these people can fight for years without any degradation to their morale, amazing. But now at the senior level, at the South Vietnamese Marine Corps, I would say the battalion commander, regimental commander, they realized that this gap of North Vietnamese pouring east all the way to Khe Sanh, could be repeated and created a back door into South Vietnam that sort of bent the flank of the whole DMZ. Remember, all their forces had been postured, basically, in the north-south axis below the DMZ. They had been fighting incoming artillery tactics. They had a linear perception of life., that the attacks would come from North Vietnam itself directly to South Vietnam. But by Lam Son 719, they realized that the whole posture of I Corps forces, along the demilitarized zone, the flank could be bent and that there was now a side door that could be used freely, like a swinging door, by the Vietnamese to move east rapidly and undermine and refuse to flank of the South Vietnamese government from Khe Sanh moving east. They realized the South Vietnamese Marines, that somebody had to plug that hole. That somebody had to be there to ensure that the South Vietnamese positions in the DMZ area and northern I Corps and eventually Quang Tri, the city, were not undermined by enemy forces coming from Laos into Vietnam. This is really hard to digest because at this time, the ability to bring US strategic might, that is B-52 strikes that could seal that if need be. It was iffy, we were playing turn on and turn off the B-52s as the function of political events going on in Paris with Le Duc Tho and the bombing and so on. So, they previously enjoyed a ten-year

period of brining US strategic might to bear and assist South Vietnamese strategic and tactical efforts on the ground. Now, it became on call. It wasn't routine. They would call and the US would provide B-52s and other weapons. So, for the South Vietnamese, they realized that their fate was going to be in I Corps for a long time. Their ability to go back to the South, the Delta, go back to Saigon where they were stationed, the ability to see their families, it was now going to be rationed. And maybe one battalion out of six or seven up in I Corps, would be rotated back on some sort of a basis to be worked out. But rather their normal rotation of six to eight weeks in the field and back to Saigon. That on the personnel level now was going to be in jeopardy and they were going to be in I Corps for a long time.

KC: What kind of effect did that have on your Marines?

CD: Again, Lam Son 719, you only realized the magnitude when you're on the ground and that maybe every day from those events in late January, early February, you start to piece this together, "Huh, it's going to be a long time up here in I Corps." The entire South Vietnamese Marine Corps which, historically, spent most of their time in the Delta and I Corps, is now in five or six corps. Is now going to be shifted and we're going to spend a lot of our time in I Corps. At that time now, probably three South Vietnamese, all their brigades, all their line battalions that were configured into three infantry brigades were going to be in I Corps. So, we're going to be in the field for a very long time. We just took that as show biz. Again, psychologically, someday someone's going to tap me on the shoulder and say, "Your tour is over, go home now." So, we all had that psychological trap and we knew we were going to leave as part of the normal routine. We could only appreciate the magnitude of what was going to happen to our colleagues who were going to spend a lot of their days up in I Corps non-stop and the psychological impact that might have had on was very difficult to gauge.

KC: All right, now pick up the story in the aftermath of Lam Son. Where were you, what was going to be your routine now? You're going to be up north now. What are you going to be doing?

CD: So, this proceeds on through about April for me, but things quiet down dramatically. We're just back at Nui Ba Den which is sort of a mountain complex halfway between Khe Sanh and Cam Lo. So, it would be a two-day walk from Cam Lo

due west. We do a lot of normal patrolling; we have artillery pieces up on top of the high ground. So, the firebase concept. So, we occupied some firebases in the sense that from where Route 9 turns due north to the Rockpile, the old Vandergrift, or what the Marines called Vandergrift Air Strip in an area. From about there, west, is all mentally conceded that the North Vietnamese are back and they're en masse. But east of that line, where Route 9 bends at, we are the forward units of the South Vietnamese. Nobody in Khe Sanh or Lang Vei anymore. Everybody's out of Laos. So, the units that are furthest west of the South Vietnamese government, are the Vietnamese Marines. And it is a quiet period. What you would have thought to be an exploitation phase of the Vietnamese to having saving victory at Xiton and Lam Son 719, would it continue to push east the first forces they would have run into was a couple of South Vietnamese Marine battalions. That didn't happen. The rain stops, it's now April, things are dry, things are hot, and there's a big lull. Now, I've never taken the time to correlate that lull starting about April into correlation of political events that are beginning to unfold around the Paris peace table. I mean, we spend a year where we try to figure out if the table should be round or square. A correlation of events on the battlefield, and in terms of intensity, was high points and low point in the dialogue in Laos. I've never run an analysis of that. So, to answer your question, it was quiet again. So, in April or May start to be quiet again which was starting to take fire again from north of the demilitarized zone. A lot of harassment and interdiction fire unplanned, unnamed, but its incoming fire. You take a lot of that which is just a standard day on the battlefield. So, April and May are kind of quiet. Now, I'm programmed to go home in July. At that time in May, the end of May, Colonel Tief, Lieutenant Colonel McMillian started having programming problems again with their military assistance program. So, they tell me, "We're pulling your ticket. You come back early, and you work on programs again." So, to maintain my identity as an infantry officer, which I am, I did have a good flight, so I don't physically fight it or try to delay or alter the plan. So, I say, "Okay, you meet me back in Saigon and you're the colonel, you're the lieutenant colonel, that's what I do. So, I have a counterpart now, come up from Saigon named Captain Frank Izenhour, I-Z-E-N-H-O-U-R. Frank was a—his father was a major general in the Army, but he was a good Marine officer who later died a young death as a captain, non-battlefield. But Frank comes up and relieves me as an

advisor and by May 15th, I'm on a plane back to Saigon to spend my last six, seven weeks in the Saigon area because it's a cyclical thing, military assistance programming of equipment. So, I go back and I do that for about a month and pack my bags. By now, by the way, I'm only a 135, 140 pounds. Or six months running around I Corps, I lost probably about twenty-five pounds. So, I go back in, and I wish all my colleagues the best. In my mind, the war was far from over. Although, the South Vietnamese suffered a great tactical strategic loss in Lam Son 719. It is, by no means do I see at that time, any mass collapse of the South Vietnamese government. Any major strike of the North Vietnamese into Vietnam. I see nothing on the scale of Tet. It's just sort of cyclical war. So, by my snapshot in May of 1971 is, the war is grinding on, Lam Son was an aberration. It was not enough auspicious one for the South Vietnamese, but it is by no means, signal a strategic defeat or invasion by the north which occurs, ironically, eight months later with the Easter Offensive in 1972.

KC: You mentioned that Frank Izenhour came to replace you, I believe you said, as an advisor there to the 1st Marine Battalion. What sort of information did you pass onto him? How did you make that handoff to him?

CD: Frank is coming, I'm up on the firebase, the helicopter lands, Frank jumps out, and we have about two to three days together. I introduce them to the person I know living on top of the firebase. The battalion commander lives on one side, the XO lives on the other. We're all within fifty to eighty yards of each other. Quietly, when I can, I get Frank off to the side and explain after the introduction of who those people are. My experience with them, some of the do's and don'ts. He's a professional officer Frank; he's on his second tour also. He knows the ropes and he was selected, and volunteered, for his duties. The grade, the caliber, and the cut of the people, of the US Marine officers that went to South Vietnamese were superb. The guys are out there doing their job in their top ten percent; fifteen percent of our Marine Corps. Frank and I—I had known Frank previously. I think the world of him. My problem is my embarrassment when I have to tell the South Vietnamese, "Oh, by the way, I'm leaving." Now, I have the shelter and the protection of the senior Marine advisors, Major Dick Hughes who stays on. No loss of continuity between the battalion commander and the senior Marines. I had the junior advisor replaced by Frank. That's a little easier to take. My sensing is that the

South Vietnamese battalion commander—they don't like it when there's instability in his unit, but as long as he's senior Marine advisor, that they know each other and the rapport is correct and cordial. As long as that bond is in place, a rotation of a junior advisor, that's all part of a day's work. And that battalion commander had been in this business at war from probably ten years and constantly involved in the battlefield. So, it's nothing new, it's just the way life is. He didn't lose any of his men. He's not being overrun, he's just losing a junior Marine advisor, but he still has the senior one. Which is the length to US firepower or whatever is available for US forces.

KC: Now, you're going to leave country in, I believe you said it was July of '71. At this point, did you think it would be possible or did you even want the opportunity to come back to Vietnam one last time?

CD: I put in a big stink. I wanted to extend, and I put in the papers to extend, but standing there protesting in May, that I wanted to extend with the South Vietnamese Marines. The senior Marine advisor and the assistant colonel's chief and Lieutenant Colonel McMillian, both of which later became general officers in the Marine Corps. Both brigadier generals. They had known that I'm still the single guy. And I haven't set foot in the United States except for ten days since 1968. You know, it was March of '68 when I went with the Chinese Marines. So, they refused and they just about read me the riot act. There was a need for me to go back to the United States because I had almost completed two and a half, almost three tours in Vietnam. It's 1971 and I'm not thirty years old. I spent most of my time in Asia with all the Chinese. I'm putting words in their mouth, but they look at me as I'm too Asiatic. I don't know my own Marine Corps. I've spent most of my time in Asia engaged in Vietnam and Taiwan. There was a need for me in my normal progression to go back to my next set of orders to Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico. There's a need that I go back in the classroom and learn the skills that I need to eventually go back into the US Marine infantry battalion and into a normal infantry battalion tour. So, they think also that maybe I'm a little tired. I spent too much time in Asia and it's a good thing. They sort of politely override and sit on me. No, they will not approve. That is, they will not give me a recommendation to headquarters Marine Corps that I'd be allowed to extend. So, I figured "Well, they're really out for my better judgment. They're out for my interest." I like both of them immensely and they've been

around the Marine Corps for a while, so I said, “Well, better roll with whatever they say.” I took their advice and thought of letting my request for extension die on them. I just heat up the clock during June in programming and work and pack my bags and leave in July so I could be sitting in a classroom in Quantico by August 1971.

KC: What was it like to be back in the States? Even before you start the Amphibious Warfare School in Quantico, what was it like to be back in the States?

CD: Well, remember I’m a single guy and my choice in women for the last few years had been, let’s put it this way, National League. So, to meet some American ladies has gotten interesting and kind of enthused to see my family. I haven’t seen my family in three and a half years. I’ve got a brother running around Vietnam as a Marine lieutenant. My mother has two sons, both of them are in Vietnam. So, I think by being home, it takes a little pressure off my mom, who was a very good Marine. And she don’t like what’s going on in the States and in San Francisco and so on. Going out to relieve that family pressure, there’s only one son in Vietnam at a time. I think that’s a joy to my mom.

