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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Patrick Curry
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
July 15, 18, 19, 25, 26, & 29, 2005; & August 4, & 5, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden

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

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I'm conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Patrick J. Curry. Today is July 15, 2005. It's approximately 2:10 p.m. Central Standard Time. Pat and I are in Lubbock, Texas on the campus of Texas Tech University in the Special Collections Library, Southwest Collection Building. We're in the interview room, just the two of us. We're conducting an interview for the Vietnam Oral History Project. It's part of the Vietnam Archive. Pat before we begin I explained off the record the entirety of the interview process and you told me that you do understand.

Patrick Curry: I do.

RV: You're free of course to ask questions as we go. Also that you're aware that consenting to do this interview verbally here today and will sign an interview agreement after we finish, but consenting to the interview now and taking part in the interview you agree, you understand that it will be made public and that at this point you are okay with that. This will be available in the Archive physically, here, for people to listen to and read, and then also on the Internet on virtual Vietnam Archive. It will be available to the public free of charge. Do you consent to go forward with the interview to those standards?

PC: Yes.

RV: Okay, very good. Well why don't we start? I would like to start with where you were born and when you were born and just a little bit about your childhood.

PC: Well I was born in Temple, Texas September 25, 1945. My father was an Army officer stationed at Fort Hood, which is real close to Temple there. In fact he wasn't there when I was born. He had been reassigned and my mother couldn't travel. My dad was career military. He had 24 years of service. Served during World War II and was in the First Calvary Division in Korea, was a prisoner of war there for 33 months.

RV: Wow.

PC: Yes, it was quite an experience. I think it's interesting that he never did really talk about it until I got back from Vietnam.

RV: Really?

PC: Then he told me some stories and some things about what he went through. It was educational, scary.

RV: Did you ask him about it before hand? Did you kind of say what happened?

PC: Well tried to but he was kind of reluctant and not…he use to tell stories every now and then but not a lot of detail, if he had met up with one of his old friends or something like that. The only thing he really talked about was a Chaplain named Kapaun who was in the prisoner, POW camp with him, saved his life.

RV: Was he a South Korean or an American?

PC: Oh he was an American chaplain from Kansas. There's a big memorial to him in Kansas. He died in the camp but he had probably saved a large number of prisoners, giving up his own food and his own blanket and those kinds of things. My dad woke up one morning, he told me this story, woke up one morning and he couldn't raise his head up off this block they used as a pillow and he had contracted pneumonia. He was in POW Camp Five, which was right up on the Yalu River; it was cold.

RV: Wow.

PC: The Chaplain came over and took care of him, nursed him, gave him his food and all that. My dad recovered. The only time I ever saw my father cry was when he went to the memorial service for Chaplain Kapaun after the war.

RV: Wow, what intense memories.

PC: Oh very. Then when I got back like I said he told me some other stories that were pretty intense.

RV: He was in World War II. What did he say about his experience in that war?

PC: Well you know he had kind of an interesting experience in World War II. He was never in combat. At that time he was a Medical Service Corps Officer and he wound up running and aid station in Brazil.

RV: Wow, interesting.

PC: Now why? I never knew why we had an aid station, a medical aid station in Brazil, but that's what he did during the Second World War. I'm one of those who is glad that we used the atomic bombs in Japan because if we hadn't I probably wouldn't be here. My dad was, as I mentioned at Fort Hood in 1945 as an infantry officer, certainly would have gone to the pacific theater to fight in the invasion of Japan. The causality rates being what they were, like I said I probably wouldn't be here today.

RV: That's an interesting perspective. That's something that many people won't think about that. A lot of people warned because people were here and not there and not invading the home islands.

PC: Well there was a history book of World War II that came out a few years ago; I can't even remember the name of it now. But on the first page the two authors said that they were certain that nobody under the age of 60 would disagree with them when they say that dropping the atomic bombs was a big mistake and the United States shouldn't of done it. I just closed the book, set it aside, haven't looked at it since.

RV: (Laughter)

PC: You know I don't think that's history. That's personal opinion. It certainly not one I share or my brothers I might add.

RV: That's interesting. As a teacher of history I often when I'm trying to pick a textbook I'll go in and I'll open up to certain events and see how it's interpreted. The atomic bomb is my very first one I always go to. So that's interesting that you start with that. Tell me about your dad, what kind of person was he that you remember.

PC: He was a good guy. He came from a very rural background in rural Ohio. He lived on a farm near a very small little town, Mt. Vernon, Ohio; which is probably 50 miles north of Columbus. But they lived on a farm out in the country. His parents were I mean just, if you look up hillbilly in the dictionary their picture's there. My grandmother was married, had two kids, divorced by the time she was 16, which nowadays is kind of shocking but you know that's just the way it was. If you weren't married by 14 you were

an old maid. He went into the Army Reserves in the 30's as a way to get away from this and get out of this little town and get away from that life. Then when the Army started expanding he went into the regular Army as opposed to the Reserves and wound up staying in it for a career. He was not a high school drop out. I think he dropped out about the seventh grade, dropped out of school. You know rural America at that time education was not highly prized. He finally wound up with an Associates Degree. So he did get a little education and that was his number one priority of all time for us three, my two brothers and I.

RV: Now you're brothers are older or younger?

PC: I'm the oldest. I've got another brother, Dave, who he went on to get a Ph.D. from UT in Chemistry. He's a Research Geochemist for Exxon. My other brother is a Warrant Officer in the Coast Guard and he is assigned in Michigan right now. But the education was the thing for my dad. He perceived that if you didn't have an education you were not going anywhere. So we were going to get one. Like I say Korea was a pretty scary time. We lived with my mother's parents who were also farmers in Illinois, of course where they live now is houses and Wal-Marts and all that kind of thing. At that time it was out in the country.

RV: I'm sorry to interrupt, is that where you kind of remember as growing up or did you all move around a lot?

PC: Well we moved around a lot. We stayed in Rockford, Illinois for over three years and that's really, kind of, what I remember the earliest is living on the farm and my grandmother had six daughters so I had plenty of cousins to play with. It was a real sense of family and then when my dad came back and we moved off again then of course that was kind of broken but yeah that's how I perceive myself as having been raised.

RV: Tell me about your mother. What was she like?

PC: My mom's parents emigrated from Sicily. Not Italy, Sicily.

RV: Oh yes, Sicilian, not Italian.

PC: You don't call my grandfather Italian unless you wanted to fight. He was a great old guy, spoiled us to death. My mom grew up on a farm; you know it's the old cliché: walk three miles through the snow to school. And she was the only one of the six sisters and the one brother who ever went to college, and she finished college.

RV: Was this in Ohio?

PC: No, this was in Illinois.

RV: In Illinois.

PC: My dad's folks were from Ohio. My mother's folks were from Illinois. They met while my dad was on recruiting duty in Rockford, Illinois. So that's how my parents met. But my mom got her college degree and taught school. I remember her teaching in a school where she had four grades in one classroom. You don't see much of that anymore, but she actually did that. So we lived there through the Korean War. Obviously a very tough time for her. We went months, and months, and months and didn't know whether my dad was alive or not.

RV: You remember that?

PC: Oh yeah.

RV: You were what, eight, seven years old?

PC: Six, seven, eight, yeah.

RV: Tell me about the Korean War. What do you remember? Are those your first kind of big world type memories?

PC: Yeah, they are. I remember watching the President on television and that kind of thing. Of course I remember the big events.

RV: Did you see Truman or did you see Eisenhower on TV?

PC: Yes.

RV: Both of them?

PC: Both of them.

RV: Really. Okay.

PC: Yeah, God I'm old. (Laughter)

RV: No, that's really neat that you were able to touch history in that sense as a young man to see Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower.

PC: Well my mother bought my grandparents their first television, you know the good old black and white with the snowy screen and we had about a 60-foot antenna on top of the house.

RV: A 60-foot antenna? (Laughter) Wow.

PC: I mean we were way out in the country outside of a relatively small town. We were state of the art. We had a fancy gadget, it was a little electric box where you could turn and it would electrically turn the antenna to point it towards the television station. So every time you wanted to change the station you had to get up and turn the antenna to face that station so you could get reception. So we were first in the neighborhood. We actually had a television and went from there.

RV: You remember watching this TV. This is at your grandparent's house?

PC: I do. My grandparent's house; my mother's folks.

RV: Tell me about your memories of the Korean War. I know that it was probably touched very personally because your father was in it. Were you aware your dad was fighting in Korea, across the world?

PC: Well in the sense that a seven year old is, I knew he was a long way away and that he was in a war. I kind of had a vague notion of what that was. I knew after he got captured and everything that it was not a good situation. We didn't know whether he was going to come home or not.

RV: They told you he was captured?

PC: Yes, finally. Finally the Red Cross got word from the North Koreans that he was a prisoner. This was after quite a few months that like I say we didn't know whether he was alive or dead.

RV: He was infantry?

PC: He was Medical Service Corps at that time, but he was the Medic, Medical Officer for an infantry battalion or infantry regiment, actually at that time. The 8th Cavalry Regiment in the 1st Cav division, which I was in the 1st Cav in Vietnam, which I thought was kind of neat.

RV: I noticed when you said that. I remembered that you were in the same division.

PC: I remember my mother was Catholic. My grandparents of course coming from Sicily were Catholic so we had a little alter set up and every night we would kneel down and say our prayers wishing that he would come home. He was with the 1st Cav and right at the beginning of the war, well not the beginning but after a few months when the Chinese came into the war and just rolled south like a wave. They overran the 1st Cav, in

fact captured the division colors and he was, as an infantry, being that he was with an infantry unit he was among those that was overrun. He told me he went to sleep five miles behind the lines one night and woke up five miles behind the lines on the other side the next morning. I mean they came through that fast.

RV: Did he tell you how he was captured?

PC: He said they pretty much, as the Chinese came through, he said there were so many of them that it was just incomprehensible. He said the joke was how many hoards in a Chinese platoon? The Chinese soldiers in back didn't even have weapons. They were expected to pick up weapons from their dead comrades as they moved forward. So their unit, my dad's unit just got fragmented. He was in a hut. A lot of this was at night and the next morning he said he had woken up and he was looking out through this shell hole inside of his hut and he turned around and there was a North Korean soldier with a rifle and that's how he got captured.

RV: Did he talk about how he was treated?

PC: He said that the North Korean's were SOBs. Well he would be laying there and while he was being moved to POW (Prisoner of War) camp he would be in a cell or something like that. They would come through and prod him with a rifle butt or reach in and twist his nose, keep him awake all night, just cruel things. He said the Chinese were different. They were a little more humane and he said they pretty much ate what the guards at the POW camp ate. If the guards had rice, they had rice. He's not a big fan of the Chinese, for obvious reasons, but he said they were certainly far preferable than the North Koreans.

RV: Does that affect your view of the North Koreans today?

PC: Oh, I'm sure it does. I don't see how it couldn't. I think that the leader over there is certifiable and he scares me to death with nuclear weapons because there's just no telling what he's going to do. If he'll fire a missile over Japan I just…

RV: Yeah, yeah, okay. So you're parents meet and did they talk about where they came from as people, kind of what their values were? How did you all learn about life from them? What do you remember about them kind of teaching you lesson wise?

PC: You know one thing I really remember is my mom being an Italian Catholic, at that time she talked about walking down the street after she got out of school looking

for a job and seeing signs, “Catholics need not apply.” They would interview her and find out she’s Catholic, wouldn’t hire her and those kinds of things. That made a pretty big impact on me and my brothers. I think that impacts us to this day.

RV: What did you think?

PC: I just thought that was so wrong. You know how can you judge somebody because they’re Catholic? You don’t know anything about them.

RV: Right

PC: That’s just not right. I just can’t think of a different way to put it. I’m pleased to say that Diana and I were able to pass that on to our kids and they feel much the same way. So I think that’s a good value to have and that’s…

RV: Talked about education.

PC: Education, talked about values. Do it right. My dad always believed if you’re going to do it, do it right, do it all the way or don’t do it. Pardon the expression, don’t do it half ass. Either do it all the way or don’t do it at all. Again in my two brothers and I, I can really see that with all of us.

RV: As the oldest did your parents expect more from you?

PC: Always, especially my dad.

RV: Did they tell you that?

PC: No, I can’t say that they came out and said that in words. I’m not sure so much my mother but my dad definitely. I think that you got a father with an oldest son, I think he expects more out of that older son, which is not to say that I always lived up to what he expected but yeah he definitely did.

RV: What ethnicity was your father, did you say?

PC: He was Irish decent. We’ve tried to track it back. We can go back to his father and after that it just gets lost. I mean they were from the Deep South. Essentially illiterate, my grandfather was illiterate to the best of my knowledge. I mean there’s just not a lot of written records in those kinds of things.

RV: I want to know what you were like as a little boy. What do you remember about yourself? Were you curious? Were you active? Were you quiet?

PC: God I was the neighborhood wimp. I mean everybody picked on me. You know the kid who the big kids would steal the ball, that was me. It was my ball and I had

a real active imagination, had a lot of imaginary friends, and pets, and all that kind of stuff. My mother taught English so we were always around books. My father would read, I mean he would sit at the breakfast table and read the cereal box. He just read, and read, and read, and read. Of course, like I say an English teacher, there was always books around and all of us read from the earliest age and I think that probably created a lot of imagination in all three of us.

RV: Right. So you remember reading?

PC: Oh yeah. Tom Swift, all of them. Hardy Boys, all of them; all of those.

RV: Your brothers as well?

PC: Yes.

RV: Do you want to talk a little about what kind of people they were? Do you remember them growing up?

PC: Oh gosh. My youngest brother, Bart, is nine years younger than I am. I'm a World War II baby; he's a Korean War baby. So we really never…just about the time he was getting old enough to develop a real personality I left the house. We never really got close until gosh, until actually when I retired from the Army and came back to Texas and settled down and then he and I got kind of close again. And I guess the same is essentially true with my middle brother Dave. Dave is so damn smart that it's just hard to describe. He has an eidetic memory. He can read a book and then five years later tell you which side of the page a certain paragraph was on. Yeah, he just never forgets anything. He was the 4.0 all the way through school, all the way through grad school. I was not that way. To put it charitably I had a checkered academic career.

RV: Well tell me about school for you. What did you like or dislike about it? What do you remember about going to school?

PC: Boy I had a lot of fun in college, which is probably why it took me 12 years to get my degree.

RV: (Laughter) So you're starting in college, tell me about elementary school. What do you remember about that? Were you a young boy who dreaded going to school everyday?

PC: No, I liked the school part. Like I said I got picked on a lot. I got along with my teachers. I got really good grades, you know honor roll and all that kind of good stuff. My mouth got me in trouble a lot. I talked a lot.

RV: This like pre junior high, high school?

PC: Yeah, I'm talking like fifth, sixth grade. I was in school at Fort Sam Houston. After the Korean War my dad came back. He had been shot in the arm. It had carried pieces of his field jacket into his arm that he had carried around with him for a little over three years. So they had to do surgery on his arm. As a Medical Service Corps Officer; Fort Sam is the home of the Medical Service Corps. So he was reassigned there to get taken care of medically and then he stayed on. So I was going to school there. I always thought it was a pretty good school. Like I say I did well. For seventh grade my dad went to Japan and this was '56, '57. He went to Japan but we still had an Occupation Force at that time. So he went over there. While he was waiting for housing for us to come over we went to school at a place called Wighill School in Rockford, Illinois. Went back and stayed with my mother's parents again, absolutely the hellhole of the earth.

RV: How so?

PC: Man I just did not fit in, at all. I was use to being around military kids and I kind of knew what that was like. I got out to this school in this farm community and I just did not fit in. I got a really rough time. I just would get up in the morning and go to school and my stomach would hurt. Any excuse to stay home, any excuse not to go to school. Finally the principal called me in and talked to me and just a great guy. I mean here I was one among all these kids and he not only knew something was wrong but wanted to do something about it, just really helped me out; let me know I was completely alone. Boy I hated it.

RV: How long did you stay there?

PC: Oh fortunately just a few months. Thanks heavens or I'd probably lost my mind. Then my dad got quarters and we moved to Japan. Lived in a Japanese house, and I'm talking straw floors, paper walls.

RV: And you're in what, seventh, eighth grade?

PC: Seventh grade.

RV: Wow.

PC: What it was, of course Japan was still recovering from the war. I mean, it only had only been 12 years.

RV: Where were you? Do you remember what city?

PC: Yes, we were in Tokyo and we lived in a suburb called Setagaya-ku.

RV: Do you know how that's spelled?

PC: Not a clue.

RV: For the sake of our transcriptionist, but that's okay. We'll figure that out.

PC: Sorry, not a clue.

RV: Can you say it again?

PC: Setagaya-ku.

RV: Setagaya-ku, okay.

PC: Our landlord had taken his house and built a wall down the middle and then added on an American style living room that had a hard wood floor and glass windows and those kinds of things. But the bedrooms, the kitchen, the bathroom were all Japanese style. Like I say we had the straw mats on the floor, tatami and shoji, which are sliding paper doors. Every morning we would walk, my brother and I would walk, I don't know about a quarter of a mile, half a mile down to the bus stop. You would always see Mt. Fuji in the background. You know that perfect color, just absolutely beautiful. It just dominated the skyline. So I went to Yoyogi High School. That's Y-O-Y-O-G-I. I did seventh and eighth grades there. Then we finally got government quarters and moved to a place called Grant Heights, which was kind of way out. Then finally got back into Tokyo and moved into Washington Heights and had a nice little house there. We were trying to help the Japanese economy so we had full time maid for 18 dollars a month. Neighbors were mad because we overpaid her. I think the going rate was about 15. Actually the Army had set up little secure compound where these young women live and they would come out and be maids during the day then at night they would go back.

RV: Is this a house or an apartment?

PC: Ours was a house.

RV: What was it like for you to go to Japan at such a young age? I mean this is really very unique. I was going to ask you about growing up in the 1950's America and here you are, you've gone to Japan.

PC: I did and that was one of the things about Japan, especially at that time; it was so different from the United States. Obviously a lot of similarities between Europe and the United States. At that time very few similarities between Japan and the United States. It was just really different and very exotic and interesting.

RV: What year was this?

PC: We went in ’57 and we were in Japan, and my dad was stationed at Camp Drake, which was in downtown Tokyo. It was the big hospital in Tokyo. If you went out the front gate and turned left you were staring at the Imperial Palace.

RV: Wow right there in the middle.

PC: Right there in the middle of town and the big mote around the palace and the whole works.

RV: So ’57 and how long was it?

PC: We were there for almost two years and then they started phasing things out in Japan, downsizing US forces and we moved to Okinawa. We moved to Okinawa in, gosh, late ’58. I went to Kubasaki High School, K-u-b-a-s-a-k-i, which I understand is still there but I don’t know for sure.

RV: Tell me before we leave mainland Japan; tell me about the Japanese people and their recovery from World War II and their personalities and culture, just what you remember about that.

PC: They were so friendly and so nice.

RV: Did that surprise you?

PC: Yeah it kind of did but I mean I was seventh grade. I didn’t do a lot of deep introspection. Even at that age I knew you know we had one the world, they were conquered. How nice were they going to be? I mean they are just very, very nice people. In fact we had a maid named Toshiko who was just super. We tried to talk her into coming back to the United States with us, you know for the opportunities. She was like a member of the family. She didn’t want to leave her parents who were older. She didn’t want to leave them and we have to understand that. We had some Japanese friends, our landlord in the Japanese house, very nice people. They had a teenage son and he came over and got me one day. He spoke about as much English as I do Japanese, which is to say none.

RV: You did not learn Japanese?

PC: No. That was not encouraged in those days.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah, it was really kind of a separation.

RV: Because you went to school, I'm sure there is an English speaking school.

PC: It was an American school. Yeah, run by the Armed Forces.

RV: Yes.

PC: It was totally like; as far as school was concerned, it was no different from being in the United States.

RV: What did this kid do?

PC: Well he came over and got me one day all sign language and went over to his side of the house. Of course you take your shoes off. He had the most amazing insect collection. I remember it to this day and that was more then last week. (Laughter) But I mean it was amazing. He had case after case, after case of all kinds of insets, beetles and butterflies and just all kinds of things. From the little that we could communicate I gathered he had put together for school. It was just an amazing collection. He came over; he was real proud of it and showed it to us and everything.

RV: Do you remember any feelings of resentment or awkwardness with the Japanese people?

PC: Not any. In fact one of the things we use to do was there was big park near our house. We use to go down there and play baseball with the Japanese kids. The Japanese love baseball. They are insane about baseball. We would go down there and play baseball with the Japanese kids for hours and hours. We never had any of, "You can't play" or "There's no place on the team for you," none of that. Always wondered how they were hitting the ball so far. Well then I found out they were using a hard rubber baseball. You can knock that sucker a mile.

RV: I bet that would be fun.

PC: Yeah, you could really get some hits. I really honestly don't remember any incidents now. The exception being that on May 1, May Day, the Communist holiday we had to stay home, indoors, shakes drawn, curtains closed, doors locked.

RV: What's the deal?

PC: Because of the Japanese, because of the Communist demonstration's and all of that on May 1st. I don't recall that we ever had anything directed directly against us.

RV: What about reconstruction? Did you see any of that? Did you notice I guess at that young age buildings get damaged somehow, I mean we're talking ten years plus after the war?

PC: Yeah, no not really. I'm sure that out in the countryside there was still damage or in some of the smaller cities maybe, but Tokyo had been pretty well…I mean, the Ginza was very brightly lit, all neon. And Tokyo had been, at least the parts we saw had been pretty well…

RV: Okay.

PC: …reconstructed, rebuilt by that time.

RV: Okay. What do you think about the Japanese today? Does that, I mean, I know that shapes your…you lived there for two years and then you were going to talk about Okinawa, but when you think of the Japanese today as this economic superpower and so plugged into everything the United States is doing, what is your opinion of Japan and do you see similarities?

PC: Yeah, I think the Japanese and the Germans are kind of the ugly Americans of the nineties, eighties and nineties. So some interesting experiences in Europe outside of Germany with German people. But I think they've gotten much like I think we did in the fifties and sixties. Got a little arrogant, a little bit of, you know, "We did this economic miracle and so we're a little smarter than the average bear," and etc.

RV: What do you remember about Japanese/Chinese relations back then?

PC: Not a thing.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, just way over my head. We did have one friend and his nickname was Popeye. I never did find out what his real name was.

RV: Japanese friend?

PC: He was actually Chinese.

RV: Chinese, okay.

PC: And he said been on the last boat for Mainland China in 1948 when Chiang fled to Taiwan, Formosa.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: So he had gotten out just in time, came to Japan to make his fortune and apparently had done so and he and my dad somehow got to be real good friends.

RV: Okay.

PC: He had a daughter about my age, very attractive girl. And of course, the wife, she hardly ever said a word.

RV: Right.

PC: Very quiet.

RV: That's an interesting experience. Before we move forward, I wanted to ask you, you mentioned Truman and Eisenhower. What are your opinions of those two Presidents; very different gentlemen?

PC: Very, very different. I actually got to see Eisenhower in person on Okinawa.

RV: Really?

PC: If you can believe that. He was on some kind of tour in the Far East and came through. I liked Truman, even given that I think twenty five percent of what we see and hear about him now is probably a hyperbole. I liked him because I think he was an honest man and a straightforward man. And I, a little less favorable opinion of Eisenhower. I kind of have an opinion of him as more of a do nothing, more of a we're reluctant to move, a little hesitant to move and do things.

RV: Was there any talk in your household that you remember, households around the world where you were of your dad talking about MacArthur and Truman and that controversy?

PC: My dad and I on one side and my middle brother on the other; my dad thought Macarthur was a worthless petuty, that Truman should've fired him out of hand for insubordination, that MacArthur did great, wonderful things during World War II. He did good things in Korea, but he's not the President. And the military is subject to the President and if the President says, "Do this;" you do it.

RV: It's the issue of civilian control of the military.

PC: Exactly, exactly. And I agree with my dad, Truman should've looked him in the eye, realizing he couldn't because of the political implications.

RV: Right.

PC: But wishing that he could, looked him in the eye and fired him out of hand.