KC: Sure.

CD: I particularly enjoy being on leave back in the States. Food—I’m not really affected so much by the way so much of journalism has painted. The Vietnam vet comes home and there’s no respect and he’s spit on and he’s considered an outcast by society. I endured none of that. I just come home and I get ready to go to Amphibious Warfare School. That kicks off in August and have a great time. When I get to the classroom, there’s a hundred other guys like me.

KC: That had all been over there for quite a while?

CD: They’ve all been over there two and a half, three tours. So, there we had a hundred guys sitting in the classroom. Probably all less than the age of thirty. What are they going to teach us? Are they going to shave my head and send me to Vietnam? The guys that are teaching us are good officers and so on, but for the most part, none of them had the combat experience sitting in a collective way in that class. When you look at a hundred guys with probably two hundred fifty years of combat experience looking at you. It’s very hard to teach and a smart school staff would say, “Let’s get the students involved. Let them do the teaching. They’re the guys that will be writing the manuals and just lived through it. But that does not happen. I can only remember two or three, one-

hour lectures where a student was asked to come up and present his unique insight or discuss and lecture on the field that was unique that he had lived in Vietnam. And the school fails to take advantage of all that combat experience sitting there. I found that pretty amazing.

KC: I'm sure.

CD: The Congressional Medal of Honor winners in the class, nobody ever invites them up to the stage. So, what you had was a class. Now, like I say, most of us knew that this war was going to go on for a while. We were just home to recharge our batteries, get healthy, and get ready to go in again.

KC: Right.

CD: So, the class as a whole, given that the school unwillingly rejected the experience embedded in the class to make use of that. They were a pretty salty class. They didn't take much off the instructors. There was sort of an attitude. "What are you going to do? Shave my head and send me back to Vietnam?" I'm going anyhow, but they're all professional officers who just thought this schoolhouse was a lull to recharge your battery and get ready to go back again.

KC: As someone who's spent almost three full tours in Vietnam and you're sitting in the classroom, you've talked a little bit about just what the environment was like there. What sort of things are they trying to teach you in Amphibious Warfare School?

CD: In Amphibious Warfare School, in the Marine Corps heritage, the cornerstone of the Marine Corps has always been the amphibious assault or amphibious operation. Now, on paper, an amphibious operation is not against an opposed landing. The US Army has conducted more amphibious operations than the Marine Corps. But amphibious assault was the Marine Corps' bread and butter back then, at least on paper. We hadn't had one since Korea and it was a lot of amphibious during the sixties. There was a little bit in Vietnam, not as much that could have been used. Just like there was no tactical use of US paratroopers in Vietnam. There were jumps, but they were over a safe feel. And there was never any contact with the enemy on landing. Same with the Marine Corps. There was only one or two amphibious assaults in Vietnam where Operation Star Light in late '65 where US Marines went into shore, immediately running into North Vietnamese units. For me, going back in the classroom, the Marine Corps was trying to

make sure that all those students were either, A, proficient in a very difficult form of warfare. Probably the most difficult in terms of coordination. They were training everybody in their classroom to go onto the next step which was to be the S-3, the operations officer for the infantry battalion. Of those hundred students, probably thirty of them were aviators, but the whole idea was to catch the student into the amphibious assault environment in all its manifestations. All the planning documents to write in operations order that would be successful timely and realistic. To get the dust off—I remember now from five years running around Asia, I never had to attend any classes, I never had to give any classes. Normal life of an infantry battalion has a lot of classroom time. A training schedule has to be written weekly, daily, all those kinds of processes or all kinds of calls go off. Or you do what is required and so on, but in military life there was a normal routine of an infantry unit that has to occur on a daily basis and a training schedule and qualifying new weapons and physical training. So, the whole normal life of an infantry battalion school was to Quang Tri with that again and to infiltrate the principles of amphibious warfare and how to write, collate and put together amphibious warfare operation plan. That was the essence in the syllabus and the final testing that you could give in certain conditions, formulate and put together amphibious operations order which was critiqued by the school staff and knowledge and so on. And there was little corollary courses. Nothing ever on Vietnam; minimal. But rather this was just making sure that the oncoming generation of Marine officers did not forget their heritage and the nuts and bolts about how to conduct amphibious warfare. We did that for six months. And then from there I was assigned to 1st Marine Division in Camp Pendleton which was now in the process of just coming back from Vietnam. They had retrograded it from Vietnam in the 1970s. I remember the 1st Marine Division. Yeah, when I was coming and going into I Corps in 1970, the 1st Marine Division was getting ready to go home. So now you had a Marine division that had been at war for about six years and who spent their primary interest on accountability. Their gear, their weapons, what was old, what had to be identified and were missing some equipment. So, they were in a refurbishment mode. They also, there was a tremendous drawdown by 1971. The 1st Marine Division only had three operational battalions. Normally on paper, the Marine division had nine battalions but only three of them were operational. The other six were cadre or were at very low

manning levels. I was lucky enough to get into one of those three battalions. So, my life from ‘72 to ‘74 was helping carry the operational commitments of the entire division. Normally staff with nine infantry battalions, but we only had three. So that meant that my life was either onboard ship coming ashore from amphibious operations, heading out to the desert in 29 Palms for desert cycle up to the mountains in Bridgeforth, California, for mountain training or cold-water training and then back down to sea. So, for those two years, very rarely or all over state-side, I was never there. I was always off, like any other officer, off doing a lot of time in the fields with an operational Marine battalion. That school held me in good stead for Amphibious Warfare School. Why? Because then when the aircraft would show up and would be talking with pilots that were in the support roles, I might have known that pilot because he was in a classroom with me. By those hundred people in Amphibious Warfare, that sort of became my class. Those hundred officers moved with me sequentially through the Marine Corps for the next twenty years. So that was my first opportunity to meet my peers and them take a look at me. So that continued to, again, bump into these people throughout the Marine Corps. We all moved together as a class and we worked together. We knew how each of us would work, which is a very precious resource that you know the people you’re working with. There was a rapport and a respect and a bond for Amphibious Warfare School. We either did not capitalize for a Marine Corps point of view on the lessons of Vietnam, which could have been learned from that class. It gave me, personally, the opportunity to fraternize and meet a hundred peers. Never knowing that these were the same peers that twenty years later, when everybody was a lieutenant or colonel, we would know them. And that was a bond, and it was a unifying factor. Not so much as in other services where I’d known the Koreans or even in the British services, your classmates, you have obligations to him. That if he were killed you sometimes, you’re responsible for the children of that officer which happens in the Thai Marine Corps and the Korean Marine Corps, but it’s the closest thing in my time to be part of a class. You know, like I keep saying the Korean Marines or even the Chinese. Your classmates are the most important to you because that’s how you move along. Like the Class of ‘57 would be the class when their first officer makes general the whole class celebrates. And he helps bring along other ones. So, in Thailand for example, today when you say, “Oh, General so-and-so just became

the supreme commander." Well, the first thing they did, "What class was he?" Meaning, was he in the class of '57 or '67? Because that shines the light that, that class with the supreme commander being the most famous graduating class, that class might come to power as a group. So that type, not that extreme in the US Marine Corps, but it is important that you recognize your classmates. These are the people that you work with and maybe someday grow up and help run the Marine Corps with.

KC: You've mentioned a number of times that you didn't think that they gave the lessons of Vietnam enough interest. At the AWS (Amphibious Warfare School) they kind of just glossed over it. I've heard other people say that. Tell me about that experience as a Vietnam veteran and seeing things as closely as you did from your perspective, why were the lessons of Vietnam not promoted in a positive way to help learn, in your opinion? Why did that come about?

CD: I think it did but let us use the prism of Amphibious Warfare School. Those people had a syllabus and in a short period of time, let's say twenty weeks, they had to get that syllabus into your skull. They had to produce a graduate that understood amphibious warfare. The construction of amphibious warfare documents so vital to the process and prosecution of amphibious warfare. So, when you took the time available, let's just say for discussion purposes, let us say that was six hundred hours in the classroom. Probably five hundred hours with just amphibious warfare. It was really no time to promote Vietnam. Again, the overriding purpose of that was it was a trade school. And the purpose of that trade school was to teach you basic skills. Once that part of the curriculum was eaten up, the hours available to allow free-flowing dialogue, the latest lessons in Vietnam, then we'd look at that first. Second of all, I suspect that the lessons in Vietnam were really gained among our peers at the bar. It was an extracurricular at night event. So, we'd go to the bar and start drinking and playing, "Where did you serve? Who are you? Do you know so and so?" Those lessons of Vietnam. That's where they started to cement. In the class itself, they knew. Like jungle drums, in a short order of time, you knew who was in that classroom. When and where and what skills he had and what experiences he underwent. You would seek him out and ask his opinion. So, the class taught each other. There was reliance. If I needed to know something, for example, on the Cobra. I had a guy next to me that had four Distinguished Flying Crosses from flying the

Cobra. When I wanted to know about the Cobra, what it could do, what it couldn't do, he was my natural source. Of course, I took his word over any textbook. So, to answer your question, sir, a trade school does not really—it's for them to fulfill their mission. Its question of time is not enough time to make room for the ongoing contingency or soup de joure of the Vietnam War. And secondly, the peers—learn from your peers, that was the quiet message in school. They would say, "Well, I'm looking at a class here of a hundred students and there's two hundred fifty years of experience. Share among yourselves, talk among yourselves. And basically, that's true, that's what happened.

KC: I've never heard from that angle before. That makes an awful lot of sense. All right, you were also with a 1st ID (Infantry Division) as you were coming back from Vietnam. You talked about what kind of shape they were in. What was the morale, for example, of the 1st Marine Division?

CD: Now, remember, the 1st Marine Division on paper is nine infantry battalions and an artillery regiment. The reality of it is, it's only three operational battalions. The division was trying to find itself. They had just come back from prolonged six years of warfare. There were accounting processes for supplies and the counting of individual equipment; helmets, blanket rolls, even weapons was rusty. The major general in charge of the division was a guy named Ross T. Dwyer, and his idea was he's going to put this battalion supply and equipment back in shape. He was a stickler. That guy was a five-gallon water cans, all the old gas cans—this is stuff that had been rusted out, not turned in. It was all going to be identified, qualified, turned in, repainted, recounted for, restocked, resupplied, whatever. He was going to bring up the Table of Organization and Equipment of this division. He worked hard at it and he's emotionless, but it took about eighteen months before the 1st Division was up to snuff again in terms of its equipment, its quality, and its quantitatively was up to snuff again in terms of its equipment, its quality, and it quantitatively. At the same time now, and socially there are a lot of things interestingly happening to the Marine Corps. We're just starting to go through the initial throws of this affirmative action. We got a lot of malcontents from the Vietnam War. A lot of people now are afflicted by social views, which is not very military. We had a Project 100,000. It's almost where the court says, "You've got a choice, go to jail or go to the Marine Corps." We have a lot of substandard people we have asked to lower our

quality control factors and it's starting to show. We have a lot of Marines with their hearts in the right place, but they're not too bright. They come with misdemeanors and a public record at the beginning of an underlying drug current here and there. Again, this goes back to Vietnam experience. A unit that is fully engaged with their troops occupied in a combat situation doesn't have drug problems. But rather where a human is idle, a lot of free time, nobody supervising the troops, the troops have too much time on their own, these types of troubles begin to fester. The same way in the 1st Division. The three operational battalions, they're gone all the time. They're doing things Marines should be doing. They're doing things that the recruiting posters advertise. Morale is very high in those three units. Especially if you're a new PFC or a private. Gosh, you're getting on ships, you're going to deserts, and you go to the mountains. You go to Mountain Warfare Training, even going down to the Panama Jungle School. It is the rest of the division that have cadre units which could not even muster even a hundred Marines a day. There is no strict training schedules. So those types of units that seemed to be idle or half staffed are beginning to undergo some of this social spill off that's coming over the fence of Camp Pendleton from the local society starting with drugs, attitudes, short-timers, affirmative action issues, and having recruiting standards to take a poor-quality trooper. We're starting to pay a toll so what I'm saying, if you were to go every night to the logbook of a Marine battalion where the officer of the day records the incidents and who came in drunk and who was disorderly and so on. Every night in a Marine battalion, troops coming back from liberty, the types of fights they're in, gang related, drinking, drugs, and driving issues. Those kinds of social statistics begin to escalate somewhat. It's not an easy time. Particularly, if you've had two combat tours and see what real Marines do and you start to see some of these misfits that you wonder, "How did they ever get into the system and into the Marine Corps?" So, you have to do what you've got to do to get into the battalion. Bring it back online with a table of equipment and complete an operational training dictated by the division and again, a division will never back off on its commitments. They lay on the commitments of nine infantry battalions on the three infantry battalions. Plus, the erosion of some of these social issues. Oh, how about this, you weigh unauthorized absence (UA). Marine units during this time, particularly the cadre units, they may be running up to twenty-five or thirty percent UA! I remember

Ross Dwyer talking one day. He came to talk to all the captains and lieutenants in division and he says, "I want the UA rate to be no more than twenty percent in each Marine battalion." That's a number we all live with. Twenty years later when I would visit a Marine unit, I would be invited out there to parade or something and here's young lieutenants talking about, "My gosh, our battalion UA rate was almost five percent this month?" Those young lieutenants were in shock. They didn't realize the guy they're telling this story. I mean, your only 70 UA rate—and UA was for a number of causes, some Marines had been, again, too much time in the field, too much time away from their battalion or their family. Some guys, just the lure of the world, they just were gone, and they took their prizes. There was none of this running off to Canada stuff. But my point is that the UA rate, even though the Marine was gone two or three days, we didn't really consider him gone unless he left a note saying, "I'm gone. I'm not coming back." Then it was UA right on the spot. We waited three days before we declared them UA because it had just been out with his girlfriend and spent the day drunk somewhere. A UA rate, constantly in an operational battalion in the 1st Marine Division of about twenty percent, was not unusual.

KC: What were some of the ways you tried to deal with this?

CD: Again, on an individual level, know your people. It's almost biblical, "Know your sheep and they will know you." One of the things was, the first thing, the stability of a unit. Remember, I had talked earlier about keeping a battalion stable before deployment is the key to all training. Otherwise, you're running a constant treadmill. You train a guy and he's gone. When the time is time to deploy, you go through unevenness. But if you go through a process as a stabilized unit when nobody gets in and nobody gets out, it's locked, and you all learn together step by step, social-type problems and UA behaviors tend to fade away and go away. So, one of the keys was a constant plea to the division that at least, in the operational units, that if we had to go to war, those units, we would have stabilization. That is the three operation battalions. I remember one time in 1972, because of that stabilization, I was in the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, the commander then Major John I. Hopkins, and he turned out to be a major general. We would do some images. For example, one time we were called upon—they told me to form up the whole battalion and get them ready to deploy, I can't tell you where, but we're going to be out

of here in ninety minutes. So, when the troops found out, my gosh, they're passing out ammunition. It was like, you know "Pass the ammunition." And everyone was humming. That battalion was ready to go and deploy by helicopter somewhere, we weren't sure where, and watching the TV within ninety minutes that battalion would move from Camp Pendleton down to the docks in San Diego because there was a potential mutiny onboard the *Kitty Hawk*. My battalion, the battalion was tapped to put down that mutiny if need be. Thankfully while we were in the air enroute by helicopter to San Diego we had advanced units land and get ready to board, it would have been a terrible thing, think about that. A mutiny aboard a US ship in harbor that never came off. But, that was sort of the life in '72 for a lot of short-term contingencies in addition to the normal amphibious, the desert, and the mountain training trilogy of training venues.

KC: Well, let's talk about this issue on the *Kitty Hawk* that you mentioned. When do you find out that it is your battalion that's going to be sent and when do you find out that that's what the mission is?

CD: That mission down in San Diego?

KC: Yeah.

CD: My battalion commander, I was at the northern end of Camp San Mateo which was the home of the 7th Marine Regiment. The battalion commander happened to be down at the division. He was called into the division commander's office who gave him a warning order. "John, be prepared to move your battalion within two hours. I can't tell you when, but I'll let you know." He walked out of the division commander's office, called me up on the radio, on the telephone, and said, "Here's the guidance. I want this battalion ready to go. We're going to go by air; we're going to have two rifle companies first and then follow along with the battalion and have that battalion ready to go within ninety minutes and the aircraft are in route. Any questions?" I said, "No, sir." And that's what you do. But now, in that ninety minutes, all the processes that you've been drilled and getting ready for embark, getting the weapons. Now remember now, weapons—when I grew up in the Marine Corps you had a squad bay. In the squad bay everybody kept their M-1 right there in visible. With fifty men in their squad, they're sleeping in their skivvies and their double bunk racks. But by the seventies in the wake of the Vietnam War, all weapons were in an armory. Every time the battalion wanted to train, or a rifle

company had to go to the field, you had to queue up in front of the armory, and each Marine had to individually sign for his weapon. This normally took an hour a day taking the weapons out of the armory and an hour a day cleaning them and checking them back into the armory. So, all of a sudden, they say we're going to be gone in ninety minutes. Just think about that event. We have to draw up all the weapons out of the armory, pass out ammunition, get ready to go, get a pack on, prescribe what is to be taken and where we're going to go for a day or three days. That's a pretty busy place for ninety minutes. Getting ready to do that when you're talking about eight hundred men.

KC: How do you deal with that? Do you say there are some things we can't expect to get done; there are other things we're going to have to forget about?

CD: I can remember that day. We have a television by then in the battalion headquarters. I had one of the guys from the S-3 shop, I was an operations officer battalion and constantly going through the TV channels trying to find out. It was somebody from the G-2s—the S-2 the, the intelligence section in the Marine division. What could possibly be going on within a hundred miles of where we were? They probably knew we were going by helicopter. That was occurring, that could account for this. We never knew until when we were in the air that we were going to go to San Diego and be landed on a peer somewhere near the *Kitty Hawk* to move onboard the *Kitty Hawk*. We couldn't figure it out, so we looked at the nature of the Marine Corps. You go with what you have, your training, and hopefully you've put into your kit or mix or whatever you take, the best available at the time.

KC: So, when do you find out that you could be used against this mutiny on the *Kitty Hawk*?

CD: When did I find out?

KC: Yes.

CD: Well, I'll say, whenever the battalion commander called me up, probably five minutes after he found out, I'd bring in the battalion staff and the XO of the battalion, brief him on what the battalion commander said and what he wanted. Then I assigned different tasks and which company would be the lead company and so on. Then we get ready to go. I'm a pretty busy guy. I mean, I can't even figure out what map to take.

KC: Now, you've never been trained, I would assume, to put down a mutiny aboard an aircraft carrier.

CD: No this–I'm just giving this as an example of the type of things that were occurring in the '72/'74 timeframe when the American population was pretty anti-war activist oriented of a very strange day when a US Marine battalion was called upon to possibly put down a mutiny that was occurring on board a major US ship of war.

KC: That's some pretty heavy stuff.

CD: Yeah, we were enroute by air, and our initial aircraft had already touched down, but some chaplain had talked down a Black Power-inspired unit, that the US Navy was also undergoing some serious social challenges. I'd talked him down. So, the riot did not come off and there was no need for the United States and that would have been a very embarrassing historical moment for the United States Naval Services to put down the mutiny aboard a major war ship at port in the United States. It never came off. But just think of it in terms of the planning, ninety minutes earlier, unknown target, and unknown direction, don't even have a map, just bring your weapons and ammunition and we'll figure it out enroute. Which all goes back to planning and training and some of these things you learn. For example, we were just talking earlier about Amphibious Warfare School. The ability in a short period of time to create the correct documents that would address contingency to developing underway contingency. If you do that, you do that in Amphibious Warfare School.

KC: All right, now you're with the 1st Marine Division until what,'74 or something like that?

CD:'74.

KC: Until 1974. You were also promoted to major in '74, is that correct?

CD: That's a funny story.

KC: Well, let's hear it then.

CD: When I was in Amphibious Warfare School, I was selected for major.

KC: This is back in '71,'72?