RV: And your brother?

PC: My brother disagrees. He thinks that MacArthur's approach was right so that MacArthur had a right to disobey Truman and I disagree. It doesn't matter whether Truman was right or wrong, he was President and MacArthur's a military man, he had no choice but to obey, should've had no choice but to say, "Yes sir."

RV: Right, and it makes it even more interesting if your father's held in a POW camp up there on the Chinese border where MacArthur was advocating, you know, basically making it glowing border, drop nuclear weapons and make it a Radiation Zone as he called it.

PC: Yup.

RV: A Radiation Belt. I mean, that has implications on your dad. I mean, it's very interesting.

PC: Yup.

RV: Okay, you moved to Okinawa.

PC: Moved to Okinawa in late '58 or early '59. My dad had kind of an interesting military career. He had come in as an enlisted man, went to Officer Candidate School in Kansas during the Second World War, became an officer. In 1948, as a Reserve Officer, the writing was kind of on the wall that you know, as the Army was downsizing so rapidly, that guys who had come in through the enlisted chain were not going to last long. And there's a dual system. You can be a Reserve Army Officer on active duty, and at that time anyway, an enlisted Regular Army rank. So there were in essence two Armies with two sets of ranks.

RV: Right.

PC: Well they offered the Regular Army NCOs a chance to revert to their Regular Army grade and stay on active duty or they could keep their officer grade and take a chance; what the Army calls RIF, Reduction in Force. So my dad elected to go ahead and revert to his Regular Army grade, which was Sergeant 1st Class, E7. So he went back and became an NCO (Non-commissioned Officer) again. That lasted about two years and when the Korean War started and the build up started, he got, his Reserve Commission was reactivated, so he became an officer again.

RV: That's interesting.

PC: (Laughing)

RV: A little flip-flop there.

PC: So, as a Reserve Officer at that time, you could only stay on active duty for twenty years. Well, he had his active duty Army Reserve twenty years on Okinawa. So he reverted back to NCO again.

RV: Huh.

PC: Rather than retire, he reverted back to E7. But when he retired, four years later, he retired as a Field Grade Officer Major.

RV: Okay.

PC: As his Reserve rank.

RV: Okay. So was there any chance, I mean, was there a danger I guess of him leaving Okinawa when he reverted back to NCO again?

PC: No, the money situation, the budget situation in the Army at that time was so tight, that if there wasn't some real compelling reason, you just didn't move.

RV: Okay, okay. How long were you there at Okinawa or on Okinawa?

PC: Two and a half years.

RV: Okay.

PC: Two and a half years.

RV: So till '61 I guess?

PC: Came back in '61, yeah.

RV: Okay. And is this where you attended high school?

PC: No, that was junior high school, ninth, well partially ninth and tenth grades.

RV: Okay.

PC: And that's where I said I went to Kubasaki and…

RV: And again, a military school.

PC: Military school, yeah. It was in Okinawa town of Naha, which was N-a-h-a, which was the capitol of the Ryukyus, Ryukyu Islands and really interesting. I mean, at that time even as a kid, you could go anywhere on the island. We used to ride the buses all over; there was not danger or anything like that.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah.

RV: And of course, there's got to be unexploded ordnance around.

PC: All over the place.

RV: And you could go just explore?

PC: Go explore anywhere.

RV: Wow.

PC: In fact, a good friend of mine from school, his dad was in the Air Force, so he lived in a different place, but we went to the same school. And one night, his neighbors told me this story. Or one day he didn't come to school and we were wondering why and he had a mass, a huge unexploded ordnance collection in his bedroom. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And he had been going all over the place picking all this stuff up. And his parents found out about it and they just evacuated the house, called the Military Police who called the EOD, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, who came out, evacuated the neighborhood and cleaned out his bedroom.

RV: Wow. Now did you do any exploring?

PC: No. Oh we explored all over, but I didn't pick any of that stuff up.

RV: Nothing like that.

PC: No.

RV: What about the Okinawan people, what do you remember about them?

PC: God they were poor. They're not so much now, but boy, at that time; they were poor, poor people. Fishermen, subsistence level farming; I mean, as far as I know, friendly people. But not as much contact for me anyway, with the Okinawans as I had had with the Japanese. I mean, we had lived in a Japanese community, we didn't do that in Okinawa and we lived right on the military base, etc. So I don't feel like I knew them quite as well.

RV: Okay.

PC: But interesting place, old medieval castles on the island that you could walk to, but very poor people. You know, you talk about the unexploded ordnance, one of the things that happened there was some fishermen were trying to open an unexploded

thousand pound bomb. They were trying to get the explosive out, you fish with explosives, and I mean if that's your livelihood, and the difference between starving to death and eating, then that's what you do. And they were trying to get it open and it exploded and it killed several people.

RV: What were the major differences between the Okinawans and the Japanese or Japan and Okinawa?

PC: Gosh, the standard of living. I mean, even that soon after the war, we lived in Japan in basically a middleclass Japanese neighborhood. The houses were, you know, nice houses and all the streets were paved and even though the sewage system was two ditches, eighteen inches wide and maybe eighteen inches deep running alongside the road. But it was a decent standard of living. Even though in Japan, Americans at that time could not drink the water, we had to boil all our drinking water. But Okinawa was very, very poor. In a lot of…I mean, outside of a military base, you know, you have The Strip with bars and that kind of thing and that was pretty prevalent on Okinawa.

RV: Okay. Tell me about your schooling. Did you, first of all, miss American schools?

PC: Well we were in American schools. I mean, like I said, it was no different than going to school in the United States.

RV: Right.

PC: Until you went off base and the crowds at football games were not very big. But no, I mean, we, you know, I mean really didn't know the difference at the time.

RV: What about your favorite subjects and your least favorite subjects; what were you good at and…?

PC: God, I was horrible at Math, anything having to do with Math, which is funny because Diana is a Math major, she's got a degree in Math.

RV: Diana, your wife?

PC: My wife, yeah. She got her degree in Math. But I always liked History and I liked English Lit, pardon me, English Literature is what I'm trying to say here. You know how you have odd memories that stand out for no particular reason.

RV: Sure.

PC: Our English teacher made us memorize *Rhyme of the Ancient Mirror* and we had to stand up in class and recite it. And please don't ask me why I remember that because I do not have a clue.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But I remember…

RV: Was that in Japan or Okinawa?

PC: That was on Okinawa.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah. And I really remember very little about school in Japan, but Okinawa, of course you know, high school, you get…junior high and high school, you get a little more aware.

RV: What about sports?

PC: Never. Swim team.

RV: Okay.

PC: Swim team.

RV: In both places or…

PC: Just in Okinawa.

RV: Okay.

PC: Well, you know, when you live on an island that's seventy miles long and two miles wide, there's not a lot else to do but go to the beach and so I learned how to swim pretty well and swim team, but you know, I'm a klutz, not real coordinated. And you know, I liked the Chess club, I'm one of those kinds of guys.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: You know, I like the Chess club; I like the Photography club.

RV: Right.

PC: I didn't do the basketball team so well; tried, but not there for me.

RV: Your brothers and your dad and your mother for that matter, I mean, were they athletic, were they into sports or was this kind of how the family was?

PC: No, it's in my DNA. (Laughing)

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: Well my dad never had the opportunity.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, he was worried as a kid about where his next meal was coming from, not about the football team. My middle brother played quite a bit of football and my youngest brother, gosh, he boxed, he was a fencer, he was a wrestler and he played football. Oh, and lifted weights.

RV: Wow.

PC: Yeah.

RV: So you were the pretty big exception there.

PC: I was. When it came to athletics, I certainly was. And I tried out for the basketball team several times but…played little league baseball and that kind of stuff, but never well.

RV: Right. So you're there ninth and tenth grade at Okinawa and do you come back to the United States after that?

PC: Came back to the United States and my father got a Reserve component assignment working with the Reserves as an Advisor in Wheeling, West Virginia.

RV: Wow, that's a big change.

PC: A big change. I will never forget coming over the hill into Wheeling, West Virginia, which is a steel town. And of course, everything is covered with about six inches of steel mill grime and it was just cloudy day. I mean, I remember vividly, cloudy day, come over that hill and there's this black and gray town, god you just wanted to go somewhere and open a vein. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: It was the most depressing thing I had ever seen in my life. I had just come from two and a half years of sunshine and beaches and to come over this hill and see that below me was just, I mean, you could feel and it just got so quiet in the car. You could tell everybody was thinking the same thing.

RV: Right. And as a teenager, I mean, that's got to be tough.

PC: Oh, turned out to be two of the best years of my life and certainly the two best up to that point.

RV: Well good. When you were overseas, did you miss the United States or was it just kind of an adventure?

PC: I really didn't, it was really kind of an adventure and all my mom's folks thought that she was nuts for dragging us all over the world. But yeah, it really was an adventure. Even at that age, I think we had some sense of doing things that most kids don't get to do.

RV: Before we talk about Wheeling, Today Pat, today, what does Pat Today think about your experience overseas; was it for the better?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah, absolutely no question about it. I've lived overseas for thirteen years of my life and boy, and there's no question it was just a fantastic experience. And even though moving around is hard on kids and it was hard on my kids, but we got to see and do things that is so far outside most kid's imagination even that oh yeah, it was great, it was great. And even though it was hard on my kids, I am really glad that they got to live overseas for eight years and they are too.

RV: Okay. How many kids do you have?

PC: I have two daughters.

RV: Okay.

PC: Two daughters.

RV: What are their ages right now?

PC: Lynn is thirty-five and Kathy is thirty-two. And we have three grandkids now; our oldest grandson, John, died of complications of diabetes about four years ago.

RV: I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

PC: I didn't know if I was going to make it or not.

RV: Wow.

PC: But we did and he's still with us.

RV: Yeah.

PC: So we have three, three grandkids now. Kathy, my youngest daughter has two girls and my oldest daughter, she's a single mom and she has Brandon, our grandson. He's seven going on eight.

RV: Okay.

PC: And he is hell on wheels.

RV: (Laughing) Well, tell me about Wheeling and these two great years.

PC: Oh, we moved into the town of Wheeling in an older house that was essentially falling apart and my parents pretty soon decided this was not going to make it. So they found a really nice house, a brick house in a town outside of Wheeling. I'm sure it's a suburb now, but at that time, it was way out, called Glen Dale and it was just kind of a middleclass community, just mostly residential.

RV: Is that G-l-e-n-n?

PC: No, just one N, G-l-e-n D-a-l-e.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so they rented that house and I went to high school up the road in another steel town, Benwood, West Virginia. And I went to Union High School and I can tell you that the movie, *American Graffiti* is true.

RV: (Laughing) Okay. How so?

PC: I mean, it was exactly like that. I mean, the same…we didn't pull rear axles off of police cars, we wouldn't have dared.

RV: Right.

PC: But I mean, it was, oh, I mean, going to the drive-in. We had drive-in in town, walking everywhere we went, never had to worry about were we safe or you know, was there a predator out there to get us, it was really kind of an idealized. Going to the football games on Friday night, really cold and it gets really cold in West, by god, Virginia. Just freezing to death sitting there watching the football games and going to the basketball games. And Glen Dale was fairly affluent, but the other towns, where the high school was, there was Benwood, there was another one at McMechen. They were steel towns, relatively poor towns. But I mean, shoot, I don't know that anybody even in school even noticed, but I mean, just all the high school clichés you hear about going to high school in the sixties. And of course, this was before drugs and all that kind of stuff.

RV: Right. This is '61, '62, '63.

PC: Yeah, yup. '61 to '63, my girlfriend wore my class ring around her neck on a string. (Laughing) And it was a small school. I guess we had about three hundred and fifty kids altogether. There were sixty kids in my graduating class, but Dave Minor got an empty envelope, he had to go to summer school to finish, but they let him walk.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so fifty-nine of us actually graduated.

RV: Were you a good student?

PC: I was an excellent student. And it was funny, my first two years in Okinawa, if I was lucky, C's, mostly D's. Went to Benwood, straight A's, had most A's and B's, don't think I ever got a C while I was there.

RV: What changed for you?

PC: No clue, no clue. Maybe it was because I had found a group of good friends, similar interests, etc., but I really, and I've often wondered that. And if you think I wondered, you should've seen my parents.

RV: I bet they were ecstatic.

PC: (Laughing) "What happened?" They weren't asking too many questions though.

RV: Right, right.

PC: But yeah, I did very, very well academically.

RV: When you see this time in your life, what do you see in your mind's eye right now?

PC: Oh, just a really happy time. I mean, nice neighborhood, nice people, good friends, my father would wear his uniform around town so he stood out. And he was really a good-looking guy.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Looked a lot like Errol Flynn, you know, the mustache and the whole works.

RV: Sure, sure.

PC: And if you remember those old movies, and he looked real good in his green uniform and he stood out, so we were kind of celebrities. And we had actually lived somewhere other than Glen Dale, West Virginia, so we were celebrities in that to them in that way, had a steady girlfriend and went to the dances and just a happy time.

RV: That's good.

PC: Yup.

RV: Were you thinking military service at this point?

PC: No, I wasn't thinking more than, "Friday night, could I get the car?" (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And of course, getting into college and all that kind of stuff.

RV: And so your parents were telling you, you know, were they telling you to go to college or were you saying, "I'm going to college?"

PC: Oh no, no, that was never an option in our house.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean, it was not something that was discussed; it was like the sun coming up in the morning, you were going to college. I mean, that's just the way it was, that was the way life was. It wasn't discussed, it was just, like I said, it's the way it was.

RV: Do you think it was a good thing?

PC: I think it was absolutely a great thing. I did the same thing with my girls. We tried to raise them to understand and to think. And what I tried not to really give them any choice about two things. One was about going to college and the other was drugs and as far as I was concerned, those two were not subject to discussion or negotiation.

RV: Okay.

PC: And to the best of my knowledge, both my girls went to college, one graduated, just got her Masters, Lynn. And to the best of my knowledge, neither one of them ever did drugs.

RV: Okay, all right. What kind of, lets see, I want to ask this very respectfully, what kind of guy were you in high school? Were you respectful toward your girlfriend and were you, you know, you were not in sports, right, non-athletic, so were you, you know, resentful towards the jocks? You know, how did your…I want to know about your personality and then we can talk about how that develops as you go through life.

PC: I was a real respectful kid, all three of us were.

RV: I bet because of your dad and your mother, what you described earlier.

PC: Yeah. My dad, you know, he had that sense of military discipline and he had never had much in the way of fathering, so he didn't really have any role models. But he had his idea of what a father should do. And times were different then, and so he was pretty strict, pretty straightforward and my mom too. And you know, we were expected to follow the rules, obey the rules. We definitely were expected to respect our elders.

You know, there's a joke going around now, people my age. You know, the principle didn't have to whip us, all he had to do was tell the parents and they'd whip us. And that's a true statement. I mean, people joke about it a lot, but that's a true statement, aside from the fact I was scared to death of our principle. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) In West Virginia?

PC: In West Virginia, Mr. Wiseman. (Laughing)

RV: You're looking like you're still a little tense about it right now.

PC: (Laughing) Well, if you really screwed up, Mr. Wiseman would call you in to give you licks. And I mean, he would lift the football players up off the ground.

RV: So that worked?

PC: Yeah, it worked.

RV: Okay. How often were you in Mr. Wiseman's office?

PC: Never. The coach got me once, but I was never…I was scared to death of him. And I'm sure he was a very nice man, but he's very stern looking and wore the old 1940 suits with the tie that was, you know, eight inches wide and hit him right about there. My group of friends were…and I don't mean this to sound kind condescending or anything, but my group of friends were the intellectuals of the school. By that, I mean, we got the good grades, we were going on to college. And like I said, it's a steel town, you know, people had been working in these mills for two and three generations and that's what the kids had to look forward to.

RV: And you weren't thinking, "I'm going to a steel factory?"

PC: Oh no, no, that was not even ever in my realm of possibility. For one thing, I knew we'd be leaving.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, so staying there and staying in that lifestyle was never on our horizon at all.

RV: How'd you deal with that with your girlfriend, you knew you were taking off? You knew you were, A: going to be going to college somewhere and might be going to Morgantown to West Virginia, but you know, you're going to be leaving this community and you know, your dad's still in the Reserve?

PC: Oh no, he was in the military.

RV: I mean, he's still full time, so how'd you deal with that?

PC: Oh, I don't know that we really thought about it a lot. You know, long range planning was the car Friday night and I don't know that we ever really thought about it a lot. It was tough when it was time to leave because I did have a steady girlfriend and everything. And I got offered a scholarship to WVU (West Virginia University) and didn't take it, often wondered what would've happened if I had.

RV: What was the scholarship in, what was it?

PC: Academic scholarship.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: Because I had really good grades. And they came up and recruited a group of us and I was among that group.

RV: Why didn't you go?

PC: My folks were moving to Texas and I was kind of immature, I was never real cool or real grown up, real mature, you know, not one of the in-group. And so I just never even thought about not living at home, etc. At least I never really thought about moving that far away.

RV: Okay, okay. So you went with your parents to Texas and did you graduate in Virginia?

PC: My parents did a really great thing for me. My dad got reassigned halfway though my senior year and rather than yanking me out of school halfway through my senior year, he went down to Texas, back to Fort Sam Houston and stayed there and my mother and the three of us kids stayed in West Virginia until I finished high school. And I know that was both a financial sacrifice and a personal sacrifice on their part and I think it's probably one of the nicest things anybody's ever done for me.

RV: Obviously it made an impact upon you.

PC: It certainly did, yeah. And I just thought that was…and its funny thing is, I didn't really even realize it until several years later and got to thinking about it. Well, you know, they did a pretty good thing for me there that they really didn't have to do.

RV: Did you talk to them about it at some point?

PC: You know, I don't think I ever did, don't think I ever mentioned it to them and they never mentioned it to me. You know, it was just one of those things.

RV: But now we have it on tape and you can state for the record that…

PC: It was a nice thing they did.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Especially since I had to move my daughter before her senior year, not halfway though, but before her senior year.

RV: Right.

PC: She had a good senior year anyway, but nevertheless, it was tough on her.

RV: Well taking a kid out of high school in the middle of the senior year would be very difficult.

PC: Yeah.

RV: It sure would. So where in Texas did you all go?

PC: We go back to San Antonio to Fort Sam Houston and my dad stays there about a year and a half after we got there. He had been there two or two and a half years.

RV: He's still active military?

PC: He's still active military and they tell him he's going to Vietnam. He thinks that two wars per career is probably adequate, and especially after what he went through in Korea, he was not anxious to go again.

RV: How old is he, is he in his forties?

PC: In his forties.

RV: Okay.

PC: He was born in 1921. And so he's in his mid forties.

RV: Okay.

PC: His health is not real great.

RV: In what way?

PC: Well, two things. One is, his lungs were so weakened in Korea by the pneumonia, that he never really came back from that one hundred percent. And on top of that, he was a very, very heavy smoker. I mean, very heavy smoker. So between the weakened lungs and that, plus he had a real bad ulcer, which they didn't really know how to treat. And between those three things, his health was…we didn't realize it at the time, but kind of on a downward trend. But he decided he didn't really want to go to Vietnam.

RV: What position, where were they going to sign him, what unit, what type of…?

PC: In Vietnam you mean?

RV: Yes.

PC: Oh, no clue.

RV: Okay.

PC: A lot of times you didn't find out till you got over there.

RV: Right. So they just said, you know…

PC: Yeah, "You're on alert; you're going." And so he said, "Hmm, no, I don't think so," and he retired.

RV: Okay.

PC: And he retired as a Major. At his retirement ceremony in 1964, he got his Purple Heart from having been shot in 1951.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah.

RV: Why so long?

PC: At that time, the Army decided that since he was a POW when he had been shot and what happened was, the North Koreans had a whole bunch of Americans marching them along, my dad fell out and a soldier stood there fifteen feet away and fired at him seven times, my dad counted them. Shot at him seven times and hit him once in the arm. Well, since he was a POW, he technically was not in a combatant status. So since he wasn't in a combatant status, he was not eligible for a Purple Heart.

RV: I see.

PC: When Vietnam came around, not a declared war, nothing like that, the guys in Vietnam technically weren't eligible for Purple Hearts, so they changed the law and that made him eligible and they made it retroactive. So he got his, that's how I understand the story. And so that's how he got his Purple Heart twenty years later.

RV: You remember that retirement ceremony?

PC: Vividly, yeah.

RV: Proud of him?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. He had done an awful lot with his life.

RV: He'd done a lot for his country.

PC: He had done a lot for his country and given up a lot for his country.

RV: Yes. How much influence does his military career eventually have upon you, going into the military?

PC: I think not so much on going into the military as the decision to stay in the military. I think he had a lot of influence there. Frankly, I flunked out of college, but boy, I had a good time though. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: Flunked out of college, was just kind of drifting, you know, pretty typical story and really no plans, no ideas, no future. And so I did what a lot of kids did those days, I went in the military and I joined the Army. And I couldn't go back to school, so I joined the Army and that's how I went in.

RV: Okay. And we'll talk about the career for you in post-Vietnam, why you stayed in. Where did you attempt to go to college, where did you go in and…?

PC: I went to Trinity University in San Antonio and I don't want to say it was a waste of time, because it most certainly was not.

RV: Is this 1963 or 4?

PC: I started in '63; I was seventeen.

RV: Okay.

PC: As I mentioned, not real mature. And I went to Trinity, over three years, I managed to amass two years of credit, but that really helped me out later on. The Army, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Westmoreland said he wanted to make a decision, he wanted all officers to have college degrees and he put his money where his mouth was and they started a program called the Undergraduate Degree Completion Program. And very competitive program and I was selected and because I had two years of credit, I was eligible. So I was selected and I went back and was able to finish my degree.

RV: Okay. What happened at Trinity, I mean, just immaturity and too much fun?

PC: Joined a…way too much fun. Joined a fraternity, started off great, gosh, I guess I had about a 3.4 my freshman year. But joined that fraternity and discovered parties and having a good time and just really was kind of a complete idiot. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) That's pretty honest of you.

PC: But did have a good time, made some lifelong friends and many of which I still have, are still my friends.

RV: What fraternity?

PC: It was a local fraternity called Sigma Kappa Epsilon and it is no longer in existence.

RV: And are these some of the friends from the fraternity?

PC: Yes.

RV: Okay, okay. What were your parents thinking as you're kind of going through this process? You're the oldest son and you're trying to, I guess they want you to set an example and you've done so well, you know, up in West Virginia.

PC: Oh, they were pissed. I mean, Trinity is an expensive school and they were pretty upset, not about spending the money, but about the bad grades. Who could blame them, you know? I mean, you can't, they were paying all this money and they had all these hopes and expectations and they were pretty upset and like I say, I really can't blame them at all had I been in their position, but I felt exactly the same way.

RV: Well apparently you weren't ready for that time, that college?

PC: Yeah, no way. Yeah, I should've never gone at seventeen, never gone.

RV: So you're there until 1966, is that correct?

PC: 1966, yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: The spring semester of '66 was my last semester at Trinity. And in September, the day after my twenty-first birthday, I joined the Army.

RV: Wow, okay.

PC: As a private.

RV: Okay, okay. Pat, why don't we take a break for a minute?

PC: Sure, no problem.

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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Patrick Curry
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
July 18, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I'm continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Patrick J. Curry. Today is July 18, 2005 and Mr. Curry and I or Lieutenant Colonel Curry and I are in again the interview room of the Special Collections Library of the Vietnam Archive and this interview's part of the Vietnam Oral History Project. Today, again, the eighteenth and it's about 1:37 pm Central Standard Time. Pat, why don't we pick up where we left off in 1966 and you had just left Trinity University. I wanted to ask you about your wife, Diana and you have told me off recording that you all met while there at Trinity and somewhere in there and if you would, kind of relate this very significant person in your life because you all are still married today and tell me about your meeting and how that happened.

Patrick Curry: Yeah, we are still married today coming up on thirty-eight years this year. I was a student at Trinity. One of my fraternity brothers got me a summer job as a lifeguard at Randolph Air Force Base. Diana's dad was a career Air Force NCO and she was coming to the pool at that time. And we met and the girls were taking turns having crushes on the lifeguards as those things go and when it was Diana's turn to have a crush on me, I took her up on it.