CD: Right, at that time, occasionally in the Marine Corps promotional processes, there was a concept known as, "Below the zone." And then a concept called, "Deep Selected." Now, from time to time in the Marine Corps, a promotion board might say,

"We have to pick a hundred majors, but there were some guys that were so close to the zone of consideration. We have to pick a hundred and look at two hundred people. So that means a fifty percent selection rate. There were sometimes when a board would say or a commandant will direct that I want you to save five percent of the slots available from promotion to the next grade and I want you to take that five percent and go another two hundred and create a field of another two hundred numbers deep and find me the five best captains in that group and they will be tacked on and accelerated, sometimes up to two years with their peers ahead of them." So that's what happened to me in Amphibious Warfare School. I was selected below the zone to major. Myself and six other officers. One of which was a later commandant, Charles Krulak, Jr. There were six of us that were picked up below the zone. I was in absolute disbelief. I spent the day out drunk. I didn't even come to school that day. I just got very lucky and for some reason my career to that point, this board decided that myself and these six other players were below the zone. Now, deep selected really means that they went down maybe a hundred, two hundred numbers. In the face of criticism, there are a lot of criticisms in the Marine Corps. Theoretically, the commandant has to be saved. This officer went down for at least two hundred numbers below the zone of consideration and is better than the other 199 guys in front of them. That's a pretty hard argument to make. That somehow, someway, some guy two hundred numbers lower, is better than 199 guys in front of them because everybody has a number linear list. That's deep selected as opposed to below the zone. Below the zone they'll pick five or six within a hundred numbers of the normal promotion zone. Do you follow my logic on this?

KC: Absolutely.

CD: So, I was selected below the zone. Ha! (Both laughing) Now, to be selected is one thing, but to pin them on, I had to wait eighteen months. So I went around as a captain (S), which means selected for eighteen months. So, although I was very thrilled and honored that that happened to me below the zone, I didn't actually become a major until maybe in 1974. So, that was funny, I had to walk around. You don't get paid, nor do you get back paid. You only get paid when you pin them on. So, although it's a great honor and that's what the compilation of experience has happened, I did not actually put on the rank and major until eighteen months later. And when I pinned them on and put up

my right hand, a whole promotion cycle had come and gone after me, before I got to pin them on. That's the life of the Marine Corps. Sometimes promotion is accelerated as a group and sometimes it slowed down. So, there I was. Let's see, I was promoted to captain and was commissioned in June of '63, reported to Basic School in September of '63. By January of '66 I was a captain. So, I went to captain in about twenty-four months. Then I stayed a captain from '66 to'74. They say that's the best rank in the Marine Corps. So, I was a captain in grade for almost eight years. Although, I had made it to captain in less than two years.

KC: Did you think you would ever get out of being a captain? Did you think you'd ever be promoted?

CD: No, especially—well, that was what the pleasant surprise was when I was selected for major. I just thought, "Oh, this is great. I'm actually going to pin them on and move on." No, I had waited. So, thank you for asking, but that would give you some idea of the dynamism created by conflict because the Marine Corps is like a pipeline. If a certain class takes a lot of casualties or deaths from natural or unnatural causes, that's a gap in the pipeline. That can only be partially filled by speeding up people by selecting below the zone. Sometimes a class would go through that. By the way, they watched these statistics quite close at the Marines because the amount of people that each class should be leveled or had a certain number of offices in it by year group. Once that year group and they were all commissioned in the year of '63, there are certain rates of attrition; people got out, people retired, death. When you put combat in there, when you get two or three tours, sometimes the initial number for that class was a hundred. Well, normally in the course of the first ten years of attrition, people have change of hearts and different careers. The class of a hundred may be down to eighty-five. When you take out the effects of warfare and death and so on, after fifteen years, that class may only have sixty-five people in it. Now, each of these classes are uneven, but the amount of numbers that each class dictates how big the zone should be behind in terms of selection to the next rank. So, we call that the pipeline. So, where you are on the pipeline when you start and walk through the fortunes of what made that pipeline larger. Creates the size of each zone to as best as the Marine Corps can keep the pipeline and numbers in the pipeline even.

KC: Well, why don’t we stop there for today, Colonel?

CD: Okay.

Interview with Carmine DelGrosso
Session [6] of [6]
Date: 11/03/2010

Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Carmine DelGrosso. Today is November 3, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University and the colonel is joining me from his home, via telephone, in San Clemente, California. All right Colonel, we just had you promoted from the rank of major. This is in the summer of 1974. You mentioned that you'd go to the US Army's Foreign Area Specialist Program. So why don't you pick up the story there and tell me about this program. How were you chosen for it?

CD: I left the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines late in the spring of '74 and a short time at the regimental headquarters because I was selected to participate as the Marine Corps were up to the US Army Foreign Area Officer program called FAO. That program, for an Army officer who chose that path of intelligence and linguistics would be seven years. It would be a year of basic language allowed possibly to go get a master's degree in area studies in that region. Then they would go in-country and study the language for another year. Then they might have had, like in the Asian context, they would have been given a year ticket, sort of as General Stilwell in World War II to visit all their peripheral countries to their target country. So, if the target country would, say China, they would visit from Japan all the way from Burma, looking at China from the perspective of its regional neighbors. Then after the tour in-country, then we'd go back to the desk officer at the Pentagon in the Washington area on that particular country. An officer in the US Army was a foreign area officer. They really knew their stuff in depth and it was a seven-year commitment. However, the Marine Corps looked at it and said, "Nah, that's too long." We're going to make all our other specialists a year. A year of language and then we might send them for a year of advance language. So having had language and basic Chinese Mandarin in 1967, I was selected to go back to Taiwan for an additional year of studies, intense studies. I studied at the United States Department of State, School of Chinese Languages and Asian Studies located in Taichung, Taiwan, in the Republic of China. Now, my classmates, there were only seventeen students in the school. The majority of them, maybe half of the promising young Foreign Service officers. Maybe it

was supposed to be ambassadors. A number of people from Langley, Virginia, and two Army officers and myself. There were a few that were going through the National Security Agency. So, we went to a school in Taiwan and studied six to seven hours a day and were given State Department quarters in the evening. It was really total immersion. Again, it went from very capable teachers. Moving along from basic Mandarin, for me, it's probably the hardest school I ever went to because when you take the finals, you had never seen the material before. You just hoped that all the hard work, particularly reading, economic Chinese, military Chinese, journalistic Chinese. That when you were given this course of material and all the reading you had done, gave you enough experience to be able to read the new material in the final. Then for the verbal part of the exam, you would sit behind a desk, and it would be five people asking you questions, like a panel. It was all in Chinese and you would answer them in Chinese, or they would ask in English, and you would respond in Chinese. This was all taped. At the end of that hour session, the panel would just give you diving scores. They would assess a number level where, on a scale of five, where they thought your Chinese was. A five being somebody who had lived and studied and worked in the country for at least twenty years. So, I found it a pretty rigorous academic challenge, very worthwhile, and probably the toughest scholastic thing I had undertaken at that time.

KC: What were your scores?

CD: Sorry?

KC: What were your scores from this exam, just out of curiosity?

CD: Oh, I got a 3/5 in the reading and writing and a 3/5 in the spoken. I really worked at it. I didn't have any family commitments. It was just me and I lived with a Chinese maid, so to speak, a maid that just came and went to my house and bought me some groceries. So, all I concentrated on was the Chinese language for fifty weeks. So, that was 1974, but typically Marine Corps. I had gotten lucky in 1968 where I actually went to basic Mandarin and then was able to go to Taiwan for two and a half, three-year tour. But not this time, there was no follow-on billet as yet, so I was assigned by to Quantico, Virginia, and I worked in what was then called the development center. Now, Quantico basically had an education side where all the schools were located at basic school and the Amphibious Warfare School. Then the development side which was

responsible for the development and identification for all Marine Corps equipment to agree to tactics and procurement. The concept behind that was most interesting. We put liaison officers at all the major Army development centers around the country, like tanks. We got an officer out there down at Fort Hood, I believe. So, we had this net of research and development people that could sort of stand behind the Army or the Air Force and look over their shoulder. As the project grew and unfolded and was ready to be launched, through our network through Quantico, we could jump up and say, "Yeah, we'll buy that, too." So, the Marine Corps had a great windfall there. We didn't have to spend hard dollars on research and development, but rather by very professional monitoring of the projects and the other services. In the 11th hour, we could make known (unintelligible) and also buy in on procurement. Where it was everything from vehicles to weapons. Now, this was all located at Quantico, Virginia, under the development center and I worked for a series of general officers starting with the Brigadier PX Kelly, who grew up to be the commandant. I finished that tour for three years under Brigadier General Alfred M. Gray who eventually was the commandant. On three occasions, I had worked close to General Gray. The first one was there in the development center. But my role—and also the development center conducted a lot of studies. I spent the good part of 1977 as the project officer and looking at urban warfare. When you look at the world, probably eighty percent of the world lives within one hundred miles of the sea and has tremendous implications for the Marine Corps. That the distribution and population of the globe was all, for the most part, accessible from the sea. Also, keep in mind the last time the United States had participated in heavy war conflict, when I started researching it historically, there wasn't much there. It was the battle of Hue back in 1968 in Tet—the Battle of Hue and was a somewhat limited urban warfare. There was Inchon for the Marines back in 1950. There was the Dominican Republic in '65, but for years, the United States forces have always skirted urban combat. It's just too many factors, too many uncontrollable. If one has the choice to fight in the city. Also, the types of casualties are different. Their structure is different, and different weapons need to be employed in urban context. The whole question of, "How do we use aviation in an urban context?" was unknown. So, my role for a year was to sort of go check with the Army. How about training, too, in an urban warfare. How do you train troops? Wouldn't it be nice if you could rent a couple

blocks of LA? It's expensive and there was no adequate training facilities. We had little combat villages left over from Vietnam in the Marine Corps, but the idea was, in an organized way. I talked to most of the Army and most of our allies to include the British who were very, very advanced in urban warfare, due to their Northern Ireland experiences. In fact, at that time, by 1977, the entire British Army had been rotated through Northern Ireland seven times. So the whole purpose for this study for about a year from traveling was to go talk to the allies and gather up all the information you can to catalog, qualify, and possibly make an anthology of all the pertinent urban warfare documents going all the way back to the Russians in World War II, the Germans, and see if you could deduce from that body a collection of documents and some hard facts which could be used as the basis and identify within the Marine Corps inventory. Were we deficient and what needed to get done? Particularly, at night urban warfare, what are the implications? Also, in urban warfare, it appeared at that time that the type of injuries you would sustain would be different from combat in an open rolling terrain and jungle or whatever. There would be a lot more shrapnel. There would be wounds from electrical outings. Different cuts from metal. Myself, we looked at—the communication challenges with dead space. The present suit of communications equipment that we had at the time did not work in certain urban contexts because of dead space. So how to shoot, move, communicate and succeed in an urban context. I was given a grant and some travel money to go sort that out. I found it a very interesting endeavor.

KC: Where did you go and how did you go about sorting it out?

CD: Well, I worked through the attaché net. I contacted the assistant naval attaché for the United States in London, who allowed working with—of course, the British gave me access to two of their training facilities. One was called Lydd, L-Y-D-D, and the other is Hyde, H-Y-D-E. These training facilities are very advanced electronically and challenging all the way down to the fire team level which the British call a "Brick." That is a four-man team, which is the basic fighting unit for the Marine Corps was a four-man combat fire team. They would break down a unit whether it was motor transport or supply battalion or basic infantry battalion. Before they went to Northern Ireland they would go to those two facilities for six to eight weeks and some of the obstacle courses and some of the courses were laid out and designed specifically for urban warfare

training and allowed a four-man fire team leader to test his squad under some very, very challenging circumstances in an urban context. So, by the time that battalion was organized—again, starting with the four-man team and building up the battalion-sized exercises, they were ready to go relieve their counterparts in Northern Ireland and not lose it in a heartbeat. What I'm saying is, six to eight months in the Belfast area would be relieved by an incoming battalion and those two training facilities were able—again, gave the battalion commander the opportunity to have those people all in one place and focused. Starting with elementary training and working up to elementary training of the fire teams and working up to sophisticated combined action teams and staff drills at the battalion level. Probably the best trained before they set off to Northern Ireland. So, to be able to go and be given a ticket, you might say, to go see that in action and document it in a recorder and then transition and take that information back to my own Marine Corps and try to put that together. Also, with General Gray at the end of that study, he tacked on into me and said, "I want you to write an operational handbook on urban warfare." He said, "I want you to take all the tips and condense them into a rugged little book; about sixty to eighty pages that can fit in a back pocket of a squad leader so that when he ran into challenging situations in an urban context wherever we were going to be deployed, it might provide him a base of some ideas or some tips." For example, how thick is the average brick wall around the world? We did extensive studies using some people from Stanford University to go around and look at the thickness of walls. This is very important because in an urban context, what you see may not be what is there. For example, you might see what looks like a solid building. It's not, you can shoot through it just like the old Holiday Inns. If you fired a 3.5 rocket into that hotel, it might go all the way through the glass and go out the other side. So, the ability to study a city like the old financial district had sediment and hard stone. Where the thickness of those buildings might be six to eight feet which render most of the small arms in an infantry battalion moot. So, to be able to study a town that you might be involved in and analyzing from the composition of the buildings on what had greater density, that would allow the weapons to be used effectively or ineffectively with positive knowledge. So, these kinds of tips; the visible wall and how many subways are there around? How do you use them? Pipelines, electrical fittings under the ground. You have an awareness, you might say,

like a fourth dimension to the battlefield in urban warfare. The concept of masking. There were certain buildings that were constantly massed. How to overcome dead space. What is the height of the average building around the world in an urban context? Well, if you can get your antenna that height, the probabilities to successfully communicate go up dramatically. So be able to pull together some very obtuse facts and synthesize them and then draw some observations. This was particularly challenging because I would argue, and some would disagree that the last time the United States Marine Corps might have been a prolonged urban context fight aside from Hue City in 1968 was probably forty years earlier in Inchon. We only passed in two days through Inchon on the way to Seoul. And Seoul was kind of urban context fighting during the Korean War. So, it was kind of a new field. It was an exciting project and eventually I got to work almost directly for General Gray and getting some of this stuff done on paper. I found it of use, oh, I think it was probably a hundred-page handbook on an art form of warfare that hadn't been practiced in fifty years.

KC: How was that handbook received?

CD: Sorry?

KC: How was the handbook received?

CD: Oh, very well received. General Gray wanted to put it out as an operational handbook under the ages of development center. Across the street, the other half of Quantico, the Education Center wanted to publish it as sort of a manual. So, I didn't care, just as long as it got into the hands of the troops. Particularly the corporals levels who needed this information and could throw it in his pack. But you know you have to stop and say, at that time they had a lot of names in the study of urban warfare. The Army called it Fighting In a Built-Up Area, FIBUA, F-I-B-U-A. Some people called it MOBA, Military Operations in a Built-up Area. But whatever, first you have to define it. What is a city? What is a village? Does it have a particular characteristics? Was it built on population? Area size? Density and height of the buildings? So, it kind of divided the world into three kinds, the village; if you can imagine a village. A little small town and then the big cities. Sort of like the size of LA or New York. It became very rapidly clear that to fight in some places as big as Los Angeles or somewhere on the continent of Europe against the Soviets in Germany, was really tough for infantry units in terms of

casualties, commitment. Entire regiments could be gobbled up within a couple of blocks. There was shock, shock warfare. Keep it in mind, the strongest card in the US Marine Corps inventory has always been aviation because we're a combined arms team and you could bring aviation to bear. But how, when you were in a major urban context, did you bring aviation to bear? Particularly in cities with skyscrapers. How do you control it? How did you mark the forward lines? How did you deliver ordnance? So, it was becoming clear, unless we figured out how to use aviation in a major urban context, that combined arms team might be denied to the US Marine forces committed in an urban context. Now, looking back on this last Iraqi go around to me the only thing where I think the Marines got a good taste, and hopefully some of these documents from the eighties and nineties might have gotten into their hands was the Battle of Fallujah in Iraq. I mean, that was certainly an urban context. The buildings weren't that high, they were two or three stories, but to put Marines clearing building after building in a Fallujah context, I think there is probably a good example for anybody who has issued the study of urban warfare early on and practiced some of the techniques had a better chance of success. Give you an example, we found out during a study that we had lost the ability to move through walls. Now, a Marine with a full pack on his back, the golden rule with urban warfare was, "He who goes in the streets gets killed." How do you stay off the streets and still maneuver? How do you go cross compartment? That is, through walls of buildings? Like residential hedge rows or downtowns that are stores. So, the idea of having what was called in World War II, a mouse trap. Where you could put it up against the wall like a hand grenade on a stationary strip and then pull it and then create a wall probably six feet high and three feet wide so that a fully armed Marine could move cross compartment through walls through use of grenade type device. These were the kinds of equipment that we were looking at that fell out from the studies. Because we found some gaps in these studies in the equipment inventory. So being part of the development center and being able to recommend to General Gray and General Kelley, these are the types of equipment, specialized equipment that the Marine Corps may need if committed to a conflict in a major urban area. So, to identify not potentially where we were going to fight, but rather in a sort of generic urban context what would were the forms of equipment that was unique that were special to urban warfare context and what were they

and how could we get our hands on them? No less, what would that cost? And was the cost exorbitant? For example, how to use tanks. Tanks, usually in the Marine Corps, are led by infantry. Tanks were never in the front when moving cross country. The tanks are always a bit back and the infantry, they used the tanks. Tanks, by the way, have armor on three sides, but what about the top of the tanks? The Russian tops of their tanks were not very heavily armored. And so that's where they were the most vulnerable. Particularly in an urban context. So how to employ artillery, not on the tanks, in an urban context? That's some unique and constraining aspects. So anyway, it was very refreshing. We pulled this together for years to be able to study a unique, not form of warfare, but a warfare environment that when you looked at the world, it was clear that in the Marine Corps, in the days ahead and to this day, has to be concerned about being committed into an urban context whether it's a small town all the way to major metropolitan issues. Which also gave rise to the question, "How many big cities are there in the world?" And we picked a number with over three hundred thousand people. It's an interesting number. No less, how many of them have subways and how do you make use of fighting underground to use those subways? All these fascinating, some real, some imagined questions came into being in the conduct of that study.

KC: Now, this sounds like it was incredibly fascinating and rewarding for you, but it was completely separate from what you've been studying there and you're obviously an expert on the Chinese language.

CD: Yeah, that's typical Marine Corps.

KC: Was it disappointing?

CD: To a degree, but the beauty of it is, language is, unless you work at them, you can lose them. But with that year on Taiwan six hours a day and the level of scholastic achievement required, I sort of had a free ride of indelible for at least a decade. I worked at it, too. Also, from 1976 to 1980, to stay out of trouble on liberty and Washington, D.C, I went to graduate school at night. So, I used my G.I Bill. So, I was a major by day chasing urban warfare and at night I was a student at George Washington University.

KC: What did you study there at George Washington?

CD: Asian history. The language plus my now love of Asia having spent what I thought in my short lifetime, a large force of Asia, I had a lot of historical questions on

how things got to be. Also, I was fascinated with Chinese communism. Now, as you know, academically in the Washington, D.C., area, it was certain that universities were known for certain things. So, there's a consortium approach. Where if you wanted to study Japan that was common knowledge at that time that you based the core of your studies at Georgetown. If you wanted to study international strategy, you would go to Johns Hopkins. If you wanted to study China, the best and most recognized institution in the greater D.C. area was the George Washington University. I went to school there two or three nights a week and I commuted, oh, maybe a hundred miles round trip three nights a week. So, I would get off work, and I had classes from seven o'clock on through eleven three nights a week. I found the George Washington University very accommodating and professional. There were two other universities I applied to in the Washington—unnamed where it was very regimented, not understanding, and basically anti-military. So even though they were well known, I didn't want anything to do with them. Whereas George Washington knew me as someone who spent a lot of time in Asia. I could be helpful for the other students. I was probably a little older than a graduate student. So, I was able to study international relations with an emphasis on Asia, particularly on China. I also, having gotten a masters in international relations, I went on toward a doctorate degree in modern Asian history. I reached a point by 1979, I was ABD (all but dissertation). But then in '79, the Marine Corps sent me back into school. They sent me to Command and Staff College during the day, and I was able to finish up graduate school at night. I went to the Command and Staff College and graduated in 1980 and also, George Washington University was really good to me and they said, "Look, the clock is ticking. We'll give you five years and up to seven years to finish your dissertation and send it in by mail and we'll work it out through correspondence and so on." So, then I received orders in 1980 to take my brand-new family, I got married that year, too, with stepchildren and went over to Hong Kong as the assistant naval attaché.

KC: So, were you ever able to finish the dissertation at George Washington?

CD: No, regrettably. What happened, I was assigned accompanied to Hong Kong for a year and a half. But the billet that the Marine Corps had put me in there as the assistant naval attaché, it had nothing to do with China. Which was a sole disappointment for me. I protested vehemently to Headquarters Marine Corps that what happened at the

billet that I was assigned was really a collection of hand-me-downs and non-essential things. It was no place for a Marine officer. It could have been handled by a Navy officer. I mean, there were officers there, but the nature of the billet was not commensurate with the training that I had received as a foreign area specialist with the Army and my graduate studies. Now, remember the attaché worked with the Defense Intelligence Agency, the DIA. So, I also knew that this time we had just opened the embassy in Beijing. So, working with the DIA and some of the excellent officers that were stationed at Beijing, were able to transfer me. I had to send my family back home and off I went on another unaccompanied tour. I had been married only six months. For an eighteen-month tour in China, unaccompanied. But my wife could come visit. She went home from Hong Kong back to California, but I went directly from Hong Kong with my suitcase up to Beijing to be an assistant naval attaché. The first Marine officer assigned to Beijing in probably, let's see, oh, probably in forty years. The last Marine attaché was in 1949.