RV: Okay.

PC: And we started dating. She's three years younger than I am, which created an interesting situation and nobody could figure out…

RV: You were twenty-one or twenty.

PC: I was actually twenty when we met.

RV: '65, okay, 1965.

PC: Actually, I was nineteen when we met.

RV: Okay, so she was sixteen.

PC: She was sixteen, yeah.

RV: Okay, all right, I'm sorry, go head.

PC: No, that's all right. And yeah, I caught a bit of grief about it from some friends and didn't much care and pretty soon they figured it out and everything was fine. Everybody loved Diana and that was not the issue, it was just the difference in ages that she was still in high school and I was in college.

RV: Right.

PC: And at that time, that's a big significant difference. Of course, now it's nothing, but at that time it was. And anyway, we started dating. Her father retired, moved off to California to work for Northern Aircraft out there. I stayed in San Antonio until I went in the Army. But we did stay in touch, stayed together. Just as a stroke of good luck, of which I've had several, when I joined the Army and I was getting ready to go to basic training, I was supposed to go to Ft. Polk, Louisiana for basic training. And at the last minute, they found out Ft. Polk was full and they sent me off to Ft. Ord, California. And so I was actually only a few hundred miles from Diana. Didn't help in basic training because we couldn't get six inches outside the company area.

RV: Right.

PC: But at least I was relatively close. And then again, when I was going off to Infantry Advanced Individual Training, AIT, "You're going to Ft. Polk, Louisiana." Man, and then at the last minute, Ft. Polk was full, I stayed at Ft. Ord for AIT. And after a couple of weeks, we started getting weekend passes.

RV: Right.

PC: And so I could go down to Los Angeles and visit and see her. So that worked out very well. And then I stayed there while I was…I had applied and been accepted to OCS (Officer Candidate School) and so I stayed there while I was waiting for a slot to open up. And as what they call permanent party as opposed to being a trainee, I

was an Assistant Drill Sergeant. Of course, we were off every, almost every weekend, so I got lots of opportunity to go down and visit and she came up to visit, etc., so.

RV: How did it go over with your parents about the age difference and when you all first met, started, whenever they realized you were serious?

PC: Um, well, my parents just was sure that I was much too young and irresponsible to get married. And they would have disapproved if I had been engaged to Queen Elizabeth. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: So, as I'm sure Prince Philip would have, but anyway, so it didn't really, it wasn't really a major factor.

RV: Okay.

PC: Her parents were thrilled to death; they loved me.

RV: Okay. So Trinity then worked out well for you and being down in that area in that sense where you were able to meet Diana at Randolph.

PC: Yeah.

RV: Okay, well, in '66, you're out of Trinity and tell me what your mind was like, your decision-making and where you saw yourself going.

PC: Well, and that's really the issue is I didn't really see myself going anywhere. I think I mentioned that I had flunked out of school, really no direction, no purpose, no idea where I was gonna go, what I was gonna do, floating from job to job.

RV: Was that hard for your father?

PC: Oh yeah. Yeah, very, very difficult for him. He had a pretty good ideas of what he wanted me to do and I didn't do them. And it was difficult for my mother too, very difficult.

RV: Yeah, of course. Did they have an aspiration for you as far as career? Were you kind of, not told, but was there an idea of what they wanted you to do?

PC: No. Really all they really wanted and expected was to graduate from college. They didn't much care specifically what I did, but they wanted me to graduate from college. And what I say what I did in terms of making a living, but I was expected to graduate from college.

RV: Okay.

PC: I just wasn't ready.

RV: Right.

PC: And you know, I was pretty immature. And like I said, fell in with a bunch of good guys and had a good time, but did not exactly shine academically.

RV: Right. Now is this when you start thinking about the military?

PC: Yeah, when I got the letter from Trinity that said, "Well, you can't come back;" I thought, "Man, this is just a non-starter. I mean, I'm not going anywhere, I'm not doing anything." And at that time, I think it's less of a perception now, but at that time, there was a perception, even with Vietnam going on that, you know, if you were that age and kind of at loose ends, that the military was a good option.

RV: Right.

PC: And so that was…after I looked around and saw what kind of jobs I was going to be able to get and how much I was going to be able to make and where it was going to take me, it just was, I mean, it was pointless. And so I thought I'd try the military.

RV: Now this is even in the face of the war.

PC: Yes. The war was a positive factor.

RV: Okay. Well I want to ask you, I want you to tell me what you mean by that.

PC: Okay.

RV: But also tell me what you knew about what was happening in Southeast Asia. I mean, we have ground troops there in 1966 obviously, but you know, kind of leading up to that, what were you aware of, of what was happening?

PC: Well, basically what I saw on the evening news and what I read in the paper. I had learned already I think to take that with a little bit of grain of salt. But there was a lot at that time, in 1965, '66 that was a lot less of the very strong, strong anti-war sentiment. It was there, but it was not as strong and not as overt as it was even just a couple of years later. And my circle of friends, my best friend's father had been our career Air Force Officer; he was a doctor and a full Colonel in the Air Force. Another friend's father had been a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army, MPs (Military Police). So my immediate group of friends was pretty much pro-military and certainly not anybody who was anti-military. And there was not even then a lot of anti-military sentiment; that came

on later. And so it wasn't a negative thing. And you know, I knew there was a war going on and that the political battles were raging back and forth and the corruption in the Vietnamese government, etc. But you know, that was when you're twenty-one, that's not something you pay a lot of attention to.

RV: Right, right.

PC: It was the combat that was interesting and exciting and that's what I paid the most attention to.

RV: Okay.

PC: One thing that did come up before I went in that made a big impact on me was the My Lai massacre and I think that the United States did not cover itself with glory in that incident and especially people rushed out to give Ernest Medina a job when he should've been court marshaled and put in Leavenworth and Cally should've been jailed for life. They murdered innocent people and there can be no justification for that, I don't care what you're doing. And those guys got not one one-hundredth of what they deserved and certainly had it been up to me, they'd gotten a lot worse. And that made a real negative impact on me; not about the Army, but just about…

RV: Sure, sure. Just about the conduct in warfare and how you're supposed to conduct yourself and how you're not supposed to conduct yourself.

PC: Well, an Army officer's supposed to have honor, you're supposed to have a sense of honor and a sense of decency, it's part of being an officer. And neither one of those two and many of their superiors had that and that was very disturbing to me.

RV: Okay. If you had to ask the twenty-one year old Pat Curry why the United States was in Vietnam, what would he say, what was the reason do you think?

PC: I believed at that time and although it's not popular, I still believe that there's a lot of truth in the Domino Theory, that the Communist strategy at that time was to try to get small gains over time. And that at some point, if we wanted to maintain our position in the world, we had to draw a line and say, "This far in, no further." We did it on the 38th Parallel in Korea and I think that's what we did in Vietnam and I think it was the right thing to do, I thought it was the right thing to do at that time and I think today it was the right thing to do; distinguishing the fact that it was the right thing to do from the fact that we really didn't handle it very well.

RV: Okay.

PC: But I think our intentions, our motives were noble.

RV: You saw it more in a Cold War. You know, here are these two ideological blocks and if we don't say no at some point, when are they going to stop?

PC: Exactly.

RV: Okay.

PC: Exactly right.

RV: Okay. Well tell me about joining the Army and that process and how you went about that.

PC: Um, well, I went down and I knew that I wanted to be an officer, but didn't have a college degree and I visited all the services and the only service where you could get a diploma or get a commission without a college degree was the Army. They had a very active Officer Candidate School program. So I said, "Okay, I'll go in the Army," and got with that recruiter who was both surprised and pleased to see me walk in and signed up. And when the appointed day came, I went down there and they gave us our physical, took us out to the airport and shipped us off to Ft. Ord.

RV: And this was in San Antonio?

PC: I went from San Antonio, right.

RV: Okay. Was your father happy that you decided to go head and join?

PC: I think relieved is a better word that I was finally doing something and he had wanted me after everything with school, he had wanted me to go in the military and he was right. So yeah, I think relieved, my mother too.

RV: How about Diana?

PC: Well, she was just kind of supportive, you know, if that's what I wanted to do and what I felt I needed to do it was okay with her.

RV: Okay, all right. So you go to Ft. Ord, California.

PC: Ft. Ord, California.

RV: And tell me what basic training was like. What are your memories, what do you see when I say that?

PC: Oh my god. Well I was in C41, C Company, 4th Battalion, 1st Training Brigade. Please don't ask me why I remember that. And I'll never forget, we got up

there, it was about three o'clock in the morning, we'd been on an airplane, been on a bus and this Dill Sergeant gets on the bus and he's got the Smokey the Bear hat on and of course, the crisp fatigues and all that. He says, "I want to welcome you to the United States Army and Ft Ord, California. Now get your asses off this bus and get in formation." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And I'll admit that at that point I had some second thoughts, but by then, it was too late. And went through all the in processing and all of that. And I was not anything remotely resembling in good shape and so the first three or four weeks were pretty tough on me.

RV: A lot of physical training.

PC: Physically. Yeah, yeah, all the time. You had to do the bars before…the overhead parallel bars, before you could get in the Mess Hall, push-ups. Ft. Ord is full of deep sand, being right on the coast like it is and low crawling through fourteen inches of sand is not fun; and long runs and full pack and rifle and everything. But probably the worst part was Ft. Ord had had a Meningitis scare, they'd had a couple of soldiers, trainees, die from Meningitis. And the bad news is, their parents found out over the radio. Yeah, that was rough. But anyway, they were doing everything they could to minimize the possibility of Meningitis. And part of it was it's apparently highly contagious, so we could mingle/mix with other members of our own platoon and that was it. We couldn't even see the other members of the other platoons in the same company. We were not allowed out of the company area. Once in a while, we'd get in formation, they'd close the PX (Post Exchange) and we'd get in formation, they'd take us down, we could go through the PX real quick and get some basic supplies. They would open, these were the old style World War II type barracks, the old wooden barracks that you see and we had to keep because high temperatures are conducive to Meningitis, we had to keep…every other window was open on the top and then the other windows were open on the bottom.

RV: Okay.

PC: And this was in October/November and you know, allow cross flow and got up one morning and I was the Trainee Platoon Sergeant because I had some ROTC

(Reserve Officer Training Corps) and I had a little room down at the end of the building and I came out of my room and looked and you couldn't even see the other end of the building. On the inside, the fog had come in during the night.

RV: Oh my gosh.

PC: And with all the open windows, it just infiltrated and it was a real pea soup fog and the barracks were just totally full of fog.

RV: Wow.

PC: (Laughing) And so that was kind of interesting.

RV: Yeah. How did you do with the military discipline, the lifestyle?

PC: Oh, I did fine with the discipline. I mean, I was used to that and it wasn't a lot different than in home.

RV: Right.

PC: In many aspects and yeah, I had no problem with the discipline at all; I fit right in with that.

RV: Weaponry, the weapons training, how did you do?

PC: I did very well. Of course, in basic, we didn't get to use a lot of weapons. We did the M-14 at that time, threw hand grenades and that kind of stuff. But yeah, I enjoyed that part of it. I had been in marksmanship training when I was younger, like around twelve, thirteen and had done a lot of shooting, so it was not new to me at all and I was pretty much used to that, no transition there at all.

RV: Okay.

PC: Had done some hunting and that kind of stuff.

RV: Right, right. What was a typical day in basic training as you remember it?

PC: Up about five thirty, cleaned barracks, go to the Mess Hall, come back, final clean on the barracks and go out and get in formation and normally march off to or run to a training location, a lot of different kinds of training. Obviously a lot of weapons training, a three day bivouac in the rain where I learned never to camp on the side of a hill because your feet slide out the end of the tent and your feet and sleeping bag get rained on.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And you wake up in the morning with very cold feet and a soaking wet sleeping bag that weighs about ninety pounds. But the ranges were all out along the coast and so we would typically, with full pack and weapon, run out to the ranges and if that's where we were going for the day. We did quite a bit of forest marches where we would just move from point A to B as quickly as we could. And since I was tall with long legs, I could take long strikes; I was always in the front rank. And the short guys in the rear hated me because we could set quite a pace. And we had a couple of nighttime exercises; we practiced charging out of an Armored Personnel Carrier and setting up a perimeter, that kind of thing. I was, at that time, relatively surprised that very little of it was actually Vietnam oriented.

RV: Well, I was going to ask you, did they talk about Vietnam?

PC: Oh, they talked about it but that's all. The training was there was no specific jungle training.

RV: Right.

PC: There was no training on what to look at as far as booby traps and that kind of stuff. Some of that came and I went to infantry AIT (Advanced Individual Training) and some of that came then.

RV: Right.

PC: But I had frankly expected more Vietnam specific training in basic, it really wasn't there.

RV: Were any of your instructors if you remember, were they Veterans of Vietnam or…?

PC: Almost all of them.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah.

RV: Did they tell you about it?

PC: No, they really didn't; really didn't talk about it very much. The relationships between the DIs (Drill Instructors) and the trainees were pretty formal. And our Company Commander was a Vietnam Vet. We had one 1st Lieutenant who was an aviator and he was Vietnam Vet. Of course, the 2nd Lieutenants had not been there yet, they were all going, but they hadn't been there yet.

RV: Yeah, okay. How much did you keep in touch with your family and what was going on back in Texas?

PC: Oh, quite a bit. I wrote a lot of letters. You know, you get so lonesome in a situation like that and at night, I mean, we didn't have a TV or anything like that, radio if you were lucky. So it got pretty lonesome. I had guys come in my room; I had a room because I was the Trainee Platoon Sergeant, everybody else was just out in the bay. And I had guys come in my room and just sit down and sob because they were so lonesome and so homesick and they didn't want the other guys to see them. And so I just kind of, you know, let them go until they were done, not much more I could do. But so you wrote a lot of letters and mail call, that old cliché about mail call is really true, that is a big part of the day. And you could see faces brighten or fall as mail call went on, that was really a big deal. This thing they have now about, "Write to a soldier."

RV: Yes.

PC: That's a real thing, that works, that really works.

RV: Yeah, you can actually adopt a soldier on the Internet. It's amazing how things have changed since then.

PC: It is.

RV: A lot of support for the troops, a lot of interaction between the troops and the public.

PC: And I just can't even begin to tell you how happy I am to see that.

RV: Yeah, we'll talk about that in detail when we get to post-Vietnam and kind of comparing and contrasting what happened with you and your generation and what happened, what's going on now. You were a leader in basic. You are almost designated that leader, but tell me how you felt, before we start talking about advanced training, how did you feel in that leadership role? Did you try to kind of stand on the radar as a leader or were you out there and playing that role and really doing it?

PC: I was really out there trying to play that role and trying to do it; pretty inexperienced, well, totally inexperienced.

RV: Right.

PC: Not really any good ideas about how to get things done and make things happen; just the authority of the position and the backing of the Drill Sergeant carried a

long way and that helped. Really didn't have a lot of problems. Of course, in basic, you know, you're so under the thumb if you will. It's such a controlled environment that you don't really expect or get a lot of dissention or a lot of discipline problems, very, very rarely. The real problems we had were guys who were having physical problems. We had a guy with asthma, came back from a run one day, a long run, and he was blue. I mean, he even scared the Drill Sergeants and they called an ambulance and rushed him off.

RV: They had his medication or he had his medication with him.

PC: Yeah.

RV: But still…

PC: He hadn't told anybody he was asthmatic because he wanted to stay in the Army. And so nobody knew, so they look down, here's this blue guy gasping for breath on the ground, called an ambulance and the only time we saw him again is when he came back to pack up his stuff because he got a medical discharge right now.

RV: Wow.

PC: We had another guy who absolutely loved the Army. He had been sleeping on a park bench and scrounging in dumpsters for food and he said, "Man, I got a bed, I've got two blankets, I get three good meals a day, the roof doesn't leak." He said, "I am just…I'll stay here forever." He was just happy as he could be. Good soldier too.

RV: Yeah. You know what happened, I mean, he finished basic and went on to advanced?

PC: Yeah, he went off somewhere else and you know, I don't know what happened to him after that.

RV: Okay, okay. It's interesting, that makeup of the Army then, you know, of the different kind of walks of life that come into it. There are a lot of stereotypes of that and that's true, you all had all kinds of different people there.

PC: We did. That was when the draft was still going. We had guys with a Master's degree plus and we had guys who were fourth grade dropouts, which made for an interesting mix.

RV: Yes.

PC: You could walk out into the barracks bay, there'd be six radios on and all of them would be on a different station. But yeah, we had the full spectrum of society. We had just about everything you could name.

RV: And this goes for, what, eight weeks, twelve weeks?

PC: It was eight weeks at that time.

RV: Eight weeks, okay. And at the end of this, did you know kind of where you were going, what you would do as far as advanced or were you going to go to advanced infantry or…?

PC: I knew I was going to advanced infantry.

RV: Okay.

PC: But as I think I've mentioned, I thought I was going to go to Ft. Polk.

RV: Yes.

PC: And then at the last minute, it filled up again and I wound up staying at Ft. Ord. And I was in A32 WTSU. WTSU is Weed the Shit Up. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And we had a really gung-ho Company Commander and real gung-ho Drill Sergeants. And I'll give you one example. One day we had a real bad storm and I mean, it was blowing and raining and cold and nasty. And our company was the only company in the brigade that went out training that day.

RV: And you were all proud of that I'm sure.

PC: We were all proud of that. We got a day off later on a nice day. But yeah, we were proud of that. And the barracks were absolutely spit shined. I mean, you could eat off the floor. Nobody walked on the center part of the floor. And it was all, at the time, I really didn't understand a lot of it, but later on with a little perspective, it's all part of that, building that sense of discipline and that sense of teamwork. And the guys who were not part of the team were really ostracized. Some of them didn't care, but nevertheless, they were really ostracized. And of course, if you walked on the center part of the floor, three or four guys would jump on you and kick your butt. So nobody did that, but not everybody played the game fully in terms of cleaning the barracks and that kind of thing.

RV: In terms of leadership, you mentioned you had really good DIs and Lieutenants there. What, in your opinion at that time was making a good leader in the Army? I mean, you're sitting here training to be an officer and you're going to hopefully go to OCS, is where you're aspiring. What made a good leader, what made them so good?

PC: Well, you know, it's interesting. When I was in basic, no I'm sorry. I stayed there to become an Assistant Drill Sergeant. And we had three Lieutenants. One of them was the Vietnam Vet I mentioned. We had another guy who, and they'd all go onto infantry OCS at Ft. Benning. He had maxed the PT (Physical Training) test, five hundred points at Ft. Benning and everybody kind of went, "Ohh." Because at that time, it was a fairly challenging test, quite a different skills, not just physical.

RV: Right.

PC: And then we had another guy and do you read *Beetle Bailey*?

RV: Yes.

PC: Lieutenant Fuzz?

RV: Yes.

PC: He's real.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And he was in my company.

RV: Okay.

PC: So the question really is what was the difference between them? And I think the difference was number one, that the good guy, the guy who had maxed the PT test whose name I don't remember, he was kind of approachable. You know, now it was very much an officer/enlisted man relationship, but he was approachable, you could talk to him. You could tell he didn't think he was better than we were because we were enlisted men; he was an officer. With Lieutenant Fuzz, that was not the case. He just thought he was a little bit better than we were and was not hesitant to let us know that. And that kind of thing breeds resentment very quickly and did. And the good guy would take you aside and talk to you, always in private and he might chew your butt a little bit, but you could tell it was to make things better. You know, correct something that had not gone right. The other guy, you kind of felt like he did it because he enjoyed it. And those are

some of the real differences and they all tried real hard to lead by example, I mean, there was no exceptions to that. It's just that the good guy set a lot better example.

RV: What then, you said you all were pretty tight. You're out there in the rain marching and training, what made the team, how did you forge a good team from all those different people? And these are the folks, you all are at the last stage, if you're not going to become an officer, you're going to Vietnam and you're going to be part of a team in a real live combat situation, so what was the Army and what do you then, and looking back at it, think was a good team, what made it?

PC: That's a good question, I'm not sure I have a good answer. Like I said before, you know, that real strong discipline, that distance between the Drill Sergeants and the trainees kind of made the trainees kind of band together. And probably ninety percent of the guys did that, they would do something just on a cooperative basis, not because somebody was there beating them on the head. And it's an old Army cliché that you always got that ten percent that are just never going to be worth a damn no matter what you do and we had that.

RV: You had that?

PC: Oh sure. And I had one guy in my…I was a Squad Leader, Trainee Squad Leader in AIT and I had one guy who was just completely useless and never would do anything. And he and one buddy and they were just off by themselves and nobody else had very much to do with them, but they just never would really participate.

RV: Right. So having a disciplinary atmosphere, having that enforced and you all having to kind of forge yourselves together…

PC: Yeah, to survive.

RV: Okay.

PC: Really. And there was quite a bit of pressure. It was, you know, I think as much internal pressure as anything else, but it was…I mean, the schedule was long. You get up at five thirty in the morning; you might not get back until one thirty the next morning or even later. So you were tired, ate a lot of C-rations, which is an indescribable treat. (Laughing) And I'm being facetious when I say that. And so there was a lot of pressure there and there were some pretty mild disagreements. Every once in a while,

you have a shouting match or a pushing match or something like that. But it was, it was pretty tense.

RV: Was there ever any physical discipline from the officers and the DIs enforcing things?

PC: Yes, but it was very, very illegal and it was very rigidly enforced by the higher command. When I was in basic, we had a Drill Sergeant who had pushed a trainee. And if you were giving people problems during a run or something like that, they'd make you get out and run around the formation as a whole and this guy was having to do that and the Drill Sergeant pushed him a couple of times, you know, Buck Sergeant. And of course, at that time at basic training, you know, a Buck Sergeant was like god to us. And somebody reported it and myself and two or three other guys got called into the IGs (Inspector General) office and they did a big investigation and finally concluded that the complaint was justified and they almost court marshaled him, but they wound up giving him a field-grade Article 15. And I know they gave him a big fine, but I can't remember whether they reduced him or not, but I know he was not…he was no longer a Drill Sergeant.

RV: So you were not supposed to touch the recruits?

PC: Oh no.

RV: Or trainees?

PC: Absolutely forbidden except to do something like adjusting a harness on a rucksack or a weapon or something like that. But touching the trainees and boy, when I became an Assistant Drill Sergeant, I can't tell you how many times I got lectured on this. "Do not touch the trainees."

RV: Okay, all right. What kind of leader were you then?

PC: I don't think I was a very good one. I think I was number one, too inexperienced and number two, I don't think I was really strong enough; I wasn't assertive enough. And part of that I think comes with experience. I tried hard, I got things done, but I think I could have been better had I been a little more assertive and a little more firm than I was.

RV: Okay. Tell me about advanced. What did you all do, what was your typical day like and really leading toward what was the Vietnam specific training?

PC: Well, the idea was, be a grunt and everything we did was infantry oriented, which included a lot of communications training, a lot of training on how to call in artillery, that kind of thing, land navigation, but most of it was basic infantry stuff. Fired a lot of weapons; M-14, M-14E2, M-79 Grenade Launcher, M-60 Machine Gun, 50-Caliber Machine Gun, which is a hoot. If you haven't done it, you ought to try it. Mortars, bazooka, that old tube, you know. Recoilless Rife, 106 Recoilless Rifle; just a lot of different weapons.

RV: How were you with all this?

PC: I was good. (Laughing) I'm sorry, but I was good!

RV: No need to apologize for that.

PC: I was a good marksman. You know, it's something that's funny to go on to a lot of years later; the one thing I could never fire was a 45-Caliber pistol.

RV: Really?

PC: I could not hit a bull in the butt with a 45. As I got older, I got better and better. By the time I retired, I was shooting expert every time. No idea why, but I just got better and better as time went on. But yeah, I had a lot of the little…goo gosh you get to wear for being a marksman except for the 45.

RV: Right.

PC: And I really enjoyed the weapons training.

RV: Was that common; did everybody kind of like that part of it?

PC: Nope. There were some guys that were just terrified; I mean had never held a weapon in their life. We had a couple of guys from New York; they didn't even know what a rifle looked like. And they were just scared to death of it.

RV: What do you do with people like that?

PC: The Drill Sergeants tend to take them aside and give them a lot of individual attention and kind of try to ease them into it a little more slowly and they take them off to one side because the idea was to get these folks through training successfully.

RV: Right.

PC: And to do that, you have to qualify with your weapons. And if they don't, it looks bad for the Drill Sergeants, so they gave them a lot of extra work.

RV: Was there kind of an overriding, overarching pressure on you all to constantly impress the Drill Sergeants and impress those above you so you would get the assignment you wanted or to stay kind of out of trouble, was that pressure a daily thing, did it exist at all?

PC: It really didn't, that's more of an officer thing frankly. Having been both, that's more of an officer thing. We did what the Drill Sergeants said, most of us, I mean just unhesitatingly unquestionably, that you just didn't even, it wasn't in your scope of reality to disobey the Drill Sergeant.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean you just didn't, it was the only alternative, only option.

RV: Were you scared to mess up?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah, nobody wanted to mess up because you get singled out for individual attention and you didn't want that. And some of the Drill Sergeants were pretty abusive; some were not. You know, you just fight, anything else you get a pretty good, pretty good spectrum.

RV: Okay. What did you all do in advanced, what were your days like?

PC: Well again, up at five thirty, get cleaned up, a little bit of barracks, breakfast. And we had specified time for breakfast; we had to eat. Back, finish up the barracks, out in formation. We almost always either walked or ran to the training sight. If it was real late when we finished, they might get a truck to bring us back, almost always walked or ran out; again, part of the physical conditioning. PT everyday, I probably didn't mention that when I was talking about basic training. We did PT every single day.

RV: When what encompassed PT?

PC: Well they had at that time the daily dozen and that was a dozen different exercises that you did a varying number of repetitions of until you got up to twelve of each, well, I say twelve, that's not right, it depended on what the exercise was. Whether I'd do fifty jumping jacks and twenty-five push-ups and that kind of thing, we did that every single day. We had our Drill Sergeant, Senior Drill Sergeant was a guy named Sergeant Chaco. He was a Filipino guy and he just had all of us in awe. We'd be out on a run and we were all probably twenty years younger than him. He would be running right beside us backwards in spit shine boots, never sweated, never messed his hair up

and we'd all be gasping, desperate for air and he'd just be running along backwards. I mean, just an amazing guy. He used to embarrass us half to death as young guys, you know, we couldn't even come close to keeping up with him.

RV: Yeah. So what else did you? Did you have classroom training, did you go out in the field and do tactical maneuvers?

PC: All of the above. Probably ninety percent of it was outside. We had some communications training inside, some basic map reading and land navigation was inside, but by far the majority of it was outside. We would practice fire and maneuver and assaults, like assaulting a hill. A lot of work with Armored Personnel Carriers, how to dismount; a little bit of that in basic, but really expanded on it here. Night marches, simulated artillery attacks. What do you do if you're marching someplace and artillery starts coming in or mortars? And the answer is, you haul butt and get out of the area. Night defense, where you put two guys in a foxhole and simulate defending a perimeter at night.

RV: Kind of a listening post type thing?

PC: Sometimes you were out on an LP, sometimes you were out on a main perimeter and hooked to an LP (Listening Post), something like that. I think the idea was to give us as broad a range of experience as possible along with the training and how to deal with those experiences; and survival escape, and evasion. They would kill a rabbit and cook it right there, kill a chicken and cook it right there to show us how. They took us out one night, gave us a little orientation and said, "Okay, you're all prisoners. Your guards have been bombed and you have just escaped. Make your way back to our mines." And they took off in trucks and there we were standing there.

RV: How many of you?

PC: Probably two hundred and fifty.

RV: Wow.

PC: And the whole company. And I was with a couple of other guys and we got separated and I wandered around forever. I finally figured out where I was going and made it back and I was far from the last one.

RV: Oh really?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. There were guys that came in four or five hours after I did. And I mean, things are different at night.

RV: Yes.

PC: And of course, at that time, the Army didn't do a lot of night training. I mean, now, we own the night now. I mean, nobody can match us at night. And I mean, it's not even close. But then, it was a lot different story and I think it was a lot of our experiences in Vietnam that led the Army to this focus on nighttime combat.

RV: What about Vietnam specific training?

PC: Some training, not a lot; some training on various kinds of booby-traps to look out for. Some of them were Vietnam specific, like a Punji stake or something like that. Some of them were just general like a Bouncing Betty mine or something like that. One thing I remember is they said that guys like to put their helmet over a hand grenade to save themselves or steel pot.

RV: Right.

PC: And they showed us a steel pot that had been put over a hand grenade and it looked like shredded wheat. I mean, the whole top was gone. So they said, "Not a good idea." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And made their point quite well. Threw grenades…of course, none of it…we didn't learn any real tactics or anything like that, I mean, as, you know, brand new privates. Although I had been promoted to PFC (Private First Class) and I was very proud of that mosquito rank. We didn't get a lot of tactics; it was basically individual soldier skills.

RV: Were they telling you or were they from, your instructors, were they from Vietnam, had they been in the war…?

PC: Almost all of them.

RV: Were they saying, "Hey, when I was there, this is what happened," telling you stories?

PC: Yeah, yeah they did. And especially the good ones did. And the bad ones would tell you stories to try to scare you. The good ones would tell you a story to try to teach you something.

RV: Keep you alive over there.

PC: Keep you alive over there and that was the good ones, yeah. So the guys who actually did the training were not actually our Drill Sergeants most of the time. They had a separate staff of trainers that did the actual training and our Drill Sergeants were responsible for getting us to and from and keeping some barracks and physical conditioning and all that kind of stuff.

RV: What did, well first of all, how would you rate the quality of training, the instructors?

PC: Well, I'd really have to divide them into two parts. The good ones, I'd probably give a B. The bad ones, I would definitely give an F. And there were some that just should not have been there, relatively few. And overall, these guys were pretty dedicated guys. I mean, they were at it from five in the morning until many times, one, two the next morning, you know, six, seven days a week. And you know, away from their families. Their families were there, but they rarely got to see them and they were a pretty dedicated group of guys. In retrospect, I learned a lot, but again, it wasn't very Vietnam specific.

RV: Okay. Did you feel like you had done well, you know, as you are getting out of the tail end of AIT?

PC: I felt like I did okay.

RV: You thought that then or you think that now?

PC: Then.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, I thought I did okay. I mean, I had done everything they'd asked of me. And my squad had done all right; we had kept up our end of the bargain in the barracks and I thought…I hadn't stood out, I wasn't, because I'm not a real physical guy, I didn't stand, I wasn't one of the top five. But I did all right and did my part.

RV: What was it that as you say, the Trainee Squad Leader, what did you do in that position? For people who don't know what, you know, day to day, do you stand in front of five guys and lead them or how does that work?

PC: Well, in basic, I was a Trainee Platoon Sergeant, which meant I was responsible for about thirty-five guys. And that meant that I was responsible for making

sure they got up in the morning, made their bunks, cleaned the barracks, cleaned the latrine, got up to breakfast on time, got back, got out to formation on time. That they were taking care of personnel hygiene, in some instances a real challenge sad to say, that there wasn't fighting the barracks, that the discipline was maintained in the barracks, those kinds of things, basically being as a Platoon Sergeant, a second line leader. As a Squad Leader, you are there with eight or ten guys and you are directly supervising them. You are the one saying, "Smith, clean the sinks. Jones, clean the toilets." And making sure that they do that, making sure that they're doing it right, etc.

RV: Okay. And again, you're looking for yourself to become an officer, to do this, to be this. Now did the others know in your platoon and in your squad, did they know this is where you're going, this is why you're in that position?

PC: Yes. Well, that really wasn't why I was in that position. I was in that position; I was a Trainee Platoon Sergeant in basic because I'd had a lot of ROTC at Trinity. And so since I had some military experience, knew what a rifle looked like, etc., they made me the Trainee platoon sergeant. And since I'd been a trainee platoon sergeant in basic, I was a squad leader in AIT. But everybody, it was no secret that I was going to try to go to OCS. They were a lot of us; I wasn't the only guy.

RV: Right.

PC: We had a lot of draftees with college degrees and they were definitely planning on OCS.

RV: How was morale?

PC: You know, it really was a very cyclic thing. When it started off, you were scared. As you got a little more confidence and got into the routine, morale and esprit kind of tended to go up. And then towards the very end as you got tired and a little tired of it, morale tended to go down a little bit, discipline got to be a little bit more difficult. Getting people to do things got to be a little more difficult. And that was true in basic, it was true in AIT and it was true in OCS too.

RV: How long was advanced, how long did it last?

PC: Eight weeks.

RV: Eight weeks again, okay. Were you then to move on from Ft. Ord?

PC: No, if I was going…I was ready to go to OCS, but if I had to stay enlisted and not go, then I wanted to stay at Ord because I was close to Diana.

RV: Right. Tell me about your contact with Diana and your relationship is evolving I assume at this point.

PC: Yeah, and we're talking about getting married. And phone calls, I'd go down to visit, lets see, we did get some weekend passes in AIT and I'd go down to visit. You know, the first weekend pass of the month, I'd fly the second; I'd ride the bus. I was taking home the magnificent sum of one hundred and twenty six dollars a month.

RV: Wow.

PC: Which was a lot more than I made in basic, but still didn't go far. But I could fly round trip to Los Angeles for forty dollars.

RV: Wow.

PC: And try that now. And so we were talking about getting married and we were trying to decide among other things, did I want to get before I went to OCS or after, those kinds of things, trying to maintain a long distance relationship.

RV: Okay. Was she in school at this point?

PC: She was. She was going to Cyprus Junior College and majoring in Math in California. In California, a lot of people start off in the junior colleges and that's what she did.

RV: Okay. And of course, hopefully we'll talk to her about these experiences here with the Oral History Project. Why don't we take a break for a minute Pat?

PC: Sure. I'm ready.

RV: Very good. Okay Pat, now, when you get out of AIT, what did they tell you? Did you know for certain that you were doing OCS, had they promised this to you, were you on this track or did you have to prove yourself to get to a point in AIT?

PC: During AIT, I had applied for OCS, had gone to an interview with the Board of Officers, gotten an evaluation from my Company Commander, all that kind of good stuff and had been selected for OCS.

RV: What was the percentage of people being selected?

PC: It was very high.

RV: Okay.

PC: Very high. I don't know what the exact percentage was, but…

RV: A lot of you who wanted to go were able to go.

PC: Went, yes. And if you had most of the qualifications and got past the Board, then yeah, you went in.

RV: What were some of those qualifications?

PC: Well, they had to believe that you had some leadership potential. Having been a Drill Sergeant, Squad Leader really helped me out there. Having a couple of years of college really helped, so Trinity had done me some good.

RV: Yes. Did they have your transcript there in front of them?

PC: Boy, I hope not. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) I was wondering if you had to do a little explaining or…

PC: No actually, I don't really believe they did. That came into play later and didn't help me, but for this, just the fact that I had the credits I think was what they were looking for and like I say, show some leadership ability, that kind of thing.

RV: Okay. So when you get out of AIT, did you have some time off before you went to OCS or…?

PC: Well, actually what happened was, I basically had a weekend pass, and this was about as I recall about February.

RV: '67?

PC: '67.

RV: Okay.

PC: And '67, yes. And wait, is that right? Yeah, it had to be.

RV: Well, you're out of Trinity in '66.

PC: Yeah.

RV: And October…

PC: Yeah. October, November, December, January, so it would've been about February of '67, that's right.

RV: And you finished basically sixteen weeks of basic and AIT.

PC: Right. And they had selected a lot more people for OCS than the individual schools could handle. I was on tap to go to Ft. Benning for infantry OCS. We had taken a physical, etc., etc. And so I became permanent party and there were a lot of us there in

varying jobs. I was very fortunate in that rather going to an administrative job somewhere or you know, sitting somewhere typing forms or something like that, I was made an Assistant Drill Sergeant with a basic training unit.

RV: Basically while you're waiting for a slot to open up?

PC: While I was waiting for a slot to open up.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so I stayed there…I became the guy that said, "Welcome to Ft. Ord, get your ass off the bus."

RV: (Laughing) Now what did you say when you…?

PC: Actually, the Drill Sergeants got on the bus, got them into the barracks and then I stayed in the barracks with them.

RV: Did you enjoy that role?

PC: I really did, I really did.

RV: Well tell me what you did?

PC: Well, did a lot of the things that the Drill Sergeants used to do. We went for a period where we hardly ever saw our Drill Sergeant. There were two of us and we essentially did it all. We got them up in the morning and supervised the trainee leaders to make sure they were supervising the troops and took them out on runs. By this time, I was in good shape. I dropped about twenty-five pounds and I was just lean and I could run. So we'd take them out on runs for physical conditioning and make sure that when the lights went out, they stayed out and that kind of stuff, that the barracks were quiet and all of that. One really interesting, we had a platoon of about, oh I guess about thirty-six guys and probably thirty of them were National Guard guys from either North or South Dakota. As you might expect, a little older, a little more mature, I mean, that was just a dream for us, for the permanent party. These guys were great.

RV: This is one of your training classes or…?

PC: It was one of our training platoons, yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, and they were great. Most of them were married and had families and they were real stable, real mature, much more so than I was. You know, we had, oh; we had a CPA (Certified Public Accountant), several guys with Master's degrees. You

know, the National Guard at that time, a lot of guys joined. And so that was really an interesting experience. The Trainee Platoon Sergeant's name was Fred White, just a real, real sharp guy.

RV: You remember him after all these years.

PC: I remember him after all these years. I even remember what he looked like then, and just a real sharp, mature, disciplined guy and did a great job. With that crew, I really had very little to do.

RV: Were you supposed to do this one eight-week period and then you go to OCS?

PC: No, it was just until a slot opened. And it turned out, the rumor was that one of the clerks in personnel, they opened his bottom desk drawer one day and found about fifty OCS applications that he had stuck in there and done nothing with and that's why we had had the long delay.

RV: Oh wow.

PC: I have no idea if that's true, but that was certainly the rumor and I know shortly after that rumor started, a whole bunch of us left and went for OCS.

RV: Okay.

PC: In the meantime, they called me down to personnel and told me I had failed the physical for infantry OCS. My eyes required too much correction to be 20/20 and I could not go to infantry or artillery or armor, even signal or MP OCS, I had to go to a combat service support. So there I had a good fifteen, twenty seconds to make a decision on my military future and I chose Ordnance Corps in logistics field and turned out to be a good choice for me, it worked out very well for me. So I went to Aberdeen Proving Ground after I guess about four months I want to say.

RV: Of being there and permanent party.

PC: Of being there and being permanent party. I went off to Aberdeen Proving Ground for OCS.

RV: Okay. Were you disappointed that…?

PC: I was very disappointed, very disappointed. But things happen for a reason, that was far and away the best choice for me. I don't believe I would've had, even had I

survived Vietnam, I don't believe I would've had a successful military career in the infantry like I did in the ordnance.

RV: Why do you say that?

PC: Well, I mentioned a couple of times, I'm not a real physical guy, I'm not a real athlete or anything like that. Infantry is very much oriented that way and I think I just would've had some real serious career problems with that.

RV: Okay.

PC: I mean, I could've done the duties, there's no question about that. I just, physically, I don't think I would've been up to it. Although, like I say, I was in good shape, but nothing like those infantry Lieutenants that had come from Ft. Benning. I mean, couldn't hold a candle to them.

RV: Right. What about you and Diana? I mean, you're going to be shipping off now, so what do you…?

PC: Well I actually had a couple of weeks of leave and went down there and stayed with her and her family and we talked about it. And at first we decided we'd get married before I left, even talked to her folks about it and everything. And then we got to talking about it some more and we thought, well, you know, this is going to be a pretty good test if we're really serious. You know, lets see if we…because we had been on and off twenty five times.

RV: Oh really?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. Let's get married; no, we're not going to get married; let's get married; no, we're not going to get married. So we had been engaged and unengaged numerous times.

RV: Okay.

PC: So we decided that I would go off to OCS and we would see what would happen.

RV: Good decision?

PC: Excellent decision for both of us, really good decision for both of us for a lot of reasons. And so I kissed her goodbye and got on the plane and went off to Aberdeen for OCS.

RV: Your mental attitude and your state of mind going into Aberdeen, were you still disappointed, had you gotten over it now?

PC: I'd gotten over it pretty much, not one hundred percent, but pretty much. Accepted it, you know, it's reality, I didn't have any choice in it. And at the time, I thought, "Well, you know, when I get out, I can always transfer to infantry" which I wound up not doing.

RV: Right.

PC: As a very good choice. So yeah, I'd kind of gotten over that and was just going to…I was scared to death and just thought I'd try to see if I could survive. This attrition rate in OCS was pretty high.

RV: Right.

PC: Getting in was easy; staying in was not easy.

RV: Right, right.

PC: And so it was number one, one of the most difficult things I've done. I probably wouldn't do it again for a million dollars, but if I had to go back to that point and do it all over again, I sure would, I certainly would. Does that make sense?

RV: Absolutely.

PC: It was tough.

RV: Were you expecting that?

PC: Oh, I didn't know, I'm not sure I really knew what to expect, but I didn't think it was going to be tougher than WTSU, but it was, it definitely was.

RV: Had you been adequately prepared, you know, mentally, physically, for your skills? Was this a natural stepping-stone for you?

PC: No it really wasn't, it was really…we had what was called Senior Candidates. OCS was twenty-three weeks long, after nineteen weeks, you became a Senior Candidate. You got to put a little red tab under your brass and the Junior Candidates treated you like an officer, which was just a good plan, really helped you make that transition.

RV: Right.

PC: Because, boy, as a Junior Candidate, if you look under the scum on the bottom of the pond, that's where you find the Junior Candidates. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And so they would come harass us pretty regularly, but it was just constant and to a very, very high standard. I mean, there was just zero tolerance for errors and screw-ups and that kind of thing. And you didn't get very many of them before you were out.

RV: Right.

PC: You took turns rotating through various leadership positions. You might be a Platoon Sergeant this week, you might be a Platoon Leader next week, be Company Commander the weekend after, First Sergeant, I mean, the week after, First Sergeant the week after that. And you were evaluated by your Platoon Leader, the real Lieutenant in every one of those positions and counseled on those evaluations and etc. So it was very, very intense, a lot of it, excuse me, I didn't understand at the time, came to understand later. I learned an enormous amount without realizing I was learning an enormous amount. One of the things they always focused on was attention to detail and that was a big change for me and I really learned that. And I learned a lot about self-discipline and doing things because you want to. You don't want to, but you need to and you do it because you have the internal self-discipline to do it. I surprised myself.

RV: You've kind of described yourself as being a good, an adequate leader above average leader, but not, you know, you said you weren't in that top five, you weren't out there in the front and many things, but you did well. And here you are now in something that's that much more difficult and you're learning, you're doing maybe better than you expected.

PC: I think much better. Once I got in and saw what was going on, kind of understood what was expected of me, I certainly did better than I expected under those, in that situation. Yeah, I didn't really think I was going to do as well as I did.

RV: When you finished, were you proud of yourself?

PC: Boy, I was. As a Junior Candidate, you run everywhere you go; you do not walk a step anywhere. And I weighed one hundred and fifty pounds, I was six foot three, or I still am. If I stood sideways and stuck out my tongue, I'd look like a zipper.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: I mean, they had just; you missed a lot of meals. You weren't supposed to, but you…

RV: But you did because…

PC: The idea was perform under pressure. You know, so it was just constant unremitting and heavy and so you missed a lot of meals and you ran a lot and a lot of PT. And like I said, I weighed one hundred and fifty pounds. Diana hardly recognized me when I got back out to California. But yeah, I think we were all proud of ourselves.

RV: Right.

PC: The guys who were not motivated didn't make it. We had one guy and I can remember what he looks like and I can't remember his name, but he had a great plan. His whole plan was he was not going to go to Vietnam. He went to basic, he went to AIT, he got drafted, went to basic, went to AIT and went to OCS fully intending to get to his twentieth or twenty first week and drop out. The theory being by then, he wouldn't incur the additional service obligation that you incurred two years for going, from the time you graduated for going to OCS. He wouldn't incur that additional service obligation, but it would be too late in his tenure as a draftee to send him to Vietnam. Well, you couldn't drop out until I think it was the twelfth week. And here was this guy with these great plans to stay until twentieth week. And man, he was the first one in line at the twelfth week when you could drop out. He couldn't get out of there fast enough. And nobody shed any tears to see him go either.

RV: I bet he was bringing you all down to an extent.

PC: He was, he was.

RV: Describe what this ordnance OCS was for those, you know, who have no idea what you would go through training for that kind of discipline, but also what OCS is like and of itself.

PC: OCS, the idea was to teach you two things. One was to be an officer and a leader and the other was to teach you the skills, the set of knowledge that you needed to be an Ordnance Officer, what kinds of things did you need to know to be an Ordnance Officer. What do you know about munitions, Ordnance Corps were responsible for ammunition.

RV: Right.

PC: Missiles, maintenance, those kinds of things; and to give you as much leadership experience as they could cram into you in twenty-three weeks. And so we actually had quite a bit more classroom type training than we had had before. Quite a bit of classroom training on Vietnam and some really excellent instructors on the war in Vietnam and its causes and cures and things like that. In fact, that's where I heard about the book, *Street without Joy* by Bernard Fall. I learned about that from a Lieutenant who was an instructor on Vietnam and OCS, I was impressed and impressed by the book too. And we learned a little bit about the political aspects and the things that were going on. I had a lot of classroom training on a, well for instance, how to run a shop office, which is something you do as an Ordnance Lieutenant if you are in maintenance and those kinds of things. Again, lots of physical training, lots of running, those kinds of things. Of course, the barracks had to be spit shined to the highest degree everyday. And said at the time didn't make much sense to me, but you know, it taught that attention to deal, function under pressure, those kinds of things. And there was a rigid rule. Oh, and the academics, you could flunk out on academics.

RV: Right. You actually graded…

PC: Actually graded.

RV: Right, right.

PC: Yes.

RV: How did you do?

PC: About the middle, yeah, about the middle. So the academics, you took tests and everything else. And we didn't have many guys flunk out on academics, but we had some. Learned how to give classes. As an officer, you're expected to give a lot of training, so learned how to do that and we were graded by NCOs and they were tough. That really helped me out, I'm a good public speaker; I can get up and give a speech in front of anybody.

RV: And you were that way then?

PC: No, I learned that there.

RV: Oh okay.

PC: That's an acquired skill that OCS taught me; there's a long list of those skills that OCS taught me.

RV: Do you want to go through that?

PC: Well, a couple of them I mentioned. You know, how to function under pressure. You know, I never really had been under real pressure. I mean, I mentioned in AIT, there was some pressure and that kind of stuff, but nothing like this, I mean nothing like this. And I mean, it was just on you all the time and you learned how to function or you don't make it. Paying attention to deal, you know. If you get all the little things done right, then the big things will get done right too. Really, a lot of self-discipline, a lot of team work working with the other guys because if you didn't work with the other guys, neither one of you was going to make it. You could kind of be a lone wolf in basic and AIT and get through, it might not be pleasant, but you get through. If you were that way in OCS, you didn't make it because you couldn't get everything done. A lot of military history…

RV: So you actually increased your intellectual knowledge.

PC: Yes, as well as, yeah. In fact, we had to write a paper, I wrote a paper on Management Information Systems, which was a fairly new concept at that time. So there was some intellectual challenge well, but unquestionably, you know, you were supposed to go to meals, you were supposed to be required to go to meals, so you'd go down there and sign in and then not eat and come back and do some more work. You were supposed to be in bed at I guess it was nine or ten and there was just no way. We had to go to bed at nine or ten because they'd come through and check on you. As soon as they were gone, you know.

RV: Turn your light back on or a flashlight or candle?

PC: Well, flashlight under the blanket or you'd go in the latrine where the nightlights were on all night, sit there and shine boots, you know, because your boots had to be spit shined all the time. And once in a while, they'd catch you. And I was standing in the shower one night about midnight, the shower curtain opens, "Whurr," and there was some Lieutenant, the Duty Officer, you know.