KC: That's quite an honor. You must have felt pretty good about that.

DC: Well, yeah, I think it was the function of I had the credentials as an Army graduate as a foreign area specialist. I knew the defense attaché in China was an Air Force brigadier. A fellow named General Bill Webb, I knew the Army attachés through the Army network. I had the credentials, and I knew many of the people, so it was an easy fit for me. Plus, I didn't have the encumbrances of the family. So, I was one of the original ones that helped get the attaché office up and running in China in 1981.

KC: I'm trying to look through some of the information that you sent me. You have been retired since July of 1989.

DC: Could you say that again? I missed that.

KC: I was looking at your paperwork that you provided to me here and I was trying to find your retirement. You retired in July of 1989. You left the Marine Corps in July 1989. You retired as a full bird colonel at that point.

DC: Yes.

KC: All right, now, as you look back on this Marine Corps experience, I mean this has been your life since, what, 1964 or 1965 when you entered the Marine Corps. Through all these tours in Vietnam and all the schooling and all the things you were able to do in Taiwan, in the United States and the handbook of urban warfare. As you look

back on it, what was your proudest moment? What was the thing that you looked back on and say, "This was the best thing I did in the Corps."

CD: Thank you, I had to hesitate because thanks solely to the Marine Corps, I got to participate in and contribute to many, many things. I think, perhaps, that this is ironic. Outside of the warfare context, the greatest thing I was able to do happened later. It happened in 1986 and '87.

KC: Tell me about that.

CD: I was selected to be the commanding officer of the Marine Corps Security Guard Battalion based in Quantico, Virginia. This unit is responsible for the security, at that time, 143 embassies and consulates worldwide.

KC: Where were you based out of?

CD: In Quantico, Virginia.

KC: Okay, based out of Quantico.

CD: Right, I had just been a graduate of the National War College in 1984, was sent to the 2nd Marine Division as the G-2. Again, working for General Gray. General Gray, thereafter, by '86, '87 was selected to commandant. However, coming from the 2nd Marine Division to resume command of the Marine Security Battalion. I took the flag from a fellow who later went on named Boomer, Walter Boomer. Boomer had just been selected for brigadier. He later on went on to be the assistant commandant and was the hero of the First Gulf War. I had that battalion no more than three months when a hand grenade went off. It was called the Lonetree Affair with the Moscow embassy scandal. Now, there was a Marine of American Indian descent whom I never met named Clayton Lonetree who was accused of espionage and cohesion with a Russian girlfriend. It was all over the American newspapers. There was a time in my life when that occurred that every night on the daily news, I was in first place, and the Pope was in second place. That was not a place to be, out in front of the Pope. This was like a massive explosion inside the Marine Corps. And who was responsible? The Marine Corps was on the face of *Time* magazine. I remember a Marine with a black eye. So, it was a very cataclysmic event for the Marine Corps. I thought back because what it involved was getting together with the Department of State. You see, this embassy thing, we had sixteen hundred Marines with all these embassies and consulates. These are young Marines who are not married, pretty

smart kids all with a high GCT (General Classification Test). The State Department had the right security officer at the embassy, and we sent the right staff NCOs to look after these Marine detachments anywhere from five to thirty-five Marines. Some of the bigger embassies like London, Paris, Rome had thirty, thirty-five Marines there. But the smaller posts—and you need at least six Marines to run a post one. That is, the initial entry security at a consulate. So, we had these detachments all over the world divided into five companies. There was one in Panama that looked over all of South America. One in Nairobi that looked over most of Africa. One in Europe that looked over all of Europe. One in Manila that looked over most of Asia. So, working through five officers, usually majors. I wanted lieutenant colonels in those billets. Our role was to equip, train, and provide caliber Marines of any MOS for a security role in a thirty-six-month tour of duty. You would go eighteen months in a relatively hard place, difficult and challenging assignment in some interesting parts of the world to a part of the world in the second tour which may have been a little better. Inversely, if you had a softer tour, the first eighteen months it was going to a place which was a lot tougher than the second. So, sitting on top of this empire and leading it through five lieutenant colonels and a very heavy staff NCO because the officers were all detachments worldwide. You had to deal with the Department of State on a daily basis. To answer your question, I felt the most qualified thanks to the Marine Corps training in other dimensions, particularly Chinese language and attaché duty to understand the Department of State, Its mindset, its weaknesses, how it treated people, and how to deal with them. Frankly for me, dealing with State is dealing with Jell-O. How do you get your arms around Jell-O and get Jell-O to do the right thing and move in the right direction without damaging it completely and wrecking any kind of a rapport which is absolutely necessary? I was given those skills on earlier tours in Hong Kong, Beijing, and on Taichung, Taiwan. Incidentally, many people in State now that I had kept up with, a lot of my contemporaries from Taichung were moving up through the ranks as deputy chief of mission and moving toward ambassadorships. In fact, the guy I worked for in Beijing was Chas Freeman. A Foreign Service officer who I felt the best Chinese linguist the United States ever had. A brilliant man who, again, politically he was—you know, the State Department is Republican or Democrat, but Chas was the best we had in Asia and at a very young age, he was the number two-man, deputy chief of

mission in Beijing. The next time we saw Chas was in 1991, was during the first Gulf War where he's the ambassador to Saudi Arabia and did a good job. In fact, he's the one that wanted us to bring Schwarzkopf in and tell him how we're doing business in the region. I mean, everybody gives a lot of credit to General Schwarzkopf, but he had to report to somebody, and Chas Freeman was the ambassador to Saudi Arabia who fully understood the limits and the blessings of power. He was able to be most helpful to our cause and winning the first Gulf War which, to me, was the most lopsided military victory since the Peloponnesian Wars. Anyhow, getting back to MSG (Marine Security Guard) and all the postings I had looking back where my skills and experience and the challenge absolutely met was the ability to during a very tough time for the Marine Corps. This crisis in Moscow shook the Marine Corps to its roots in terms of what is to be done, who is to blame, how do we fix this? Did the Marine Corps pull out of this embassy business completely? These were all under review. I reached the point where if I wasn't up in front of some general five times a day, I was not having a good day. The good news was that the secretary of state at that time was George Shultz and George Shultz had been a Marine officer in World War II. So, he had a compassion and a heritage as a proud Marine quietly at one side. So, George Shultz tried to keep it all in proportions and prevent hysteria through the State Department who was all finger points and, "The Marine Corps, it's their fault." And on and on. There were seventeen different investigations at different levels by different agencies. There was one, for example—by the way, at the time this starts, the commandant is General PX Kelley, who had just—he's about to close out his tenure as commandant. I walk in and say, "We got a problem." Of course, then after General Kelley was General Gray. So, I had the luxury of knowing the commandant on a personal basis and his strong points and his brilliance. So, having General Gray and his assistant commandant of the Marine Corps General Tom Morgan, a brilliant man. I used to go to General Morgan. I said, "Look, my phone rings. I get eighty odd generals around the Marine Corps for all our logistics calling me everyday about this MSG thing. How about keeping all your generals? They all work through you, and every day I talk to you, General Morgan, and that way we can work our way through this thing." And he agreed with that. So General Morgan and General Gray, I was blessed to have those two understanding men on our side of the fence. No less in the background,

the Secretary of State himself showed it. So that over the course of all of 1987, we were able to work through this very sticky and thorny issues. I remember the FBI was in on this and NCIS on NSA there were seventeen different investigations on what was called the Moscow Incident. It resulted in Ronald Regan, because when I finally got to Moscow, I hadn't been to Moscow yet. The entire brand-new US embassy was built with Russian labor, and I screamed bloody murder. I said, "This can't be. This building is full of bugs and spooks." Why would we use Russian labor on that building? Especially on some of the secure, compartmented areas? It resulted in that American Embassy. It's probably still there, but there's a pink elephant just sitting there. George Shultz agreed. We had to abandon a building that was just completed as the new American embassy in Moscow. So, this gave rise to a whole new dimension of the construction of US embassies on foreign territories and some with security precautions that had to be taken. General awareness, a specific use of certain contractors and security forces. So, 1987 for me was the last thing I expected to pull this together. To be able to be at that spot and command of the unit. That was ground zero during a very tough page in Marine Corps history and to be able to personally navigate that unit through those rough and pretty perilous waters and get the Marine Corps somewhat unscathed through that process and to find the culprits and put this behind us and keep up the morale of that unit. I thought it was the juncture of all my training against, probably, ironically, a challenge that I could have expected or could have foreseen that was in a non-military context that was, I thought, helpful to the Marine Corps.

KC: In 1989, the Berlin Wall goes down. The Cold War, for all intents and purposes, is over. What were your recollections of this? You'd just retired from the Marine Corps, and you've done all this overseas duty. The Cold War was the backdrop of your entire professional career. What was your opinion and what did you think about this when it occurred?