RV: And you're studying?

PC: I was not; I was in the shower.

RV: You were actually showering?

PC: I was actually showering in the shower and so I got caught on that one and he just sent me to bed. But they were, the Lieutenants were tough, some of them a little too tough, but the Command took good care of us, they worked our butts off, they expected a lot of us, but they took good care of us. I had hurt my foot and boy, you didn't want to go on sick call if you could avoid it, but I just couldn't run, I mean, I just couldn't do it. So I went on sick call and the doctor asked me what happened and then I said, without even thinking, I said, "Well," and I forget what we called the Lieutenants, Platoon Leader maybe, "made me run on a sore foot." Well boy, about, I went back to the company, about an hour later I got a call from the Company Commander, "What the hell happened?" He was POed, that Lieutenant got in a bunch of trouble. I mean, they were tough on us, but they were not allowed to abuse us.

RV: Right.

PC: And that was clearly a pivotal point in my life.

RV: OCS?

PC: OSC was clearly a pivotal point in my life. It had changed the kind of person I was.

RV: It sounds like you learned a lot of life lessons.

PC: An immense number, from watching the guys around me, from going through the experience, from learning I could do it. It really made a difference.

RV: Do you remember what they told you about Vietnam, that training on Vietnam? You said you read Bernard Fall's book, which is still considered one of the best books ever written on that part of the world and that kind of conflict.

PC: Well, you know, it was interesting. It depended a lot on the instructor. And I remember being surprised at the time at some of the things they could say in an Army school. We had one instructor in particular, clearly a draftee who didn't want to be there, but who was a very good instructor and he was the one who taught us the political side of it. And his thesis was we were doing it all wrong, that every General in the Army should be made to read *Street without Joy* and take a test on it.

RV: Wow.

PC: And that we were not winning the hearts and minds, that we were doing the exact opposite. And if we didn't change somewhere, we were going to lose the war.

Guess what? And I'm surprised he could say things like that, but he sure did, it was more like a college in that one specific aspect.

RV: Right, right.

PC: It was more like being at a college than in an Army school.

RV: What did you all think about this guy when he was telling you this?

PC: We were, like I said, impressed at his frankness. I wasn't impressed with…he was kind of an intellectual if you know what I mean, in that sense of the word of being obviously educated and intelligent and able to present that well and we were pretty impressed. We didn't run across a lot of intellectuals. And you know, the Army is not necessarily a good career for an intellectual in most places. And so we were kind of impressed with how bright he was, we were all kind of just, "Wow," kind of in awe.

RV: What kind of, and I'm curious as to what they were saying about Vietnam in 1967, in the spring and summer of '67? This is pre-Tet, so things are still looking like, you know, we're pushing forward.

PC: Light at the end of the tunnel, yeah. And well you know, most of the focus was, "You're going to go to Vietnam and if you don't pay attention and learn this, you're going to die." And I even used that line myself in some training classes that I gave. I tried to phrase it a little more creatively.

RV: Right.

PC: But that was the focus of most of it. You know, we were so busy trying to get from day to day to day that I don't know that we really discussed the politics of it a lot.

RV: I'm sure it's hard to remember too what was said in that classroom.

PC: Oh it is. Most of the discussion among the candidates, the officer candidates was, "Do I want to go or do I not want to go?" with the nots in the majority.

RV: And where did Pat fall?

PC: Oh, Pat wanted to go.

RV: Why?

PC: Experience.

RV: To get the experience?

PC: To get the experience, had not seen that before, had not done that before, it was exciting. My dad had done it, it was new, I wanted to go.

RV: What about those who would say, "Oh my gosh, you want to go to a war?"

PC: Yeah, I do want to go.

RV: Now from the many Veterans that I've talked to who were training to be officers, they expressed similar things, this is what they were trained to do, is that how you felt?

PC: Mmm-hmm. You know, I was in the Army; an Army exists to fight a war whether you want to or not and you know, that's what I was supposed to do.

RV: Let me step outside OCS for a second. Tell me your opinion of the current politics of the day. First of all, let's start with JFK. What did you think of John Kennedy? You know, he's only going to go '61 to '63, but and I'm going to ask you a similar question about LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson), tell me about what you thought of the American leadership?

PC: See, I just absolutely adored JFK.

RV: Why?

PC: God, he was so charismatic and he was so bright and so personable and just seemed so comfortable in his skin. You know, I'm talking obviously about the public presentation of JFK.

RV: Sure, sure. But that's what you saw.

PC: That's what I saw. In fact, I missed seeing him by thirty seconds the day before he was killed. He was in a parade in San Antonio and I got there just after he passed.

RV: Wow.

PC: And then the next day he got killed in Dallas. And I just worshiped Jacquelyn. I mean, when they lost their baby, I just cried, I just felt attached to him and I think most people did.

RV: Let me ask you this and you don't have to answer.

PC: Okay.

RV: Was your family more democratic or republican at that time?

PC: My family was pretty much apolitical.

RV: Okay.

PC: They really were. There wasn't a lot of political discussions and that kind of thing, it just wasn't a big deal in our house.

RV: Okay. So you were kind of free to make your mind up and…

PC: Yeah, yeah.

RV: So Kennedy, what do you think about Kennedy's response to what was happening in Southeast Asia? I mean, this is during Ngo Dinh Diem as President, the sink or swim with the Dinh Diem guy and…

PC: As much as I liked Kennedy, I think he blew it. I think that had he handled it differently, certainly the outcome would've been much different. And I think he could have handled it differently. I knew none of this at the time, I mean, absolutely nothing.

RV: Of course, this is…

PC: This is from years later and I think he should not have supported the corrupt regimes. I understood why he felt he needed to, but I don't think he should have. I think the price we paid for it was too high and I think he should've thrown his support to someone else if someone else could've been found. And I also think that we needed a stronger response earlier. I think one of the mistakes that we made in Vietnam that cost us so much in lives and as the cliché goes in treasure was this trickle effect where we'd add a few thousand troops and then we'd add ten thousand troops and then we'd add a division and then another division. But we did it so slowly that the enemy had too much time to prepare for it and adapt to it and deal with it and man, they were good. I mean, they were good and they were dedicated and they had a cause that they believed in. And I don't think we ever really took them seriously enough until boy, right at the end and we said, "Hey, wait a minute." But they were good fighters.

RV: What about LBJ? He takes over in 1963 and really I guess the first big, big moment for him as far as this war is concerned is the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in 1964 in August. I mean, he's kind of, you know, he's continuing Kennedy's policies for the most part, the advisory role, there are more people staging, there are more training. How did you think LBJ was handling this early time? And this is again, pre-Tet, it is when you then are going to enter into the military and this is the President who is going to effect what you do.

PC: I voted for LBJ. I'm a big fan of LBJ's Civil Rights. I'm not a, Civil Rights activities and actions, I'm not a big fan of LBJ's Vietnam War strategies, policies. I don't know if you've read Robert Carrow's series of books, boy, that was some of the best books I've ever read and I think they just illuminate him so much. He just lied too much and pretty soon people didn't believe him anymore.

RV: At first, did you all see him then as a, you know, he was the Vice President from Texas and had this persona. Did you see him as a really good President, a strong leader? Okay, we're in good hands now, we've got more on this step of President Kennedy, but we're moving forward with LBJ.

PC: Yeah, yeah I did and I supported him at the time. I mean, you know, I think it was different then; we had a different attitude towards the President then.

RV: The United States people?

PC: The United States, the people of the United States and the people of the world had a different attitude towards the President then. You know, now we know Kennedy had all those affairs, but the press never would print that, you know. And it was not Kennedy; it was the position of the President of the United States. And President Johnson was the President of the United States and because of that, he deserved my trust and my support and I think that's the way people felt then.

RV: And you think that's what the difference is, is that because of the position, that you know, whether your democrat or republican, you're going to respect the office and respect whoever's in that seat.

PC: Yeah. And between Johnson and Nixon, I think we lost that. And I can't say that I blame people for that, it was two pretty rough sessions there. And I think it's unfortunate that the attitude has changed, but you can really see it now with the very personal, very vituperative attacks on the person of the President, not on his policies or his positions, but on him personally. And the same thing was true of Clinton, you know, as the democrat.

RV: Yes.

PC: He was attacked just as viciously, maybe more so than President Bush has.

RV: And so I'm assuming anything goes mentality.

PC: Anything goes. You can say anything and do anything you want, it doesn't matter that he's the President; your job is to make him look bad.

RV: And back then, in the sixties, you didn't do that.

PC: You didn't do that; you didn't do that.

RV: Okay. Any other comments about OCS that you have?

PC: Boy, was I glad when it was over. (Laughing) We all were. The day before I graduated, I got dropped for a hundred push-ups, had a hand in the pocket and that was a no-no.

RV: Wow.

PC: In fact, back then, we wore heavily starched uniforms; you never even broke the starch on these pockets. And on one back pocket, you were allowed to carry a wallet in the other one, but you didn't carry anything ever in your shirt pockets. And I had been retired for like five years before I ever started carrying anything in my shirt pockets.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: Just I mean, they engrained it into that deeply. Actually, Vietnam, not Vietnam, OCS was a really good experience for me, was a formative experience for me and it certainly to a very large extent, I think made me what I am today.

RV: And you come out as Second Lieutenant.

PC: Come out as Second Lieutenant.

RV: And do you have orders?

PC: You have orders and you know, I mentioned before, I was lucky on numerous occasions and once again I was lucky. Instead of going to a staff job somewhere or a research job or something like that, which I wasn't qualified for, but a job in the Training Indoctrinate Command or something like that, I went Third Armor Division, I'm sorry, Second Armor Division, Second Armor Division at Ft. Hood, Texas and was a Platoon Leader in the 124th Maintenance Battalion. So I went directly to work with the troops, just a very fortuitous move for me. I was good at other things, but I never enjoyed anything more than being with the troops.

RV: Okay. And did you have time off between or did you go straight down to Ft. Hood?

PC: No, I had a couple of weeks, it was Christmas time, December 14th was my date of rank, that's the day we graduated. I flew out to California and Diana and I got married on December 23, 1967 and we drove to Ft. Hood together, bought a car, and drove to Ft. Hood together and set up housekeeping and I reported in. We lived in a mobile home and I was making three hundred and twenty five dollars a month including my quarters allowance and so we rented a mobile home, fully furnished, washer/dryer, the whole works and set up housekeeping and I started being a Platoon Leader.

RV: How were you there, when you first arrived, I understood, were you excited, were you, thought this was…?

PC: I was very excited. You know, I'm finally going to get out in the real Army as opposed to the training base. So I was going to get to see how good I was, see what I could do. I was excited about being married, nervous, but excited and wanted to see what was going on. This was an interesting time in that it was kind of the end for the real old time NCOs.

RV: What do you mean?

PC: The guys who came up through World War II and Korea and the peace time Army, the NCOs who were part of the NCO Corps and very proud of it and I think we've got a lot of them now too, but there was a time when we didn't and who considered it part of their duty to teach the Lieutenants. And I'll talk about him more when we get to Vietnam, but had a Sergeant Major, Command Sergeant Major Casimir Grenda.

RV: Do you know how to spell that?

PC: C-a-s-i-m-i-r G-r-e-n-d-a. Probably finest NCO I've ever met.

RV: And he was where?

PC: He was in Vietnam and he was the Command Sergeant Major of the battalion, the maintenance battalion I was in my last six months in Vietnam. I probably learned more from him than I did my Battalion Commander about how to be an officer. But he was the old school, you know, they'd invite him to a party with the officers, he wouldn't go, he was not an officer, he was an NCO and he was proud of it, he didn't need to be an officer. And several of the NCOs there taught me quite a bit and you know, I had a couple of the senior NCOs that if I was having a problem with somebody or

problem with another NCO, I'd go to them and ask them and they would give me a straight answer, you know.

RV: Well tell me about your duties at Ft. Hood and how long were you to be there?

PC: I was at Ft. Hood for about eight months.

RV: Did you know that going in?

PC: No.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I volunteered for Vietnam and so left after eight months.

RV: Wow. What did you do at Ft. Hood?

PC: I was started off as a Maintenance Platoon Leader and what I did was I had essentially all the mechanics who were responsible for repairing vehicles, artillery pieces, communications equipment, weapons, all the kinds of things that an Army uses and that break.

RV: Okay.

PC: Armored Personnel Carriers, tanks, and we were the first line of maintenance, maintenance support.

RV: Okay, so you had to run a shop?

PC: I had to run a shop, exactly, that's what I did. And so I did that for a few months and Ft. Hood was really in turmoil. They were taking whole units and sending them off to Vietnam. They were taking so many individuals and sending them off as replacements that a lot of units were at half or less strength. I became a Shop Officer, which is a step up that supervises all the shops and deals with the customers in terms of taking in equipment and managing it through the system and getting it back to the customer fixed. And shortly after I did that, the division was at such close strength, that they closed, I was in a forward support company and they closed all the forward support companies and start sending everything to the main support company and we had nothing to do. I mean, they took a lot of our people, but they didn't take all the officers. And we didn't have anything to do and so you know, we got the place cleaned up and got all the tools in good order and got the manuals in good order and just bored to death. And the operations portion of a maintenance battalion is called MATO. And so I went up and

talked to the MATO who was the maintenance officer for the battalion. He said, "Talk to the Battalion XO (Executive Officer). Here I was a Second Lieutenant and a Major was just, you know, half a step above god and a small step to. But I went in and talked to him and just told him, you know, "Sir, I'm bored to death, I'd like to have a job." And that impressed him, which I didn't do it for that reason, but it worked out that way. So he made me the Shop Officer of the main support company.

RV: Wow.

PC: And yeah, yeah. I keep mentioning lucky.

RV: Well obviously he's not going to put just anybody in that position.

PC: Well I like to think I had a good reputation. And you know, as a brand new, still wet behind the ears Lieutenant and that was a great job, real busy and lots of experience and lots of stuff to do. And back then, we were still working five and a half to six days a week, so it was real busy, but you know, I was always home by six at night and so Diana and I got to go do stuff. Went out on a few field exercises and was told I did well on those. And I'm sure I stepped on it more than a couple of times. And I got my butt chewed a couple of times, but you know, when you're a Lieutenant, you've got to expect that. So I would, when I was in the main support company, I would coordinate all the shops. If possible, I would try to cross level workload and I would try to make sure that no equipment sat around un-repaired too long, chase parts, deal with the customers with the customer liaison. If somebody had a special request, you know, I'm going to Vietnam in six weeks, I need this, put them at the front of the line.

RV: Talking about…can you give an example what exactly would that be?

PC: Infantry battalion might be their mortar, a mortar, a mortar.

RV: One.

PC: Need that repaired and back so they could use it for training.

RV: That's pretty important.

PC: Yeah, they thought so; put them at the front of the line. What I remember specifically that was totally non-combat related was we had an annual parade and one of the artillery units, missile carrier was down and I couldn't get the whole thing fixed, but I could get it running in time for the parade and then we'd take it back in and fix the rest of it. And I agreed with their Battalion XO, that's what I would do. And this one

Lieutenant, their Maintenance Officer said, "Well I'm not going to pick it up if it's not fixed." And I said, "Lieutenant, you better call your XO before you make that decision." And about ten minutes later, he was down there picking it up. The XO had firm ideas on whether he should pick it up or not. So dealt with those kinds of issues and problems and things like that; like I said, interesting job.

RV: You enjoyed it?

PC: Enjoyed it a lot.

RV: Okay. Any thoughts about infantry at this point?

PC: No.

RV: Are you well engrossed in this?

PC: I'm well engrossed in this and I'm pretty settled and moving forward, it seldom crossed my mind.

RV: Why then would you want to volunteer for Vietnam, to leave that?

PC: I think it's what I said before. You know, I had been in all this training, I had gotten some experience, it was an experience that I wanted to have. It was something I wanted to see and do, I felt it was the right thing to do.

RV: You wanted to see Vietnam or you wanted to see war?

PC: I wanted to see the war. Yeah, I wanted to see the war. I was really focused in that direction and so I put in my application. We had a new program coming into our unit automating the…and this was in the very early days of computers. I mean, we are talking punch cards and magnetic ledgers, magnetic strike ledgers and I mean, and those were hot stuff.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And I had been to some training on this system, so the Battalion Commander called me in and tried to talk me out of applying. Well, as a Second Lieutenant, I was so stupid, I didn't know I was supposed to say, "Yes sir," and take it back. And so it went through and of course, volunteer, I mean, I was picked up like that.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And when I brought my orders home, Diana cried.

RV: Well obviously. Did you discuss this with her before you decided?

PC: I was not very smart then. (Laughing)

RV: So that answer would be no.

PC: That answer would be no and I was not very smart. And she knew I wanted to go, but…

RV: Had she said, "No, look Pat, I don't want you to do that," I mean…

PC: If she had said that?

RV: No, did she?

PC: Oh no, no, and she never would, not to this day.

RV: Okay.

PC: She would say "I would rather you not go, I don't want you to go, but if you go, you know, I'll be here when you get back." And that's just the way she is and she's still that way. And so no, she would've never said that.

RV: So when you go back home and you bring your orders and say, "I volunteered for this…"

PC: Yup, I'm going. (Laughing) I don't remember mentioning that actually until quite a bit later.

RV: Really?

PC: Well yeah not foolish, but not dumb. So yeah, I felt pretty bad then.

RV: She cried?

PC: She cried, she did, and I wondered if I had made the right decision.

RV: How long did you have? How long did you have before you…?

PC: Six weeks, six to eight weeks, something like that. I don't really remember exactly, but it was something like that.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I went through some weapons training. I'd never been trained on the M-16. And they called it POR training, Preparation for Overseas Rotation. So I went out and had some training on the M-16.

RV: There at Ft. Hood?

PC: There at Ft. Hood. Started the process of turning my position over to a very sharp Warrant Officer, Bill Boyd. And did a little bit more training and etc. and basically out processed, got ready to go. Diana and I were making plans. We originally intended for her to go out to California. By this time, Diana was pregnant.

RV: Okay.

PC: I should've mentioned. I mentioned going to the field.

RV: Yes.

PC: I should've mentioned pregnant after I got out of the field.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so she was pregnant with our oldest daughter Lynn.

RV: Wow. How did that effect your mentality, you're getting ready to go to a war?

PC: Yeah, yeah. It definitely gave me second thoughts, but didn't change my mind. The phrase, "Young and foolish" comes to mind frequently.

RV: But looking back now Pat, do you think that was a good decision?

PC: Yeah I do.

RV: You still believe in what you…?

PC: I do, I don't regret it. I regret some of the things that happened because of it, like Diana crying and etc. but I don't regret going at all.

RV: Okay.

PC: And anyway, we had intended to get her an apartment in California near her folks, wound up with her just staying with her folks and we paid them some rent, not much, but paid them some rent and etc.

RV: Sure. Tell me about how your mother and father felt about you going?

PC: My dad was proud, you know, he was proud I was going. My mom was pretty scared because I mean, all you heard in the media was, you know, x number of deaths and it was just perceived as if, you know, is if you went, you were going to die.

RV: I mean, this was, you're volunteering literally after the Tet Offensive of 1968.

PC: Yes.

RV: You get to Ft. Hood in January '68 and you were there eight months and you volunteered I guess in what, the seventh month or so?

PC: Yeah, probably, sixth or seventh.

RV: So you're looking at the summer of '68, Tet's happened, the Counteroffensive is going on and the news isn't good. This is, I mean, what a lot of people consider is the worst time for the United States in the war, the whole time.

PC: I'm missing all the excitement.

RV: (Laughing) And I'm simply playing Devil's advocate.

PC: I understand and I'm giving you a straightforward answer.

RV: Yes.

PC: I'm missing all this excitement. Look what's going on; I'm not there. You know, I'm a soldier; I'm supposed to be there. And that's really how I felt about it.

RV: How did you all react to the Tet Offensive? It starts really end of January '68 and Siege of Khe Sanh goes on for, you know, into April and then you've, you know, long drawn out and you've got the whole March 31st speech of LBJ on TV, "I'm not going to seek nomination for the November." Why is that…?

PC: I saw that.

RV: A lot of things happening. What were you thinking?

PC: We really, based on what we heard on the television and saw on the papers, we really thought Tet was a terrible defeat for the United States.

RV: Based on what you saw media wise.

PC: What we saw media wise. We really thought we had got our butts kicked.

RV: Are you surprised?

PC: Oh very, just stunned. Because I mean, we knew we were better than they were and they had AK-47s and we had tanks and airplanes, you know, and we were just really stunned at what happened.

RV: And Westmoreland had been over in the fall saying, "Light at the end of the tunnel and we're winning."

PC: Yeah, yup.

RV: And did you all then think something else was going on?

PC: Well yeah, yeah. We thought, you know, I mean, we have two obviously incompatible situations here, which they can't both be right, they can't even both be partially right. One is completely wrong, which one is it? And it wasn't till years later I found out what a military defeat Tet was for the North Vietnamese and the VC (Viet

Cong), but they certainly won the political battle. So it just seemed like a terrible trouncing to us and we couldn't understand why Khe Sanh drug on so long with all of our B-52s and all of that, why couldn't we just go in there and clean them out? We just didn't understand.

RV: Did you have a different perspective when you came back from Vietnam?

PC: Yeah, yeah, tough load of bears, yeah.

RV: We'll talk about that then. Tell me about LBJ's speech and your reaction to him deciding to step out.

PC: Stunned.

RV: Why?

PC: Stunned, never thought Lyndon Johnson would give up. I mean…

RV: That's how you all saw it or…?

PC: That's how we saw it, that dealing with the war and the anti-war movement in the United States just was too much for him, they just whipped him, that's exactly how we saw it. He was tired and he was tired of it and it just didn't mean enough to him to continue the fight and he gave up. That's exactly how I saw it. Just, I mean, I can't describe how shocked I was. If the sun came up in the west, I would not have been more shocked; just totally different than his public persona.

RV: Tell me what you were thinking about the year 1968 and think about yourself then and including what you just said, you've got Martin Luther King killed in April, you've got Bobby Kennedy killed in July, I believe, and this is one of the most tumultuous years, the Democratic National Convention is coming up in the fall. You've got all kinds of stuff happening that just says that this…a lot of historians look at this as one of the most tumultuous years in American history, period. And here you are smack dab in the middle of it and you're volunteering to go to war and it seems, you're there at a moment in time, a moment in American history, now obviously we're looking back with hindsight here and that might be the answer to this, but did you see what was happening around you in this kind of chaotic existence and you throw in the anti-war movement and I want you to comment on that as well, what about this time period? This is an incredible time for the United States.

PC: Well you know, it all came so fast and so furious and so traumatically that I don't know that we ever really had time to analyze it. We were trying to deal with it. We spent a lot of time at Ft. Hood training for riot control duty.

RV: Really?

PC: Really. We were at a battalion party…

RV: Is this in the face of the anti-war movement or after King's assassination?

PC: After King's assassination, but some of both.

RV: Okay.

PC: And we were at a battalion party at the West Ft. Hood Officer's Club when somebody said, "My god, get in here," and we went in the bar and watched television, they were announcing that he'd been killed. And I mean, to a man, we didn't have any women officers, but to a man, we all said the same thing, we just all said, "Oh shit." And boy, that turned out to be true.

RV: Meaning, "Oh boy, it's going to all break lose?"

PC: All hell is going to break lose and it sure did. And we went on, I mean, it was like we were going to war, we were on alert, we had to move into the barracks, officers and all. We were not allowed to go home. We had to be ready to deploy on four hours notice.

RV: Wow.

PC: We were told we were going to Memphis. 1st Armor Division actually went to Chicago. We never deployed, but I sure thought we were going to.

RV: You were supposed to go to Memphis of all places.

PC: Memphis.

RV: That's where it took place.

PC: Yup.

RV: Wow.

PC: And I was much more nervous about that than I was about going to Vietnam.

RV: What was your personal reaction to Martin Luther King being killed?