CD: I would offer two things. I decided by 1989 to retire because I had made my contribution and I had a wonderful career with a lot of lucky good breaks and a lot of talented people. I could see no war on the horizon. In '89 I could not see the Gulf War in '91. So, I thought—I mean, if I knew, in recollection today, it was my remembrance that if there was a war on the horizon, I probably would have stayed for one more tour, but it

wasn't there. It was time to get on with life. I had a family, and it was time to look after them. So, I decided to retire. That's part one. Part two, how do I best explain this? Part two is when I did get to Moscow back in '86,'87 and, rather '87,'88. The first time I was in Leningrad, I realized that the main highway between Leningrad and Moscow was a two-lane highway. Can you believe that? I said, "Two lanes?" And then I realized and I did some studies of the Soviet Union, and I had known some Chinese communism. If you want to understand Chinese communism you've got to understand what's going on in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. That the Soviet Union was not ten feet tall. That the Soviet Union only had one eighth, for example, of the railroad track that we had. I realized that the Soviet Union was a giant façade. When I saw the quality of life in Leningrad and Moscow and how their idea of controlling ice in the winter was to put out a battalion of old ladies in their babushka kerchief with ice chips chipping the streets. That was their idea of control of ice in an urban context. I realized that it's just a matter of time. I knew that the Soviet Union by late '87, I knew that the Soviet Union had its problems and that it was a false façade that would crumble within. I had had the luxury, thanks to the Marine Security Guard Battalion, to have traveled, also, to one of these then Soviet countries from Hungary, East Germany, Finland, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Having been to all those countries, I could see and understand the hatred of those indigenous people for the Soviet system, what it meant to be occupied. And to be able to travel through that environment, I realized earlier by'87, that the Soviet Union was just a matter of time. I thought it would crumble because of internal reasons. I didn't realize that maybe later on due to the Reagan policies and our ability to outspend them, contributed to accelerated to the demise of the Soviet Union. I thought the passing of the Soviet Union would have been more bloody, sort of ala Hungary or Czechoslovakia in'56, but that it imploded from within and had some pretty enlightened people, like Gorbachev, who guided it through a tough transition without these necessary and revolutionary explosions that would accompany the collapse of the Soviet system. It went a lot more peaceful than I thought. But by '89, when I looked at the Berlin Wall, I realized this was the sign, this was the start of the dominoes, but I don't think the dominoes were going to go as fast as they did. So those were the kind of things running through my mind when I saw the demolition of the Berlin Wall. Having been to Berlin,

for US Marines to get to Berlin, not many have that experience, but I've been there a number of times based on urban warfare studies and also the Marine Security Guard Battalion because I had an office and a company located in Frankfurt, so I'd come through Berlin a lot.

KC: Let me take you back to Vietnam or a Vietnam topic, here, as we begin to wrap up the interview here, Colonel. All the time that you spent in Vietnam, what did you find to be the most rewarding aspect of your service there?

CD: The most rewarding aspect of service?

KC: In Vietnam.

CD: Well, to me the Vietnam experience came in three dimensions. One was in the reconnaissance business, two was in the junk business, and three was in the advisory business. I saw all of them equally rewarding, unique, but perhaps the reconnaissance business and the advisory business, because of my peers, that the people I met in '65 and early '66 and the people, particularly the advisory people in '70, would go onto be the senior people in the Marine Corps. To have knowledge of them and their habits, the way you do in business in the battlefield context. And then see them contributing a decade later at higher levels of lieutenant colonel and general officer in the Marine Corps. It was very rewarding. I sort of moved around as sort of a graduate in my class. My class with the Vietnamese Marines was '70 to '71. So, to see many of those officers go onto great success and having known them at a greater age and seeing them continuing to contribute, I found personally very rewarding.

KC: Yeah, it was a very impressive group of Marine officers who served as advisors to the South Vietnamese in terms of decorations, honors, awards, as well as those who moved onto the upper echelons or just general officers. An astounding number of famous Marines who did that.

CD: Remember I had said to you that once in my Chinese studies, found a picture of the Marine barracks in Beijing about 1936. In that picture of about thirty officers in three rows, you know, one sitting and one kneeling and one standing. Those thirty or so officers, I can pick out eighteen or so general officers who later went onto become generals. So, in a way remember that picture and how comradery and friendships tend to move together in the mainstream later. Not that they help each other, but they move along

at that pace. Extricating from that picture of eighteen of thirty general officers in the Marine Corps, the first thing, "Oh, there must have been a clique that these officers supported each other and they all moved together successfully through general officer ship." No, it was something else, but I felt that the Vietnamese Marine advisory unit, maybe because of the level and the caliber of people that participated that I met, that they, as a small group all did very well at the Marine Corps. Was that a clique? No, but it was a shared common experience that each took away from that experience. Something special that later got to contribute to the US Marine Corps. So for many of the people, during my snapshot time there—and there were advisors before me and there were some after that they all kept together and did very well for the Marine Corps as a group. I found that very, very unique.

KC: Okay, let me ask you about the most challenging thing about your service in Vietnam. As you look back on it forty-some odd years later, what did you find to be the most challenging aspect of your Vietnam service?

CD: The most challenging aspects, I found on the Vietnam War was trying to educate my peers on the greater Asian canvas on what is going on. Again, many of them thought that the Vietnamese were just black pajamas or water buffalo out there on a rice paddy somewhere. Probably greater than ninety percent of the Marine Corps served in only I Corps and that was their experience with the Vietnamese people. It was in a non-urban context, very rural, and that these people in black pajamas for the most part were either VC or the enemy. Of course, the NVA somewhat had uniforms. But I had the benefit and the privilege of serving in other parts of Asia having had the language, Chinese language which just underpins the entire Vietnamese society in terms of the history, their legal structure, and their language. So I had a better grasp or appreciation of Vietnam and also the politics of Asia and how it spilled into Vietnam. Again, historically and the relationship of trying to tune North Vietnam at the time and trying to intonate that and explain that to my colleagues who all good officers who didn't have the time, the intonation, or the advantages that I had for trying to share my knowledge without being tutorial or snooty. There was a lot more going on here that met the eye politically and as far as what the outcome would eventually be. I found that to be an intellectual challenge.

KC: What do you think you learned most about yourself as a result of your Vietnam experiences?

CD: The question is, what did I learn about myself because of the Vietnam experience?

KC: Yes, sir.

CD: I learned leadership firsthand. I had some great instructors. You know, as a young Marine officer, you can be the most motivated, but if you don't run it to a leader who's not up to the standards that you would appreciate or come to respect and then you run into two of them in a row, you're out of there. You'll never stay in the Marines. If you're lucky and you meet a super player at the beginning, when you start to do meet ones and they're not the finest apples in the barrel. You say, "Oh, this guy's just an aberration because I've already met some of the best. So, I was most fortunate early on to meet some terrific senior officers at the rank of captain and major, lieutenants. I was trained by some of the best, I learned their leadership. A young Marine would go anywhere you tell them if you step in front of them. I learned about integrity, and integrity is doing what you're supposed to do when nobody's looking. I consider that the three cornerstones of a superior Marine officer. And those cornerstones are maturity, integrity, and judgment. So, to be early on, cast in a situation, the officers who were looking after my destiny and future, and that I was following, demonstrated on a daily basis maturity, integrity, and judgment, for me, became my yardstick as I went forward. My lens which I judged everything else. So, all those who worked for me reported to me, I would judge the three basic elements of their maturity, their integrity, and their judgment and then their professional skills. So that was, in '65, that was instituted into me at a very early age. I was only twenty-one. That helped me in long stead. For me, let's see, by the time I was—I'm starting to think when I went to AWS. I was twenty-eight years old, and I had almost three tours in Vietnam. So unwittingly and unknowingly that was the standard, but there had been a lot of action packed into the first decade of my Marine Corps career. I was selected to captain at a very early age. So, I got to do a lot of exciting things up front at an early age, but all of those were wrapped in and around maturity, integrity, and judgments. That was sort of like my beacon light when things got foggy, or when the Marine Corps got foggy. Later in 1987 with the Marine Security

Guard scandal at the Moscow embassy or the Moscow Affair. There are a lot of books written about that. Those, again, became my steadfast unbreakable guides to which I got to a lot of challenging and shifty times of maturity, integrity, and judgment. It's unshakable. To this day, even when I went on, I got out of the Marines on a Friday, bought a comb, and went to work for Boeing on Monday. Now I'm in a situation where I'm in a huge civilian institution. Of course, my only yardstick of measurement was the Marine Corps. So, to be in the whole Boeing under that lens or under that microscope in terms of what I perceived as integrity and judgment, and how much of that carried over into the civilian world. All their companies out there that are close to the Marine Corps in upholding honesty, integrity, maturity, and all sorts of things and or do they just pay lip service. I found Boeing to be a very civilian to practice many of those morals. It had a good moral fiber to it and I liked that. The transition to me was painless and I was able to contribute in Boeing. It all goes back to those three principles really were chiseled into cement for me probably in the '65 timeframe of integrity and judgment.

KC: What were your recollections of the fall of Saigon in April of 1975? How did that affect you?

CD: That's a good story. Remember where I am. I'm standing in Taichung, Taiwan. It's a pretty big city, probably almost a half a million people. Right outside Taichung, Taiwan is CCK, it's a Chinese name for Chiang Kai-Shek's second eldest son, Chiang Ching-kuo who was later the president of China. Well, the air base, which is the home of many of the B-52s, the Chinese had given us overflights and landing lights. So many of the B-52s used in Vietnam not only came from Guam, but they came from CCK. You could have been from the forty or fifty B-52s of the CCK. Okay, the CCK also is a logistics depot for aircraft from Air America, the CIA airline. So, I happened to be, during that week, walking down the street in Taichung and following what is going on in Vietnam. I see some beautiful Vietnamese women walking down the streets with their ao dai, A-O D-A-I or pronounced in the north, ausai. These women in a traditional Vietnamese dress walking the streets of Taichung. And so, I stop my car in absolute disbelief and so on. What has happened? They're off on liberty and they're allowed off of the base to go into town. This is the initial wave of the Vietnamese who were fleeing Saigon. Many of them come through Taiwan. And remember the president of South

Vietnam at that time, he comes to Taiwan. He comes through CCK airfield, quite close to the city I'm studying in '74, at Thieu, T-H-I-E-U. Thieu is in Taiwan, the first week after the fall of Saigon. He is being hosted by the Chinese authorities in Taipei. So, for me, I'm reading about this in the newspaper and the absolute collapse of South Vietnamese forces. I'm shaking my head, "How can that happen?" That week when they're falling back from the DMZ, the general fallback and withdrawal. Then the mass evacuations to the sea. Remember, at that time, ironically the 4th Marines are embarked on US Navy shipping off of Saigon and the CO of the 4th Marines at that time is Al Gray. Good, old Colonel Al Gray. So, I have colleagues in the 4th Marines, I'm following the somehow miraculous deal that was cut by the NVA that they would not use surface to air missiles against Marine helicopters. For about a thirty-six-hour period, the Marine (unintelligible) and the helicopters with the 4th Marines embark on naval shipping off the coast of Vung Tau which is the point city down from Saigon about thirty miles. So, the Marines evacuate people off the roof and off the streets of the US embassy and other locations in and around Saigon, all these Marine helicopters are flying at east-west axis of about sixty miles and the NVA that was a deal cut where they would not fire on their helicopters. So, the United States is able to successfully evacuate quite a few people to the sea. Again, another instance of amphibious power that no other service could do, but it is very successful. Now, in that three-day period where that evacuation takes place, there are stories of other colleges. Remember, the last two Marines killed in Vietnam were both Marine security guards. There were two new people in country who were sent by the detachment command of the US embassy in Saigon out to Tan Son Nhut Air Base to help with some relief project during the fall of Saigon. That was the last two US Marine casualties, ironically, were Marine security guards. Also, the CO of Company B, Marine Security Battalion, Major Jimmy Kean, he's now deceased. He died about five years ago. Major Kean is sort of built as the last man out of Saigon. If you're familiar with the story, all the people leaving on the roof are the US Embassy in Saigon. All of a sudden, the Marines helicopter moving people off of the building all the way down to the sea stops and the last two men is Major Kean and a colleague spend the night in the radar dish on top of the roof of the US embassy. Nobody knows they're there and the NVA ransacked the palace underneath them and the embassy. Only 'til the next day where a helicopter

comes in is successfully extricate then captain, but Major Jim Keen as the last man out of Saigon. I'm aware of these stories in Taiwan and it is made bitterly clear to me what is happening as the elite hierarchy of the presidential family and some of his probably cabinet postmen in their families are walking down the streets of Taichung where I'm going to school in 1974.