PC: God, I just didn't understand it, how it could happen. I mean, I knew there were nuts out there that would want to kill somebody, but you know, we had kind of started, what to me is the down slope after Kennedy was killed and when assassination

became such a common thing and just kind of broke America's heart I think. And it just was, you know, god, it didn't have to be this way and it shouldn't have been that way.

RV: What about Robert Kennedy when he was killed?

PC: I really disagreed with Robert Kennedy's politics, but I was just sick to my stomach when he got killed and more sick to my stomach when I found out it was a Palestinian who was trying to call attention to his cause. And you know, you just start to wonder, "What in the hell is going on in the world? You know, are we just going to explode in a big ball of fire?" You know, and then you throw the violent anti-war protesting on top of it and the Democratic National Convention, all the stuff that went on there. And of course, I was really opposed to that.

RV: Tell me about that. Tell me what you saw and…

PC: Well you know, here I am as a soldier, my country right or wrong, I'm going to defend it, you know. And again, you know, as the President and that kind of thing, so I was, you know, I was pretty strongly opposed to what they were trying to do up there. I did some reading on it later on, that you know, they were trying to destroy the system, to build a new one on top of it if you will. Still don't think that's a particularly good idea. In fact, it's a terrible idea; a lot of people suffer when you destroy something. But again, didn't really understand the real reasons why they were doing it and why they felt like they had to do it; just too young to understand that I think.

RV: Did you all in general, your comrades there at Ft. Hood, did you all take issue with their tactics, the way they went about protesting versus and you just said, some of what their ideas were, but you read about that later, but did you all see it as that, "I don't like the way they're going about it," but were you okay with the fact that they had the right to descent? Did you all discuss this or did you see it as, "Hey, we're at war, you all need to dial it down?"

PC: Exactly, they did not have the right to do that.

RV: Okay.

PC: You're asking how we felt at the time.

RV: Yes, absolutely.

PC: And I still don't think they had the right to be violent and I will never concede the right to be violent about anything. They just do not have that right. They do not have the right to hurt innocent people; I don't care what they believe.

RV: Tell me how you all saw them hurting innocent people. What, just the fact that they would violently protest, they would not let people get in their way, what'd you see?

PC: Well, you know, I'm kind of mixing now and then.

RV: That's fine.

PC: Probably shouldn't do, but…

RV: That happens in interviews.

PC: But at that time, we just felt like, you know, these guys, they don't have the right to do this, they shouldn't be doing this. You know, this is the United States, they don't have the right to tear down the system, they don't have the right to try to tear down the system. You know, they have a responsibility to work within the system to change it. You know, if they don't like it, fine. Try to change it, but work from within the system to change it; you can change it that way.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so we felt I think pretty strongly about it. And you know, obviously as a bunch of Army officers, we had a fairly uniform perspective on it. I mean, we had some guys who had been drafted and were just there to do their time and get out and to go on who felt differently, but not very many.

RV: That's interesting. Did you see yourself as kind of a lifer at this point? Were you looking at a career?

PC: No, no clue, no clue. Had not even really seriously thought about it one way or the other.

RV: You had what, how many more years left on your commitment?

PC: Uh, let's see…

RV: '66, you get in.

PC: A little over a year. In fact, I'd probably got extended in Vietnam and just been discharged straight from Vietnam had I not decided to stay on for more. I went

what they called at that time volun-def. For an officer, it meant Voluntary Indefinite Status and I could be thrown out at the Army's whim or I could resign at any time.

RV: And that was when, did you do that…?

PC: The day while I was in Vietnam.

RV: When your commitment was up…

PC: Just before it was up, yeah.

RV: Okay. Why don't we take a break just for a minute?

PC: Okay.

RV: Okay Pat, continuing. So, tell me about your saying goodbyes and shipping off once you finished your initial, that training period that you went through.

PC: Well, we threw everything. Well, the Army came and picked up what little furniture we had, which didn't take long. And we threw the rest of our stuff in our '68 Mustang and took off to California and hooked up with Diana's folks and decided, they asked and we agreed and so we decided she's stay with them, which was a pretty nice thing. Her dad's mother was living with them as well and they had a three-bedroom house, so it was cozy to say the least. But they were real good to Diana and it was really a relief to me that she was staying there instead of by herself.

RV: I bet so.

PC: I mean, that just took an enormous load off my mind. And the way the finances were set up through the Army was I only kept about a hundred dollars a month in Vietnam and frequently couldn't spend all of that. And everything else went home to Diana. And she saved a lot of money for R&R (Rest and Relaxation) and everything. So that, Diana being taken care of, unlike a lot of guys that I met, Diana being taken care of was not an issue with me. I was comfortable with that and got lots of letters she wrote virtually every single day, sometimes twice. I might not get them once a day.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, I might go a week and then get seven, but she wrote virtually every day.

RV: Wow.

PC: So one interesting thing, I was on a battalion firebase, a forward firebase, I mean, out in the middle of nowhere and she called me. (Laughing)

RV: On one of the MARS (Military Affiliate Radio System) phone calls?

PC: On one of the MARS phone calls.

RV: You weren't expecting this?

PC: Uh no. And the Red Cross calls me; "We got a call for Lieutenant Curry." "That's me." And it was a firebase for 1st of the 5th Cav and what I wanted to know was where the baby was.

RV: Right.

PC: And she didn't tell me, but she thought it was coming real soon; and the next day.

RV: Wow.

PC: So…

RV: Wow. Well we'll talk about that…

PC: That was real interesting.

RV: Yeah, I bet it was, I bet it was. I think today, people can have cell phones and they can make these calls and yet, they can get on the Internet and do instant messaging, but back in Vietnam, you all relied on letters and that weird occasional MARS phone call.

PC: Very occasional. The guy was listening in on the conversation.

RV: Right.

PC: Every word, so you couldn't get real intimate.

RV: Right.

PC: But it was good to hear her voice and know that everything was okay. And she was so good; she sent me lots of pictures and all that kind of stuff. But yeah, it was quite an experience, I think it was on a TA-1, is that what they called them? Anyway, the old crank phone with the two com wires going out, that's what I was on, came through the battalion switch board and just amazing.

RV: Wow, yes. Did you know where you were flying out from in the United States?

PC: Yeah.

RV: You're going out of Travis?

PC: Yeah, flew out of Travis.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, and knew that from the time I got orders.

RV: Okay. What did you say to Diana and your family? I mean, did you get your will together, I mean, how do you prepare to go to war like that on a personal level?

PC: Well, it's part of the out-processing; you do a will. And of course, pretty simple. I think our net assets were about a dollar eighty-five. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And so that didn't take long. And so that was taken care of, make sure your life insurance is up to date and that you know, you have the correct beneficiary, that when you got married, you remember to change it from your parents to your wife, which I had, all that kind of stuff. I foolishly took civilian clothes, which I got there, bundled up and mailed home. In fact, Diana had to bring clothes for me on R&R. In the 1st Cav, you didn't have to worry about what skivvies you were going to wear tonight. And you know, basically my mother cried; my dad beamed. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) Did they come out to see you in California?

PC: No, we actually, we were at Ft. Hood and it was only a couple of hundred miles, not even that far, a hundred and fifty miles to San Antonio, so we went down and spent about a week or so out there. And the Army gave me plenty of time, so we went and spent some time down there and visited some of our old college friends down there and said goodbye to my folks and then drove out to the coast and got out of a speeding ticket.

RV: Did you really?

PC: Was going through Arizona and, oh especially at that time, I mean, it was out in the desert and there was nothing. And I had this big V8 and I was just kind of booking along and I got caught. Well, at that time, to clear post, once you gave your post-parking sticker, you taped a copy of your orders in the back window. And I hadn't taken mine out and the Highway Patrolman was standing there with his foot on the bumper writing the ticket. He said, "What's that in your back window?" And sensing an opportunity, I said, "Well, that's my orders for Vietnam." He says, "Well are you in a hurry to get there?" And I said, "Well, I've got to get my pregnant wife out to California and get her set up in an apartment and get her ready before I go." And he changed it to a warning.

RV: I see.

PC: Which I appreciated. You know, the police were pretty pro-military then and now and so that's not the only time I got saved. So we spent a couple of weeks in San Antonio and then drove out to California, spent a couple of weeks with, I did, with her folks and they took me to the airport the night before I was supposed to leave, Los Angeles Airport, flew up to Travis, spent the night in San Francisco and went downtown and partied a little bit. And the next day, drove up to Travis and turned in the rental car and put my uniform on and went from there.

RV: Was Diana, did she go with you up to San Francisco?

PC: No, she stayed in Los Angeles. She was pregnant and not real comfortable. The driving trip had been kind of hard on her physically and so she stayed down with her folks.

RV: Okay, all right. What was the atmosphere like in Los Angeles and in San Francisco during that time in 1968?

PC: I'll tell you the truth; I never had a problem, not a single time; in fact, more just the opposite. We were, a friend of mine and I, when we were in training up at Ft. Ord, we were going down to Los Angeles and we were hitchhiking and we were in uniform because that's all we had and we're standing by the side of the road and a guy in a Jaguar pulls over and says, "Where do you want to go? I will take you there." And he must've gone, based on what he said he must've gone fifty miles out of his way and took us right to the door. Another time, I went in someplace to have a drink, I was by myself and Diana was at school and this was in Los Angeles and I was sitting there and struck up a conversation with this older couple next to me and as soon as they found out I was in the Army, my money was no good. And I mean, I think they'd still be there buying me drinks.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But I had more of the reverse backlash I think than the anti-war. Nobody ever spit on me, nobody ever called me a baby killer, I had none of that ever. And I went through major airports in uniform, you know, going and coming; never had…like I say, much more of the opposite where people would bend over backwards to be nice to me.

RV: Do you think that's a myth, this, I mean, not a total myth, but do you think it was a lot less frequent than Vietnam Veterans say about the…?

PC: Yeah, yeah I do, I do.

RV: Why do you think that?

PC: I think that the incidents and I don't want anybody to think that it was a rare incident; it was not unfortunately. It wasn't real common. I think it's one of those things that has gotten blown out of proportion and there's one or two of those about the Vietnam War that has just gotten blown out of proportion and exaggerated over the years. Not only did it never happen to me, I never saw it happen.

RV: Okay. Tell me about Travis and boarding the plane. This is a civilian flight or civilian airplane, airline.

PC: Civilian charter airplane. And at that time, they called them stewardesses were real nice to us. You could see a lot of wide eyes. I mean, obviously guys were pretty nervous. I don't remember any women on the flight. We had women in Vietnam, but nothing like now in Iraq.

RV: Right.

PC: And I actually have a story about that; but pretty quiet.

RV: On that flight?

PC: On that flight. A lot of guys obviously, no alcohol, good choice. But what I remember is they kept waking me up to feed me. (Laughing) I was tired; I wanted to sleep. And it seems like about every three hours, they'd come around and shake me and feed me something, so I'd eat and go back to sleep. But I remember getting over Tan Son Nhut and of course, they came in and then kind of spiraled down. But I remember thinking, you know, "Boy, it's a good thing the bad guys don't have any airplanes."

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And being kind of nervous, being pretty nervous about what was going to happen and you know, what the next year was going to be like and where I was going to go, because I didn't have a unit of assignment yet.

RV: Right.

PC: And being pretty nervous about it. And seeing Tan Son Nhut for the first time and getting off that airplane and it was like getting smacked with a wet washrag, a wet, hot washrag.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: We didn't have the connecting, you know, things then and I mean, it was just like somebody went "Whack!" It was brutal. And of course, we weren't acclimatized at all.

RV: Right. When was this, what month in 1968? Is this November?

PC: It would've been early November of '68, I want to say second or third of November of '68.

RV: Okay.

PC: Because I got a nice drop coming home and came home in October. But even in November over there, it was just, I mean, it was brutal.

RV: Yeah. So your first impression is the heat, what else, what else do you remember?

PC: Heat, the temporary, I mean, Tan Son Nhut just looked temporary, it looked like all huts and shanties and wooden buildings, which it was and just looked real, real temporary. And I remember being kind of surprised. It was pretty big, been there for a while. It was likely to be there a while longer, but there were, at least in the parts I saw, relatively few permanent buildings.

RV: Okay. Is this daytime or nighttime?

PC: Daytime.

RV: Okay.

PC: And they gathered us all up and put us on a bus and took us to the reception center and all the Lieutenants and Captains went in one building and it was bunks four high. And I remember, they had a women's compound that was guarded by an armed MP and was surrounded with concertina that must've been triple based and twelve feet high.

RV: Wow.

PC: (Laughing) And probably with good reason. But those women were secure. And I remember thinking that was kind of funny at the time; later on I understood better

the reasons for it. And so then we kind of hung around there a couple of days, really not doing much.

RV: Just waiting for your orders?

PC: Just waiting for orders. And finally I guess after two or three days, I got my orders, I was going to the 1st Calvary Division.

RV: Were you issued a weapon?

PC: Not at that point.

RV: Okay.

PC: Not at that point.

RV: Did you hear a war going on or see a war going on?

PC: No, didn't hear a thing.

RV: Did it meet your expectations or what…?

PC: Well, at this point I knew I wasn't in the real war yet. I mean, I was still in the rear-rear, behind the rear-rear, at the reception station waiting to go to the war. And I had done enough reading about World War II history to know that there's this transition and I didn't figure it was going to be that much different from World War II to Vietnam that you know, you weren't going to come in and go into a battle in ninety seconds.

RV: Right.

PC: So it was more boredom than anything else, which turned out not to be an uncommon thing. We had a Chaplain that described Vietnam as hour after hour of monotony interrupted by moments of sheer terror and that's probably pretty accurate description. This guy was something else, but I can talk about him later. But he was a gun-toting Chaplain.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But anyway, after a couple of days, we got our orders and I keep mentioning that I was lucky and I went to the 1st Calvary Division and that was just a stroke of luck from my perspective. I was not going to be in Bien Hoa, I was not going to be in Long Binh Depot, you know, I was not going to be hot showers and three hot meals a day; I was going to see the war. You know, there's guys that went to Vietnam and spent twelve months there and I mean, never got their weapon out of the armory and just had kind of

an office job. You know, and they went to the club at night and I could've done that at home. You know, that's not what was there for.

RV: You characterize this as lucky?

PC: Oh extremely.

RV: You thought that then?

PC: I thought that then for two reasons. Number one, my dad been in the 1st Cav in Korea.

RV: Oh wow, yeah.

PC: And so I thought that was kind of cool, you know, just a little happen stance of fate there. And second of all, I didn't want to be a, and I was, but to the infantry guys I was, but I didn't want to be a REMF (Rear Echelon Mother Figure).

RV: Right.

PC: If I was going to do it, let's do it.

RV: And so where was the 1st Cav and where are we going to be?

PC: And that time, the 1st Cav was up in I Corps and had been through A Shau Valley and had guys telling me that it looked like a valley with chicken pox, the burn marks from where helicopters went down. I got there after that of course but I guess it was pretty tough; a lot of guys still pretty shook up about it. But I went up north to LZ Eagle.

RV: How'd you get up there, was it C-130 or…?

PC: No, it was a Caribou.

RV: Okay.

PC: And put us on a Caribou, had a nine thousand pound duffle bag that I remember dragging around.

RV: (Laughing) With all those clothes in it.

PC: With all those clothes in it and they stuffed us in a Caribou, a bunch of us and sent us up north. And landed up there and I'm kind of trying to remember the sequence of events. But anyway, we went through a week long in country training program.

RV: At Eagle?

PC: At Eagle.

RV: Do you remember what they told you or kind of sort of what they were telling you?

PC: Well they gave us a lot of M-16 demonstrations; we fired the M-16 again. Something I had not seen before was a Claymore and they gave us a couple of demonstrations of the Claymore. They gave us artillery demonstration; we did some repelling off a tower, things like that. And good orientation, I wouldn't really call it training, but it was a good orientation. Told us a little bit about what was going on with the 1st Cav Division, a little bit of history with the 1st Cav. You can't go to the 1st Cav and not get the history of the 1st Cav, first in, last out. And then the Cav was in the process of moving south down to III Corps. And I call it the Cav. You know, if you get the 11th ACR and you get the 1st Cav, it's the The Cav, but to 1st Cav guys, The Cav is the 1st Calvary Division period.

RV: Let me ask you real quick about orientation.

PC: Sure.

RV: Did they tell you about Vietnamese culture, what to expect, how to interact with the Vietnamese?

PC: They gave us a few, how not to offend the Vietnamese. You know, it was common for Vietnamese men to walk down the street holding hands. They said, "Don't laugh at them, that's just their culture," you know. Told us, "Be careful because you don't know who to trust," some things like that, but not really anything in depth at all. Nothing like what we got during Desert Storm when we were preparing to go to and I never did go, but we thought we were going to, preparing to go to Saudi Arabia, that's a much, much more in-depth detail then.

RV: Do you think that would've made a difference in Vietnam? I mean, looking back, did it really matter or…?

PC: No, not with all the…that thing by itself is one factor, no; it wouldn't have made a difference.

RV: Okay.

PC: We had overall a pretty bad attitude towards the Vietnamese and I don't exclude myself from that, I'm not proud of it, but that's the way it was.

RV: When you got there or did that develop over time?

PC: It was there when I got there, but it really got much stronger over time, not something I'm proud of, not something I'm proud of.

RV: Do you want to talk about that, how that came about, what happened?

PC: Well you know, at that time, except for the Russians, America was kind of the king of the world and especially oriental peoples because they're basically, they have a reputation of being basically quiet and kind of submissive and you know, that kind of thing. We've lived in Japan as conquerors, you know, and that gives you a certain amount of attitude. And you know, and I used all the words, you know, gook and chink and slope and all those kinds of things and it always kind of prided myself on not being a prejudice person, but that just didn't apply. You know, I still wasn't a prejudice person in my mind.

RV: Is this towards North Vietnamese or South Vietnamese

PC: No, no, South Vietnamese.

RV: Towards South Vietnamese.

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. And unfortunately, I was not unique; it was pretty prevalent throughout.

RV: Did you have a lot of contact with the Vietnamese or was this…?

PC: Yeah actually, in a couple of ways. When I first got there, I went to 1st Calvary Division in Phuoc Vinh after Eagle. Phuoc Vinh was a division headquarters and they assigned me to 1st of the 5th Cav. And we had a thing called the Combat Arms Replacement Program and allow me to go off track just for a second here.

RV: Okay, sure, sure.

PC: The idea was is that combat arms officers, Lieutenants and Captains, were being pulled out of the field halfway through their tour to take administrative positions, like S4 or S1 or etc. in the infantry battalions. So, we would substitute combat service support officers for these combat arms guys so they could spend their whole twelve months in the field. Needless to say, this made us immensely popular with the combat arms guys who could look forward to six-eight months and rotating out of the field.

RV: Sure.

PC: And the program did not work. We were made, as I was for instance, an Assistant Adjutant, the administrative officer for the battalion. The adjutant was an

infantry officer. I was an assistant S4, the S4 was an infantry officer pulled out of the field. So the program just fell flat on its butt. It was a great theory at, you know, at USARV (United States Army Vietnam) level, but when you got down into the units, it just did not work. But because of that, I got lucky again and got to go to 1st of the 5th Cav. And I was put in an administrative position after my orientation and all of that. And so I would work with the Vietnamese Labor Force. We had Vietnamese come in every day and fill sandbags and build bunkers and all that kind of stuff. We were at Tay Ninh at this point, which is where the rear for 1st of the 5th was. And so I would get a suitcase load full of piasters and go out and pay the Vietnamese laborers everyday and talk to them and everything. Also, we would do what was called MedCAPS, the battalion surgeon would go out in the local area and set up a little aid station and treat the Vietnamese for whatever it was that was ailing them. And they had some ailments and I would go along on those because they were just so interesting. And that's where I really got to kind of see how the Vietnamese lived, and went into a Muslim mosque in Tay Ninh. There was a Muslim section in Tay Ninh and we set up a MedCAP there. And in fact, I have a picture of me at home with the village headman and he took me in the mosque and they were praying and times were different then.

RV: Very interesting, yeah.

PC: And the people say there were Muslims and yes there were. I can show you the pictures.

RV: So this is how you kind of developed your sense of the Vietnamese people in one direct way.

PC: Well yeah and you know, the prevailing attitude was that you know, they're not nearly as good as we are and no they're not as smart as we are and they're not as big as we are, which was a true statement.

RV: Sure.

PC: And etc. etc. And so we all had a pretty bad, pretty bad attitude and that way, that's one of the clichés that happens to be true, pretty widespread.

RV: Right. What about today, I mean, toward the Vietnamese people and just looking back at your experiences?

PC: I think it's a lot different attitude and I think we feel, a lot of the guys I've talked to feel bad about what we did to the South Vietnamese, which was basically pitch their butts right out of the boat right to the wolves. Pardon me for mixing a metaphor. But I mean, lets face it, we landed that helicopter on the roof of the embassy and we loaded a few Americans on and we took off and said, "See you later!" shameful, shameful.

RV: We're getting ahead of ourselves a bit, but do you wish, do you wish that you had acted differently in Vietnam toward the Vietnamese people, just thinking about the civilians?

PC: Yeah. We should've have been so superior and condescending.

RV: How did you, give me an example, how did you act superior and condescending, what did you do?

PC: Oh, it was like, you know, patting them on the head. You know, treating adults that are thirty years older than I am like children and just stupid things that you do when you're twenty-two and that's you're ashamed of later. But you know, you get older and wiser. I certainly wasn't wise at that point, but yeah, the older people who were out there trying to earn enough piasters to survive until tomorrow, you know.

RV: Yeah, yeah.

PC: And treating them poorly.

RV: Did the poverty of the Vietnamese people strike you or were you expecting that what you saw?

PC: I was expecting it, but not to that degree. I mean, lets face it, you just don't see huge goiters in the United States now, you know, and you just don't see it and it's very common at that time over there. You know, kids wearing nothing but a little shirt, run around barefoot. And the funny thing though, we were out on a MedCAP one time, here comes a humongous water buffalo and I mean, they were big anyway. And even by water buffalo standards, this rascal was big. About a six-year-old Vietnamese boy leading him on by the nose, just giving him hell, whacking him with the stick. That buffalo just plotting along, you know. I mean, just as docile and obedient and we had been told they did not…different diet, we smell different, they don't like us, stay away

from them. And so we had this picture of them as these ferocious beasts and there was this little boy just "whack, whack, whack, whack!" We all just cracked up.

RV: (Laughing) That's an interesting memory.

PC: (Laughing)

RV: Okay, so you're down at Tay Ninh, this is your first area of assignment and tell me what you did, what was your job everyday?

PC: Well, if I can back up just for a minute.

RV: Of course.

PC: I went to Phuoc Vinh, got assigned 1st of the 5th, went to Tay Ninh. I immediately went out to a forward firebase where the Battalion Commander was. The way it would be set up is the XO and the primary staff would be in the rear, which was Tay Ninh. Battalion Commander of the S3 would be out on the forward firebase among with the operation staff and those folks. So I went out there and one of the things that they had all officers do was a tour of the various companies in the field. And so there I am as a brand new ordnance Second Lieutenant, almost new, jumping off a helicopter in the middle of the jungle. And no clue why I remember this, but there was this ruin temple, it wasn't shot up that I could tell, it was just overgrown with vines and stuff like that. And so that was where I first got off the first helicopter. And in the 1st Cav, helicopters were it. I mean, you took a helicopter to the PX.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: We had so many of them and they were so common, we just did everything with helicopters. And it was the first airmobile division.

RV: Yes, absolutely.

PC: You know, and there's some interesting reading there too. But anyway, jumped off and some guy comes charging out of the bush and drags me out of the LZ into the bushes and went off. And so I toured with all the companies for oh ten days or so.

RV: What do you mean when you say "toured;" you went on patrol?

PC: I would spend, yes; I would spend a few days with A Company, with their Company Commander and Platoon Leaders. I'd go out on LPs, that kind of stuff, then I'd go to B Company, spend a few days there, etc. And I remember clearly, I mean, just one of my real vivid memories is one night I woke up and I remember thinking, "I'm

ordnance, I am not supposed to be in the middle of the jungle in a pouring rainstorm with a flat air mattress." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And everything was just soaking wet, it was pouring rain. Fortunately I had my poncho over me, but nevertheless, it was pretty miserable.

RV: Yeah. What were your impressions of Vietnam and the whole, I mean, you were right there usually on the front lines in the war, what did you see, what did you hear, what'd you smell?

PC: You got to understand that to the 1st Cav, all of Vietnam was off limits except the jungle. We were not allowed in Saigon. As an example, the MPs would go around and check and if you had that faded patch in the shape of the horse blanket; they would take you in. The villages were off limits unless we were actually on a patrol, etc., so all I saw was jungle. Of course, ninety-five percent humidity all the time, hot during the day, walked through streams and you would just stay wet. The jungle boots were pretty good, you know, canvas in the water would run out pretty quick, but your sock wouldn't dry.

RV: Right.

PC: And bugs everywhere. It was interesting when the tiger set off our trick flares. (Laughing)

RV: And you're certain it was a tiger?

PC: Oh we saw him.

RV: Oh okay.

PC: Yeah, yeah. The trick flares went off and so we had some light and so we saw him. Yeah, it was a big old sucker.

RV: This is your first ten days?

PC: Yup.

RV: Out there.

PC: Yeah.

RV: Wow. What did you learn while out there?

PC: I'll tell you, watching the Company Commanders was really interesting. They were Captains and had a little more experience. And watching them interface with

their troops was interesting. These guys, the good ones, they were really leaders. We had one guy and I can't remember his name, but he looked just like Robert Redford, I mean exactly like Robert Redford. Same color hair, mustache, the whole works, he was good. I think he was the A Company Commander, but don't hold me to that. And you could just see this, you see him working at this quiet, calm, confidence, you know, and trying to convey that to his troops in that he knew what was going on and everything was going to be good, you know. And never saw him twitterpated, a technical term, twitterpated. Never saw him excited, he just was always calm and in control, he's real good and that was interesting.

RV: What about the soldiers, how would you describe them?

PC: You know, I was…one of the things that amazed me was they had good weapons, plenty of ammunition and plenty of water and plenty of food, but you know, half the guys didn't have socks and nobody wore underwear, you couldn't, but half the guys didn't have socks, run over boots. Some of the guys had cut their fatigues off to make them a little cooler; I never did that because at night the bugs would just eat you up. But I just thought, "You know, god, we're the richest country in the world, why can't these guys have socks?" And that surprised me. But I can't say morale was bad. I won't say we laughed and joked a lot, but it was, I can't say morale was bad either. It was, you know, "Let's do my time, let's stay alive and then let's go home."

RV: Okay. What did you carry with you? You had your M-16…

PC: I had an M-16, frags, fragmentation hand grenades, smoke grenades; of course, obviously extra ammunition. I wasn't loaded down like the grunts were. You know, I mean, I was a visitor and so I wasn't loaded down like they were. They carried lots of extra ammunition, lots of hand grenades, lots of smokes. We used to use smoke grenades to signal helicopters, so we would use quite a few of them. And of course, they carried a lot more food and water than I did. Well, not more water, but a lot more food than I did, C-rations. And the MRE (Meal, Ready-to-Eat) is best thing to come down the pike and not only did they taste better, but you're not carrying all the damn cans around.

RV: Right.

PC: And the smartest thing I ever did was get rid of what was it, eggs and Lima beans or anything with lima beans in it. But anyway, so those guys were pretty loaded down, probably seventy/eighty pound pack.

RV: Wow.

PC: And of course, the RTO (Radio Telephone Operator) carrying a radio, he tried his best to cover that rascal up and keep that under cover. In fact, I had a friend who was a Platoon Leader, he was a blue team leader and he was walking along one time and they were on patrol and he went like that to reach back and get the handset and a bullet went right like that and got his RTO, didn't kill him, but messed him up pretty good.

RV: Yeah.

PC: But I mean, hundredths of a second later, it would've got him. He was an ordnance officer, volunteered to be blue team leader.

RV: Wow.

PC: So, he was just glad to see how he was lucky that day.

RV: How did they treat you out in the field?

PC: Very well.

RV: The men did?

PC: The men did, yeah. Nobody laughed at me to my face.

RV: Right.

PC: But I mean, you know, as a Second Lieutenant, you expect a certain amount of that, that's just the way life is.

RV: Sure.

PC: It's the same today. But no, I never had any problems with disrespect or anything like that. You know, the Company Commanders wanted to take care of me, make sure nothing happened to me. And so it was…and the troops were real good to me. You know, we were sitting there waiting to go into a firefight, waiting for the helicopters to pick us up and a couple of guys I guess saw the expression on my face and told me, "Don't worry sir, maybe some frags," and so they were good to me, I had no trouble with that at all.

RV: That's neat you sensed a camaraderie there.

PC: Really. And that really was there, that really was there. It was kind of a common bond of misery I guess.

RV: Tell me about any combat you did see there in those ten days. Did you get into anything?

PC: I really didn't, I really didn't. We had some instances where we were being followed and we knew that and we would try to call artillery or helicopters in on them. Or we'd try to send a patrol out with M-79s and you know, Company Commander's artillery, good weapon, good weapon.

RV: Why?

PC: Oh, well you could, you know, first of all, it would shoot about anything, but you could sit there and very accurately shoot 40mm HE rounds, a guy in a tree or a couple of guys in the foxhole, something like that. And it was quick; you didn't have to set it up like you did a mortar.

RV: Right.

PC: It was lighter, easy to carry around, the ammunition was easier to carry around and it was just…if you were in close, you could use buckshot rounds, throw out buck, which would just make a mess. And so it was just a real good, good weapon. And it was easy to be proficient with it.

RV: Right.

PC: It was a smart move to put them on the bottom of the M-16.

RV: Did you feel well trained; did you feel adequate, like you could handle the situation?

PC: No, no. I wasn't trained to be an infantry officer. And in fact, one of the things that the Battalion Commander asked all the combat support officers who came through or service support was you know, "At the end of the week, I'm going to ask you if you want to volunteer to be a Platoon Leader."

RV: Instead of doing…

PC: Instead of being in an administrative position and boy I agonized over that; I mean, for the entire time. And I just lay awake nights because you know; I'd wanted to be an infantry officer.

RV: Yes, absolutely.

PC: And I finally came to the conclusion that what I was going to do was either work for some Platoon Sergeant who knew what he was doing or I was going to get a bunch of people killed. I had not been to Ft. Benning, I was not trained to lead patrols, I had no experience in it in training, very little, no real experience. I had no idea what was going on and I was going to get a bunch of people killed.

RV: Why would they offer that to someone who had not gone through that training?

PC: Ease the load on the combat arms officers.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And we had some instances where we didn't have enough Lieutenants or we had senior NCOs acting as Platoon Leaders and etc. But you talk about a hard choice, that was a hard decision for me. I think I made the right one.

RV: Right.

PC: Sometimes I kind of feel like a chicken for doing it, but you know, if I'd have gone out there and gotten a dozen guys killed, I'd feel a lot worse. And I just wasn't trained.

RV: Right, right.

PC: Now, I got, finally after six months, I got to an ordnance unit, I knew exactly what I was doing, very comfortable. In fact, was made Company Commander as a First Lieutenant, was just a couple of months in grade.

RV: Wow.

PC: And so I knew what I was doing there, but with the infantry, I didn't.

RV: When was the first time that you wrote Diana? Once you got there and…

PC: The first day I got there. Yeah, I mailed that from, I think they took us to Long Binh from Tan Son Nhut and I mailed the first letter from there.

RV: And that's where you, you'd written it in country?

PC: Yes.

RV: Okay.

PC: Told her where I was. You know, there was no censorship.

RV: Right.

PC: Not like there was during World War II, so I could tell her about anything and…

RV: Did you tell her the unit you'd been assigned to?

PC: Well I didn't know then.

RV: Oh.

PC: I was at Long Binh, didn't know. Told her where I was and what I was doing, that I was waiting to move out, find out where I was going to go and all that kind of stuff.

RV: Had you intended to always try to tell her everything that had happened or were you thinking at the front end of this that, you know, I need to kind of protect her and not tell her if I'm, you know, getting mortared every other night, things like that?

PC: I very rarely told her about that stuff. And in fact, when you got in country, there was an option that you could elect of whether to notify your next to kin if you were not critically wounded.

RV: Right.

PC: In other words, if you were lightly wounded. I guess there's such a thing really. If you were lightly wounded, they wouldn't notify your next to kin and I elected not to tell Diana.

RV: Just to protect her?

PC: Just to protect her. And she didn't need to know I was getting shot at all the time. What good would it have done? It would've made her worry and as a pregnant woman, she didn't need that kind of worry. You know, her dad knew what I was going through, he'd been in Korea and everything, but I didn't need to put that burden on her, she had enough, just with me being there and being pregnant.

RV: Your first…

PC: Incidentally, when she found out I had elected not to have her told, she was pissed. (Laughing)

RV: I kind of assumed that, but I didn't say.

PC: Yeah, she was not a happy camper. I didn't tell her until I got back.

RV: I was going to say, was this on R&R or was this…?

PC: No, I didn't tell her until I got back and oh, she was not happy with me.

RV: It's safe to tell her then…

PC: Yeah, yeah.

RV: So you're in country basically a month here almost and…

PC: Yeah, just about.

RV: And you're eleven months to go. Were you counting days or…?

PC: Not at that point.

RV: Okay.

PC: I'll tell you the truth; I was having so much fun and so much excitement, which is not saying I didn't get scared every now and then.

RV: Right.

PC: That's not the issue. But I was having so much fun and it was exciting and so different and so new. And you know, walking around in the jungle waiting for somebody to shoot at you. And I mean, I was twenty-two, I was bullet proof.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, I was going to live forever. And going out on the MedCAPs and…

RV: And this is your…you're talking about your very first time, your first days and weeks and months in?

PC: Well, after that initial in processing period, when I got out to 1st of the 5th Cav, yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, it was all new and exciting and fun and interesting.

RV: Okay. I'll tell you what Pat, why don't we go head and stop for today and we'll pick up here with going to 1st of the 5th and kind of what your daily duties were.

PC: Okay.

RV: And we'll pick up there tomorrow.

PC: Okay.

RV: Thank you very much.

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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Patrick Curry
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
July 19, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I'm continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Patrick Curry. Today is the 19th of July 2005 and we are again in the Special Collections Library Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech University and it's 1:33 pm Central Standard Time. Pat, why don't we pick up with where we were? You had arrived down in Tay Ninh and you discussed some of your activities, but let's kind of start with a couple of general questions about the area.

Patrick Curry: Sure.

RV: How long were you there in this area? Was this your permanent home while on tour?

PC: Well, it was for a few months.

RV: Okay.

PC: (Coughs) Excuse me. The Combat Arms Replacement Program that I mentioned yesterday had just started and they didn't really kind of know what to do with us. And so I was, after the ten days or so that I spent touring the various companies and out on the firebase at a place called Katum, not Kontum the city, but Katum. No N, K-a-t-u-m. It was just a battalion firebase and LZ (Landing Zone) is all it was. And we were standing out there, a couple of us standing out there one day and just to prove that the Air Force has a sense of humor, two F-104s came over. I had my back to them and I didn't see them and I was kind of nervous anyway being you know, a newbie and all of that.

And they came down and came over the LZ at about a hundred feet and rolled and popped their after burners right as they got over our heads.

RV: Oh boy.

PC: And man, that was almost the end of my tour right there.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: Scared me half to death until I saw what was going on and then everybody laughed, but mostly at me. But it certainly got my attention.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But I initially started off yeah, back in the rear. And I was first the Assistant Administrative Officer, really a terrible job.

RV: Why do you say that?

PC: Oh, it was kind of boring. But I was responsible for a lot of the personnel actions, the administration, if we had a court marshal or something like that; I had to do the administration on it. Awards and decorations was a big, big part of what my office did.

RV: Do you mean you all typed up the citation and…?

PC: Yeah, we would get something hand scribbled on a piece of paper from the field and it was our job to turn it into a citation that we could send forward that would number one, justify the award so the guy got it.

RV: Right.

PC: And number two was suitable to be used as a commendation with the award.

RV: Okay. Would you all try to translate as close as possible or did you do any embellishing or any kind of, you know, making sure that, you know, this individual got that Bronze Star or that Purple Heart?

PC: Uh, usually didn't have to embellish.

RV: Okay.

PC: I mean, my experience was pretty much the enlisted guys that got awards pretty much earned them. And of course, Purple Heart, I mean, you get wounded or you don't. But for a Bronze Star with V, especially a Silver Star, I think the fuss about Kerry's award was kind of a disgrace. I'm not a big Kerry fan, but my experience has

been that when you get a Silver Star, it's because you earned it. And I didn't see very many of those faked.

RV: Right.

PC: And I think if Kerry got a Silver Star, then by god he earned it.

RV: Right.

PC: And they should've backed off on him for that.

RV: Okay.

PC: Editorial comment.

RV: Well, that's interesting. I was going to ask you if you could give examples of things you remember from you life, either then or now, about citations and awards and getting them or not getting them, people still seeking them today for action back then, so that's a very appropriate comment. Continue, what was the atmosphere of that office when you all were writing up these incredible acts of bravery and woundings?

PC: Well, there was a real dedication in getting the awards through. Most of the company clerks who all worked for me along with the S1 staff; I would say half of them had Master's degrees. I mean, you know, it was the time of the draft and almost all of them were grunts, eleven Bravos, and they had spent a bunch of time in the field and had come back for whatever reason, a wound or something to take an administrative type job. And so they were pretty darn dedicated to see that their buddies got these awards. And we really didn't embellish because we didn't have to.

RV: Right.

PC: Now we printed up the language, the grammar, the punctuation, spelling and all that. (Coughs) Excuse me. But in terms of adding in things that didn't happen, no, I didn't do that because I didn't have to.

RV: Yeah, that's what I meant by that is that you all cleaned up what was written, but it was what was written.

PC: It's what was written. The events in the little hand scribbled piece of paper are what went into the formalized award, recommendation for an award.

RV: What ever happened to those scraps of paper? Did you all just throw them away once you were done with them?

PC: Oh gosh, they're probably in the battalion files in the archives of the Army somewhere.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, we filed them with the awards. It's backup in case there was ever a question.

RV: Right.

PC: And we had one NCO E7 and he got put in for the Distinguished Service Cross. He had gotten wounded, he'd gotten shot in the chest, but this guy was a soldier, I mean, capital S. And he's in the hospital, he went AWOL (Absent Without Leave) from the hospital and still wounded of course and managed to frag a ride, grab a ride on a helicopter, get back to the battalion rear and then went out to the battalion front and went right back out in the field with his company.

RV: Wow.

PC: And then the next day, there was a big firefight and he led a charge, gathered up some guys and led a charge right into the center of the enemy line and broke it. And this is all while with a severe chest wound and broke the enemy line and managed to send them, the ones that were still alive running back into the jungle.

RV: Wow.

PC: And I never did hear if he got it or not, but boy, he sure earned it, brave guy.

RV: What was it like to read these incredible citations, the scribbled notes, something like you just mentioned with these guys stories?

PC: Oh, it's real emotional, you know. I mean, you can just picture in your mind's eye these guys out there, especially if it was a posthumous award. And unfortunately, obviously, there were a number of those. And they were real good about making sure that, you know, that the guys that got killed got put in for an appropriate award.

RV: Right.

PC: And so yeah, it was a pretty emotional time and you spend a lot of time and effort writing these things and trying to make them just right, to put in the right buzz words so they'd get approved.

RV: Right. What was the mood when you all would do this? Was it somber or were you all kind of collaborating and you know, standing over each other's shoulder and saying, "Hey, why don't you try this?"

PC: No, it was pretty somber and it was pretty much a one-person job. Like I say, with the educational level in that office, we didn't have any trouble finding people that could write.

RV: Sure.

PC: Although I personally did a lot of the writing and I did a lot of the write-ups, so it wasn't much trouble finding the people who could write. But the volume was such; you didn't have time to have multiple people spending a lot of time on one award.

RV: Right. How much time was taken up by this? What was the volume; guesstimation?

PC: Oh gosh, it was hours and hours. Probably two people full time.

RV: Wow.

PC: Because it wasn't a ten minute task to sit down and write one of these. You know, you sit down and write it; you revise it. And of course, we didn't have word processors, you know, it was pad and pencil and you revise it and then you revise it again. Maybe get somebody else to look at it, you know, if it's a high level award, get somebody else to look at it to see what they think and go from there.

RV: Do you think people today would benefit, the American public today would benefit from reading citations such as the ones that you wrote to better understand what happened in Vietnam, to better understand the American soldier in Vietnam?

PC: Oh I think that's, there's no question, yes, absolutely; it certainly would give them a lot. It would give them a different picture of the Vietnam War than they had from the media where all the emphasis, the publicity was on the bad things that happened. And there were a lot of them; I'm not denying that.

RV: Yes.

PC: But there were a lot of very good, very brave things too and they didn't get a lot of coverage. And it would be really great if people could read just the little hand scribbled notes because there's some Company Commander sitting there in the jungle in

the middle of the night with a poncho over his head and a red flashlight writing this thing up so he can get it out on the Log Bird the next morning.

RV: I'm trying to imagine you all doing that and I can, having interviewed so many people and heard so many stories about what you all must've felt doing this and the duty, I would assume you all felt in this task. Tell me, do you have anything that you remember specifically from that besides what you just related to that NCO story? Anything else that when you think of that time and doing that task that comes to mind?

PC: Gosh, hmm. Had a guy who got put in for a Silver Star. Obviously a grunt and they had walked into a bunker complex and gosh, I don't remember his name after all these years, but they had walked into a bunker complex, starting taking fire, everybody hit the ground and he was hit, not badly by those standards. No such thing as a good one, but it was relatively minor, but he managed to crawl into the complex and start throwing grenades and suppress fire long enough for the rest of the company to do some fire and maneuver and sweep through the bunker complex and eventually take it over. And I mean, that was just a pretty gutsy thing to do in my book. He was wounded, he had every excuse in the world to just lay there and holler a Medic, he just wasn't that kind of guy.

RV: Guessing again, what would you say Pat is the percentage of Americans who served in the war and who witnessed countless acts of bravery, but they were never reported? Do you think that was high, do you think it was, you know…?

PC: I'm sure it was, I'm sure it was. If they had tried to report every time a man acted courageously, I mean, we'd still be processing the paperwork, these guys, and I'm not saying we didn't have our ten percent. I was a defense council for a guy, assistant defense council for a guy who some VC walked into a hasty ambush and he jumped up and ran before they got in the kill zone and screwed up the ambush. We didn't get any of them as it turns out. And back then, they didn't get an individual attorney, they got a couple of Battalion Officers appointed as defense.

RV: And that was you.

PC: That was me.

RV: This was one of your jobs.

PC: This was one of my jobs. It was one of the jobs of every officer in the battalion.

RV: Okay.

PC: And it wasn't the first time I'd done it, I'd done it quite a few times.

RV: In Vietnam?

PC: Uh no, over just the course of the year and a half that I'd been an officer.

RV: Tell me how in Vietnam how you were selected to do this. Was it just random?

PC: It was basically a duty roster kind of thing. You know, it's Chandler in Curry's term and Chick Chandler was a guy I really want to tell you about.

RV: Was he there at Tay Ninh with you?

PC: Yes. And he was the lead guy on this, defending this guy that broke and ran and even though nobody, everybody just wanted to strangle the guy and everybody knew he had done it. I mean, it was obvious he had done it, we got him off.

RV: What was…can you spell the name of your friend, Chit?

PC: Well, his nickname was Chick, C-h-i-c-k, but his real name was Charles Chandler.

RV: Okay.

PC: And he and I got to be pretty good friends. He was an infantry First Lieutenant and through working on this court marshal and everything. And Chick got promoted to Captain and became Company Commander. And after he'd been out there a couple of months, they had a mortar attack and he rolled out of his hammock and was crawling towards the foxhole and a mortar round landed about eighteen inches away from him and killed him. And I'm not a big fan of the Vietnam Memorial. I hate it.

RV: Really?

PC: I absolutely hate it. But when I was working in the Pentagon and living in Washington and when the traveling Wall comes here, I go out and look at Chick's name and you know, somebody remembers him. Several people remember him, I remember him. And he was married probably about the same time we were, Diana and I were and he had a son he'd never seen. And so he was going to go on R&R. We were talking about, "Well are we going to bring the kids on R&R?" And he said, "Well, we decided we're just going to have this time for ourselves, not bring my son and I'll have plenty of time to see him when I get back." And he died never seeing his son. And one of the

things I really regret, just kick myself in the butt for and have for thirty years is not staying in touch with his family. I wrote his wife and told her what a guy, what kind of guy I thought Chick was. (Getting emotional)

RV: Take your time.

PC: And she, you know, I've never gotten like this before. She wrote me back and said she was going to save it for her son to read. And god I wish I'd stayed in touch with her. He was from St. Louis.

RV: How long had you all known each other? Was it just a couple of months?

PC: Six months, five months.

RV: And did you bunk together, I mean, were you there in the same barracks?

PC: No.

RV: He was a First Lieutenant; you're a Second Lieutenant.

PC: Well yeah, but I mean…

RV: But you all stayed…

PC: Sure. Rank among Lieutenants is like, I won't finish the phrase, but it doesn't much matter.

RV: Well what is the phrase?

PC: If rank among Lieutenants like virtue among whores. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And so no, I mean, you know, I didn't call a First Lieutenant, "Sir," or anything like that. When I made First Lieutenant, I didn't expect a Second Lieutenant to call me, "Sir."

RV: Sure.

PC: So we were more or less equals. He'd been in country longer, had more experience and I respected that.

RV: Why did he get in the field?

PC: He wanted to be a Company Commander.

RV: He was infantry?

PC: He was infantry all the way, through and through.

RV: Okay. Did he like spend his first six months with you and then six months…?

PC: No, he'd been a Platoon Leader and then he became a Company XO, so he came back to the rear and then he got promoted to Captain, he went back out in the field to take a company. We had our Company Commander who, he's not a bad guy, he just wasn't a real competent guy and his casualty rate was pretty high. And he just didn't have that ability to lead men in combat and do the mission without creating too many casualties. And this very quickly became apparent and he was very quickly moved out of the field, out of the command position and sent out of the battalion to a different kind of unit where he wouldn't command soldiers in combat. And I don't want to say he was incompetent, but I guess the evidence says he was.

RV: Right.

PC: But he was sure moved out quick. I mean, one day he was there, the next day he was in a different battalion.

RV: Was that common?

PC: No.

RV: When people saw a problem, did they…I mean, not common that of incompetence, but common in the fact that if those who had this authority, if they saw a problem like that, they would move people out of the field, they would minimize problems and smooth it over and get it going?

PC: Yes.

RV: Okay.

PC: And they put Chick out there to fix it.

RV: How many days was he out there?

PC: Yeah, not long at all, like a month.

RV: Why don't you, if you care to, tell me a little bit about him as a person, your six months with him and just to kind of honor his service. Right now in the moment, just tell me a little bit about who he was and the work you all did together.

PC: Well he was just a really bright guy and I mean, just a smart guy. And you know, I mentioned this court marshal; well the battalion had charged this guy who boogied out with intent to avoid this. Well you can't prove intent. And I mean, how do you prove what a guy intended to do? His defense was he was going to a better position and that his intent was to kill the enemy and how could you prove it wasn't? And yeah,

and you couldn't. And one of the board members later told me that ten minutes into the court marshal, they were sure of two things. He had done it, the guy had chickened out, no question and two was, he was going to get off and he did. And they sent him to a different company, they didn't want to send him back with his buddies, he wouldn't have made it would be my guess.

RV: Were there any Americans lost during that incident?

PC: No.

RV: He just blew the ambush?

PC: He just blew the ambush and it was a bunch of VC (Viet Cong) and they just turned around hoofed on back into the jungle. And as far as we know, we didn't get any of them.

RV: So I guess his Platoon Leader or his Company Commander, they brought him up on charges.

PC: Absolutely.

RV: Of…

PC: Cowardliness in the face of the enemy. And actually, what they charged him with was fight with the intent to avoid hostile contact or something like that.