KC: What are your personal feelings about the collapse of the Saigon military and the Saigon government?

CD: I think two-fold. The first is, I have immediate compassion and absolute bedrock belief that the South Vietnamese Marines are not part of the problem. They will do everything they can to preserve their country. Their bravery after many years of fighting of the people that I had met, these are patriots who had the communists and will fight to the death. So, I concern myself about how are they doing and where they are. Are they trapped somewhere in this major collapse? My second thoughts revolve around; this sounds like interior intrigue. This sounds like somebody in I Corps may have gone over. I'm just guessing, this is my sensing now. As I'm walking around Taiwan I choose to develop the theory that maybe somebody in I Corps, some senior officer of the South Vietnamese government opened the back door and maybe withdrew units from I Corps or from strategic positions to allow the North Vietnamese to port through and circumvent and flank all the key positions in I Corps. Then a day or two later I am in absolute disbelief and stunned that somebody in Saigon orders a general withdrawal from I Corps and II Corps and now you have an implosion of Vietnamese units either in their orderly or disorderly way of fleeing and making their way South either by boat and they're commandeering boats or ships trying to escape. I'm absolute disbelief. Keep it in mind now, in '72, the Easter Offensive has almost occurred and thank again that the South Vietnamese Marines were at the bridge. Colonel Jerry (Gerald) Turley has written a great book called the *Easter Offensive*. They do a great deal to prevent a mass invasion across the DMZ in 1972. I choose to believe that between'72 and'74 that the Vietnamese government had realized the errors of those ways and worked to ensure that that did not happen again, another Easter Offensive. But, by the spring of '74 in June, it is happening again. So, I'm in disbelief, I'm in shock, I'm a little bitter. I know somebody is responsible and I believe somebody panicked in the South Vietnamese military hierarchy

and ordered a major withdrawal that was not planned. To do it right, a withdrawal is a very, very difficult, sophisticated, and challenging military operation. That they start to crumble and move back. I worry that the Vietnamese Marines were up in I Corps, that they get out, and are able to get back behind some imaginary line halfway across the country that somebody hopefully is planning to be able to rally upon a set of positions as a redoubt to stop the flow of this onslaught of North Vietnamese forces on mechanized forces heading south toward Saigon. But my hopes were dashed because that is such a major under facing ordering tremendous coordination and timing which was not there most of the time available to erect the fallback positions behind some parallel line midway across South Vietnam.

KC: I've got two more questions for you, Colonel.

CD: Oh, and I realized it's all over when my Chinese friends in Taipei call me up and say, "Guess who's walking around up here in Taipei?" When I realized President Thieu has fled the country. So now you have what I choose to call a *deus ex machina*, you had a government without a head. The head has personally fled. You can't expect to—again, troops will follow you everywhere. You lead them if you're one step in front. If you leave the country, I know it's going to be a bloodbath, and I just say a prayer for the Vietnamese. There's the good Vietnamese people who are going to have a long, tough time ahead of them.

KC: Right, now I've got just two more questions for you, Colonel. One is, as you look back on everything that was Vietnam, looking back at the Vietnam War, what do you think the most important lessons for the war were for the United States? What are the most important lessons of the Vietnam War?

CD: Okay, that's a very timely and good question I should have thought about that. My sensing tells me that the lessons for the United States is one that most Asians know. And again, I perceive much of my thinking from Sun Tzu and Confucius and so on. While the American success on the battlefield for two hundred years is absolutely brilliant, our biggest military and short coming is political will. Knowing Asia—by the early eighties to have a handle on Asia and to be able to speak with authority on that subject. That in Asia, the United States is just still in kindergarten. In appreciation of what constitutes political will. When you study the life of Ho Chi Minh and how long he

was at it and how many setbacks. I mean, the man was even an elevator operator in Boston. When you look at his battle with the French and then with the Americans, even though I don't subscribe to his philosophy of sorts, but the idea is to study a political will. When they see that the Church Amendment going in in'74 and I realized that the United States had only been engaged in Vietnam. We had advisory efforts in the early 60s,'62. We had been there a decade that we could not develop the political will. The Americans fight like a football game, like we play football. We want a sixty-minute contest, we want a visible score board, we want a clear winner, we want a clear loser, and then we want to go home. That is not the nature of conflict, particularly in Asia. We do not appreciate, nor are we willing to put blood and treasure on the line for a protracted cause. Whether it's noble or not, but whether the United States is not politically, mentally—just like we finished the election this week. Some people in the world say we commit political suicide every four years. But the United States, our greatest drawback, is our inability to think in terms of a protracted conflict. The only two western nations who were pretty good at that, maybe three, is the British, the French, and the Turkish, and the Turks. The British understood in Malaysia with their emergency in Malaysia. What it would take to extricate the Chinese communists, and it would take a decade. The French, when you see Vietnam, you'll see that the French, for what it took, talking about colonialism that the French had made an investment for over a hundred years in Vietnam. Now, when you take the points, I'm trying to make here on protracted warfare, I don't consider the Cold War as protracted warfare. Things went on and so on and we had little skirmishes here and there. We supported proxies fighting in Africa and Eastern Europe and so on. But to be fully engaged as a nation committed to protracted warfare, only comes into the mainstream when you think about Iraq and now Afghanistan. Then today, there's so much finger pointing on Afghanistan, we've been there a year or ten years, we get out, how did this happen? To me, it's all symptomatic like the American way of doing business, like a football game. We did slight, protracted warfare. That's why the Gulf War, number one, was so appealing. I said earlier that it was the most lopsided victory on top of the Peloponnesian War. We went, we conquered three weeks, we had minimal casualties, we got our allies to pay for it, and we all went home under George Bush I. Anyhow, to pull this together my greatest fear is the United States' political will. Right now, and I look

ahead at other threats facing the United States and the five-hundred-pound gorilla in the room, again, is China. I choose to believe that we will have some serious confrontation with them. Maybe this is not the time for that. My point is, unless we somehow—and again, recognition is halfway to solution unless we recognize that we devise some sort of political mechanism or prepare our people on the nature of protracted warfare that is as often necessary, hard to measure, hare to gauge, hard to tell who's winning, but political will is the key to any military success. We have some issues there as a nation.

KC: All right, now my last question for you, Colonel is—

CD: Did that answer it? The whole purpose?

KC: Yes, absolutely, absolutely. And I've only got one question for you and it's a pretty broad one so feel free however you see fit. Again, as you look back on the Vietnam War, everything it was and everything that it's been in recent American history, what would you say the greatest legacy of the Vietnam War for the United States? What's the war's legacy?

CD: There's two ways to look at that. It's the near-term or the strategic. Strategically, the engagement of the United States bloodied pressure for a decade in Vietnam and then to have such a terrible outcome of withdrawal. There was some positive things that occurred. The first was, I truly believe that Indonesia was saved from the PPK, the Chinese communist uprising there in '65. The presence of the United States in Asia in such vast numbers of power and treasure, did much to stabilize much of Southeast Asia. Even Singapore or Malaysia and even Pakistan and India at the time. Secondly, that the United States, to a degree, learned the natures and the conditions under which we entered the Vietnam War should not happen again. There was not enough introspection. The *Turner Joy* incident, the *Maddox* incident were very shaky grounds. Right up there with "Remember the *Maine*," why we entered the cause of the Spanish-American War. But also, the United States, by our presence in Vietnam, we were very fortunate because much of that war, particularly from'66 to'72, that we did not irritate the Chinese and create another situation analogist for the Korean Peninsula. We were fortunate because the United States ironically did not understand, just a handful of people, what was going on in China and how the Chinese could have been more of a problem for us in Vietnam. But because of the cultural—the great Proletarian Cultural

Revolution, the Chinese were fully engaged and self-absorbed in their own internal problems and trying to keep—and Mao Tse Tung was fighting viciously to maintain his regime against other elements within the communist movement. He was fighting for survival. With our inability to see that, we were very lucky. Here we are on the fringes of China again, and China gets very nervous with consulates on their borders. The Chinese could have made it a lot tougher for all of us, but because of their self-contained problem issues, they were self-absorbed and could not spend time giving better aid and comfort to their North Vietnamese allies. And third is, the United States, all during the early sixties, mid-sixties, even up until about 1968, did not see that communism is not monolithic. There are many different communists under that blanket. We could not clearly distinguish at the presidential level. Nowhere in Congress or in our strategic think tanks. It was so simple and later revealed. We were still operating under George Kennan and his containment. We did not realize the tremendous split between the Soviet Union and the communist Chinese. In 1968 they went to war up on the Ussuri River. Our inability as a nation politically, maybe Nixon began to see this. That we could drive a wedge between the Chinese communists and the Soviets. They were not monolithic. They had their own national objective priorities which often clash. We did not take advantage of that and Vietnam, again, is one way we could have done that. In the Vietnam War, we failed to realize the major conflict in the world that was emerging. That we could have done something about politically between the Soviets and the Chinese. Only with the advent of Nixon who realizes that the Chinese, for a price, can become detached monolithically and begin to face west and this resulted in the isolation of the Soviet Union leading to the eventual political and economic collapses.

KC: Well, Colonel, is there anything else you would like to add to this interview before we close it up for good?

CD: No, sir. I'd just like to say thank you to yourself and the staff at the archives at Texas Tech. This has been a terrific opportunity and conducted in a very professional way with some timely historical questions, and I just feel most fortunate that I was able to participate and contribute my thoughts to the objectives of the archive.

KC: Well, it's been my pleasure to spend this time with you, Colonel, and on behalf of the folks here we certainly appreciate your effort.

CD: Doctor, forgive me, in a few days I want to get that letter off attesting—