RV: Right.

PC: So, that's what they actually charged him with.

RV: What was would you say the most common thing that you dealt with as far as a defense council, what was the most common incident or issue?

PC: Insubordination to an NCO, disrespect to an NCO was the worst common, no question.

RV: And you had to defend these individuals.

PC: Or prosecute.

RV: Okay. Or you could prosecute?

PC: Or prosecute, sure.

RV: Okay, so it was basically potluck, you were chosen for one side or the other.

PC: There was one where I was the lead defense council. We had an LZ, LZ Dolly on top of a mountain, [Indiscernible, LZ Dolly was on Razorback]. And we used to sit up on top of that mountain and watch the big red one get mortared every night. But

these guys were supposed to, there were four of them and they were supposed to go out and put out an LP. And they went out and set it up and then they came back inside the wire without telling anybody. Uh huh and they got caught, of course. And well the first thing they did was tell eleven people that, "Yeah, we did it." So defending them was a little difficult.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And I tried everything I could think of to come up with some kind of defense strategy, but I mean, they had told so many people and it was so, there were so many witnesses that I just didn't see anyway.

RV: But you still had to defend them.

PC: But I still had to defend them and I talked to them all and we wound up pleading guilty and putting their service records out there, the kind of ringleader if you will had a Bronze Star with a V and most of them had awards of different kinds. And they weren't bad guys, they just tried to get away with something and didn't and so they got court marshaled and all of them got reduced. But the ringleader, he got sent to LBJ, Long Binh Jail and not a pleasant place, but he got sent there for thirty days. And of course, that was bad time, that didn't count either towards his tour in Vietnam or his time in the Army. And they sent him back to us again. The time he was in LBJ is when he was supposed to be on R&R meeting his folks in Hawaii. And of course, obviously he didn't go on that, and he came back and about three weeks later, he got killed, got in a big firefight and he got killed. Well, his parents started writing letters to us. "What happened, why wasn't my son on R&R?"

RV: Oh, he had not informed his parents of why he couldn't meet them?

PC: No. And he had not told them anything and they just wanted to know why was he still in country because it was after his original DEROS (Date Eligible for Return From Overseas), why hadn't he come on R&R, all these kinds of things. And nobody was going to tell them what happened, I mean nobody.

RV: Out of respect for him?

PC: Out of respect for him, he screwed up, but he was still a soldier and he died and we weren't going to sully that memory with his family. And boy, and we write a

letter back and they of course, it didn't satisfy them, there's no way we could satisfy them because we couldn't tell them the truth.

RV: And your unit was responsible for writing that letter and being a communication…?

PC: Yeah, well they wrote directly to us and so we had to answer directly. What the Battalion Commander came up with, probably fourteen different things to tell them, but we never did tell them, we never did tell them.

RV: Was that difficult?

PC: Oh yeah, it was real tough. Not telling them was easy.

RV: Right. You knew that was the right decision.

PC: Oh, there was no question, we didn't even think about it. There was never the slightest thought about telling them what really happened. But you know, figuring out what to tell them was pretty difficult, yeah.

RV: Did you see yourself, you know, six months earlier, you know, I'm going to be in a war and I'm going to be defending people; I mean, did you know this was part of what you'd be doing?

PC: Oh yeah. Yeah, I had done the same thing at Ft. Hood.

RV: Okay. So you expected that to continue and be part of your…?

PC: Oh yeah. I mean, that was just part of the duties of a Captain and below in a battalion, I mean, that was just part of your duties.

RV: And this continued on throughout your tour?

PC: Oh yeah.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: Well, in the second half, most of the second half of my tour I was a Company Commander, so I wasn't really eligible to do that kind of thing.

RV: So chronologically just so we're straight, your in Tay Ninh, which again is I don't know if we've discussed the geographic location, but it is northwest of, just outside Saigon, northwest Saigon and III Corps. And you were there for the first couple of months?

PC: Well, I was there for a couple of months and then they moved me out to set up an office on the LZ on the firebase, Katum.

RV: Okay.

PC: Which was basically a bunch of concertina and a landing strip. And of course a TOC (Tactical Operations Center) and I stayed out there for a while.

RV: How long do you think you were out there?

PC: Two or three months.

RV: Okay.

PC: Then when we moved to LZ Dolly, and I think I'm getting this chronology right, when we moved to LZ Dolly, then I again moved back to the rear.

RV: Okay.

PC: In Tay Ninh.

RV: And that's when you were Company Commander.

PC: No, no. I was still in the 1st of the 5th Cav.

RV: Okay.

PC: Under the Combat Arms Replacement Program, after six months, I could apply to go to my kind of unit, an ordnance unit. And so I called the G1, which is a division personnel and said, "Guys, you know, I've pretty much done my six months and I'd like to go to a maintenance battalion." And they said, "Yeah, you did your time and so we'll move you." And I went to the 27th Maintenance Battalion.

RV: Okay.

PC: And anywhere/anytime. And I was a Shop Officer and Company XO for I guess five or six weeks and then they made me Company Commander. And I spent the rest of my time there. And this was LZ Andy, Quan Loi.

RV: In Quan Loi?

PC: In Quan Loi and I spent the rest of my time there as a Company Commander.

RV: Okay. That will help outlining that just as far as, you know, where you were in country. Can you describe what Tay Ninh looked like? And of course, it's dominated by a geographical feature, Tay Ninh Mountain.

PC: Yup. Nui Ba Den, yeah, Black Virgin Mountain.

RV: Yes.

PC: Yeah, engineers used to just have fits out there. They said that we owned the top and the bottom and they owned everything in between, not the engineers, the VC, owned everything in between, so it was kind of an interesting place.

RV: Did you ever have a chance to go up on the mountain?

PC: Never did, never did. Tay Ninh was kind of an interesting place. Most of the buildings were wood boards, horizontal wood boards up from the ground up to about four feet.

RV: You're talking about the houses or businesses?

PC: Well no, I'm talking about the buildings on the military instillation of Tay Ninh.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: And from about four feet up to ceiling level, they were screens, you know, to try to get any kind of breeze that you could get; and then usually some kind of metal roof corrugated, metal corrugated tin or something like that. And of course, in between every building there was a bunker so that you could run out and get in there. And some of the guys had taken and cut through the wall of their hooch and dug a tunnel down into the bunker, so they didn't have to run outside and into the bunker, they could from the inside of their hooch, they could get down into the bunker much faster. And they would put, we had what was called PSP, Perforated Steel Planking, I'm sure you're familiar with that, and that would commonly be the roof of a bunker with a bunch of sandbags on top. One of the cooks was running through one of those little quick hide-e-holes and hit his forehead right on the edge of the PSP. Knocked him cold and of course just laid his forehead open. And…

RV: This is during a mortar attack?

PC: Yeah, yeah. And so he spent a couple of the days in the hospital.

RV: Yeah. Let me ask you this Pat. I've had many, many veterans comment upon the bunkers back at the base and how you all would get in them and go through that routine when rockets were coming or mortars coming. Did anybody take you aside, when you first arrived and said, "Okay Pat, here are the bunkers and here's what you do when this happens and here's our bunker and this is who gets in first, you need to get in

last or every man for himself." or was there anything like that or did you just kind of have to figure it out on your own?

PC: You just kind of figured it out on your own. And I mean, you learned real quick, but you just kind of watched the thundering herd and followed them.

RV: Right. Is that something that you would, like when you would arrive say at Dolly or these other places go, "Okay, now where are the bunkers?" Just kind of pinpoint in your mind where they were so you would know where to go?

PC: No, I can't say that I really did. There were so many of them scattered around, that it really wasn't…being far away from one really wasn't a major issue that I can't say…now not on the firebases.

RV: Right.

PC: I'm talking about at Tay Ninh.

RV: Right, right, back in the rear.

PC: Yes. And out on the firebases, they were so temporary; there just wasn't a lot of time to build those kinds of things. But one of the big things was how do you learn the difference between outgoing artillery and incoming artillery.

RV: Can you explain how you learned; did you look and listen?

PC: I did, I did, because I wanted to know the difference.

RV: Right.

PC: And everybody I asked said it'll take you about two days to figure it out. Nobody could explain it, but they all said it would take you about two days and they were right. When I first came into the 1st Cav, I was in Phuoc Vinh at the division headquarters and I was in what we'd called the BOQ, basically a hooch with a bunch of cots in it. And there was an artillery battalion not thirty yards away, or battery, not battalion, battery. And all of a sudden they started shooting. Man, I didn't know what was going on. And fortunately, there was nobody else in the building because I hit the deck. But from then on, I knew what outgoing sounded like.

RV: Can you describe what you listened for? It's just loud at first and then…?

PC: Well, the incoming has got a, even if you don't hear the whistle, the incoming has got a sharper crack to it.

RV: Meaning when it shot at you?

PC: When it exploded.

RV: When it exploded.

PC: Yeah. And so if you started hearing these kind of sharp cracks, then you knew it was time to hit the ground.

RV: I guess because you're hearing a loud explosion whether it's an incoming landing and exploding or an outgoing being shot out of the tube, you know, out of the artillery piece. So you have to differentiate between the sound of those two explosives.

PC: Exactly, that's exactly it.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah. And the guys were all right, it took me about two days and after that, it was never any question of whether it was coming in or going out.

RV: Did you ever get used to the noise?

PC: No.

RV: Okay.

PC: No. The outgoing never bothered me, except I have some hearing loss. At Quan Loi, we had a 175 Battery right across the street and those suckers are loud. But the outgoing never bothered me. But boy, I sure never got used to the incoming.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And I'm glad I didn't.

RV: Right, well of course.

PC: When you get used to it and get casual, that's when you get killed.

RV: I would like you at some point and you can do this when you want to, is to comment upon, you know, some incidents or experiences when you did, were fired upon in the rear and when you had to deal with incoming and how you felt, what you did. Are there any particular things that stand out in your mind about it?

PC: Well, it's a really helpless feeling. Because I mean, there's somebody five miles away shooting these big bullets at you and you don't know where they are, you don't know where they're shooting at and half the time they didn't either. And it's just really a helpless feeling. Now if you're out on the perimeter and if you're a counter battery, something like that, you can at least shoot back. But if you're just walking

through the area and it starts coming in, I mean, you're just really helpless and that's the way I felt.

RV: Right. Were you scared?

PC: Oh sure, sure. I had people I didn't even know were trying to hurt me, seriously hurt me. You're darn right I was scared. And we were in Tay Ninh one night and gosh, it was kind of in the middle of the night and all of a sudden all hell broke loose. And there were procedures that you followed, especially if you thought you were going to get a ground attack. And there would be a reaction force, there was a unit right next to us and they had a deuce and a half full of ammunition and that was supposed to take their reaction force to the perimeter. And about, we figured about a hundred and twenty seconds before twenty guys jumped on this truck; a 122 hit it. And I mean, we picked up the pieces, they picked up the pieces, you know, in a bushel basket. These thing just...and it blew for probably ten minutes. And then the EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) spent about three days cleaning up the unexpended ordnance that this thing had just scattered all over heck and gone. But we missed eighteen or twenty casualties by ninety seconds.

RV: Wow.

PC: And I was in my hooch sound asleep and I was sharing a little office or a little room I should say with a Warrant Officer, had concrete floor.

RV: This is in Tay Ninh?

PC: In Tay Ninh.

RV: Okay.

PC: And it was the same night as the truck and all of a sudden these things start landing all over. And of course, this truck blew and I mean, we both hit the floor and kind of rolled under our bunks and just nothing you can do but wait for it to end. And ultimately it did and so we waited a little while and got back in bed and went back to sleep and got up in the morning and all kinds of holes in the ceiling where shrapnel had come through.

RV: Wow. I think that people, when you talk about this kind of thing, that it's for people who are listening to this who have never experienced anything close to that, how human beings can endure that kind of thing, especially a helpless feeling, feeling of

fear, self protection and survival, how does a human undergo that and how does a human deal with that, how did you deal with it?

PC: Well, I mean, you just do. It's apart of the environment; it's a normal part of what you're doing at that time. And it's something, it's always kind of niggling at the back of your mind, but you can't dwell on it. There wasn't anything you could do about it.

RV: Right.

PC: So there wasn't much point in fretting about it. You know, you just deal with it. I didn't see very many guys that had lots of problems with it. I mean, a few did obviously, but very few. I mean, I'm not sure how to answer your question. I mean, it was just there. You know, it's like looking both ways before you cross the street.

RV: You've answered it, that's how you did, how you dealt with it. When you're under the bunk and you're waiting for the birage to stop, what're you thinking, just stop, you know or…?

PC: Well, I'm thinking, "Damn, I hope nothing lands here!" and I'm thinking, "I'm ready for it to quit now." and hoping that I don't get it.

RV: Are you thinking about family, home?

PC: Not really.

RV: You just don't let yourself go there?

PC: No, you can't do that. You wouldn't be able to deal with it then if you thought about that.

RV: Are you talking to your buddy across the room?

PC: We're both looking at each other like deer in the headlights. I mean, all you can see is eyeballs. And because like I say, there's just not anything you can do about it, when they're hitting that close, you're taking a bigger chance jumping up and running for a bunker than you are just hunkering down. Typically it'll explode in a V shape, so if they're not, if they don't hit a roof above you and spray a bunch of shrapnel down, if they hit the ground beside you, they have to be really close before they're going to seriously hurt you. They're definitely going to damage your morale and your eardrums, but they're not really going to seriously hurt you unless they're really, really close. So you really

kind of savor when they're that close hunkering down and just staying flat on the ground. I mean, that's what we both did.

RV: Did you cover up with anything?

PC: There was one flak jacket in the room and we scrabbled over it. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) Did you do rock/paper/scissors?

PC: No, we both just grabbed and he got it. (Laughing)

RV: Okay.

PC: And I used to joke with folks that, you know, if you get scared enough, you can get entirely under your steel pipe. And god, we were standing outside one night and nothing was going on, it was dark and remember, I standing by a connex, you know, the bit steel boxes and all of a sudden it sounded like a freight train was going overhead. And S2 told us later, they thought it was a 122 with a satchel charge attached and it went right over our heads and I turned around and flatfooted, went eight feet. Well you know, a connex is about three inches off the ground and I didn't quite make it under the, but boy, I was sure trying. And that thing hit in the road on the other side of our battalion area and it left a crater that must've been four feet deep and six feet square.

RV: Wow.

PC: I mean, it just, but I'll never forget that sound, it just "Whoosh!"

RV: Didn't even know it was coming.

PC: Didn't know it was coming, just out of the clear blue. A bunch of us standing out there talking. And of course, somebody yells, "Incoming!" all you see is bodies diving for the grounds.

RV: Would you see people trying to get in bunkers and say, "Hey, there's no room in this bunker," or would you all make room for anybody that came?

PC: Oh no, if they came to the bunker, they got in.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah. No, I didn't see any of that. It got a little cozy sometimes, but I didn't see anybody turn away from a bunker.

RV: Were the attacks more daytime or nighttime?

PC: Almost always nighttime; ninety percent plus.

RV: Why do you think they were doing that?

PC: Oh, they owned the night. You know, we didn't do much at night; we couldn't do much at night. And we used to talk about it, you know, at night, Vietnam was theirs; during the day, it was ours. But they could do things at night that…of course; they were a lot lighter and more mobile than we were. So at night, that was an advantage. During the day, of course, that was a real disadvantage because we could see them and just bring hell down on them. But at night, they just were pretty much moved within impunity. Not true anymore.

RV: Yeah, I remember you yesterday and you talking about that we own the night now; we have the technology.

PC: Yup, nobody matches us at night now.

RV: Do you think it's a lesson from Vietnam?

PC: I absolutely do. I think the smart guys looked and said, "You know, we can't fight another war like this." And I went on some night exercises at Ft. Hood and this was long, long after and had night vision goggles and it is an eerie sensation to be sitting in a Hum V scooting along at forty-five miles an hour when it's pitch black because the driver's got night vision goggles. Well he can see everything. Of course, you can't see a thing; it's an eerie feeling.

RV: And you're sitting, you don't have the goggles.

PC: I don't have the goggles.

RV: And so you just don't see anything.

PC: All I can see is black. Because he doesn't have any headlights on and he's got the night vision goggles. So, I mean, it's reasonably safe, but like I say, it's a strange feeling.

RV: I bet so.

PC: But yeah, most of them happened at night. We had a few during the day, mostly a few isolated rounds, nothing real serious.

RV: Of all the places you were stationed while there or posted while there, where were you receiving the most attacks?

PC: The most mortar attacks was there at Tay Ninh. The most ground attacks is when I was up at Quan Loi.

RV: Okay.

PC: We had several pretty serious ground attacks on the perimeter when we were up at Quan Loi.

RV: Were you ever responsible for being on the reaction force or being part of the response?

PC: No.

RV: Okay.

PC: No, they would rotate infantry units through to do that. Now, my unit would be called and given a certain sector to defend, things like that, but in terms of being responsible, I was just responsible for making sure my guys got where they were supposed to be and they let the combat arms guys…

RV: Take care of you.

PC: In an attack of good judgment, let the combat arms guys do the tactical stuff.

RV: Right. Tell me, lets talk some more about Tay Ninh.

PC: Sure.

RV: Tell me again what it was like there and what were your quarters like and what did, you know, what kind of recreation did you have, what kind of food did you have, your basic everyday life there at Tay Ninh.

PC: Of course, it was hot, I mean hot and wet. And my sleeping hooch I shared with another guy and it was one of the buildings I described earlier and I mean, you didn't have to worry about modesty, there were zero women around, absolutely zero.

RV: What about the hooch maids? Did you all have…?

PC: Illegal in the 1st Cav; not allowed in the 1st Cav.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: As a Company Commander in Tay or I mean in Quan Loi, I cleaned my own hooch.

RV: Okay.

PC: And not allowed. So other units on Tay Ninh had them, but we didn't. So like I say, you didn't have to worry about modesty, so everything was open screen doors and all. I had a bunk over on one side; he had a bunk over on the other side.

RV: About how big was this room?

PC: Oh, twelve by twelve.

RV: Okay.

PC: And ours had an enjoining bunker so that all we had to do was run through the back of the hooch and we were in a bunker.

RV: Right out the back door.

PC: Right out the back door. I mean, it was actually connected to the hooch.

RV: Okay.

PC: And they had the culvert, steel culvert. You'd put that over to make a little tunnel and then put sandbags over that, so you had kind of a little tunnel going into it and you could jump up and dive in there real fast.

RV: How big was the bunker?

PC: Oh, six by six maybe if that.

RV: Pretty good size.

PC: Well, we've been in Tay Ninh so long that there had been plenty of time to do those kinds of improvements and that kind of stuff.

RV: So the two of you could actually go into the bunker and I mean, it was covered up, but you go in there and dig out some more and improve it.

PC: Yeah, exactly.

RV: Okay.

PC: And it was nasty when it rained. That water'd pool in there and of course, it make the bottom all muddy and all, but it was better than getting shot.

RV: How did you get assigned to room with this guy?

PC: Just kind of random, you know, where is there a space.

RV: Did you all get along?

PC: Oh sure, yeah. We all pretty much got along.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I don't remember any bad feelings. We had one Lieutenant, really get himself in trouble, good guy too, I hated to see it. But man, he sure screwed up. He got in a drinking contest one night and took a dare and I'm surprised he didn't die of alcohol poisoning; he drank about a half a bottle of scotch just straight down, got out in the middle of the battalion area screaming and yelling and ranting and raving. And the

Chaplain tried to calm him down; we thought he was going to punch out the Chaplain. So, we had of course a big crowd of enlisted men watching this officer disgrace himself.

RV: What was he yelling, what was he ranting about?

PC: Oh gosh, "Oh this sucks and that sucks!" I don't really remember, he was screaming and yelling and telling the Chaplain, "Get away from me or I'm going to deck you!" and that kind of stuff. And we believed him too.

RV: Was he armed?

PC: No he was not, he was not. And we all had our weapons, but typically in the battalion area, we didn't carry them. If we went outside the battalion area, you carried your weapon; that was the 1st Cav rule. And finally things calmed down and all and he wound up getting an Article 15 from the Division Commander.

RV: Which was?

PC: An Article 15 is non-judicial punishment. It's usually for officers. It takes a General Officer, a General to give them an Article 15 and it's basically an administrative type of punishment where you can be fined, you can be restricted to your quarters. Technically you can be put in confinement for fourteen days. Enlisted soldiers can be reduced; they can be busted, but not officers because they're appointed by the DA, Department of the Army. So he got…and you can turn down an Article 15 because it is non-judicial and because you have a constitutional right to a trial.

RV: Right.

PC: You can refuse an Article 15 and insist on a court marshal. But he wisely didn't do that. Obviously the penalties in a court marshal are much more severe than the penalties in an Article 15 because you really can go to the stockade there. So he got an Article 15 from the Division Commander, the XO read it to him and I was the witness, which I thought was a little weird because he was senior to me. But the XO said, "You're the editor, you're going to do it." And I said, "Yes sir." And of course, that was the end of his career; an Article 15 for an officer is absolutely the end. I mean, you just say, "Thank you very much." resign and go on your way. There is no way to come back from that.

RV: Wow. That one night.

PC: One night. He was a combat vet, you know, been out in the field a long time, done a great job and screwed up.

RV: Does that seem fair to you?

PC: Yeah. He knows the way of an officer; he's not allowed to have that kind of lapse. He should have had better judgment. I mean, he's not a teenage/college student anymore. You know, he's supposed to be leading men in war.

RV: Okay. Tell me about your quarters. You described it a bit, but you know, bathroom facilities, shaving, and then tell me about Mess Hall. This is at Tay Ninh.

PC: At Tay Ninh. The latrines were basically long narrow buildings, maybe twenty feet long and five feet wide, maybe eight feet high and inside was a board raised up and with holes cut in it and underneath it were half of fifty-five gallon drums. And that was the bathroom. And typically somebody who had screwed up would have to come by once a day and pull the drum out, pour diesel in it, stir it up and light it. And that's just one of those odors you never forget as hard as you try.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And that was the latrine facilities. Water was out of a fifty-five gallon drum, something like that. We actually had a shower and somebody had put a black, I think it was an old fuel pod on top. You fill it up with water and over the course of the day, that black surface absorbed so much heat, you get a nice hot shower at the end of the day. And shaving, you had your little field mirror and you know, your doc kit and all of that. Now when we were out on the firebase, I used to use my steel pot as a basin. I mean, I know the kevlars are much better helmet in terms of protecting you, but it sure is a lot less functional in other ways. And none of us ever carried a basin, didn't have to, you carried one on your head. But when we were back in rear, we'd go to the PX and buy a little plastic basin or something like that to use.

RV: Okay. So you had access to the PX.

PC: Yes. Tay Ninh was a huge place, thousands of guys. And in fact, we had, part of the instillation was Filipinos, the Philippine Army had a big instillation there.

RV: Did you mix with them any?

PC: I used to go over and use their facilities. Man, they had a great club; they had a rec center with a photo lab, just all kinds of nice facilities. They really had it nice over there.

RV: Tell me about recreation and things like that, photo labs and just things you could do on base once you were done with your daily duties.

PC: On the military side, on the Army US side, there really wasn't very much. Every now and then we'd get a dance troops through or a USO (United Service Organizations) show or something like that. The Donut Dollies, God bless them, used to go out in the jungle in a helicopter and talk to the guys and all that. But there really wasn't all that much to do. Play cards, talk, drink a lot, a lot of drinking over there.

RV: Why do you think there was so much drinking?

PC: Oh you know, you're lonesome, you're either bored or scared, you know, it's just something to relieve the stress.

RV: Was it a problem do you think?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah I think so. (Coughs) There was the Lieutenant that trashed his any hopes of a career and guys were pretty drunk. Sometimes just too drunk to even make it to the bunker. You know, we'd get a mortar attack and they'd just lay there because they couldn't get up. And so yeah, there was quite a bit of drinking.

RV: How about yourself, did you partake?

PC: I did, not that much, but probably more than I should have. But I was never too drunk to get to the bunker, I can tell you that. But yeah, there was a lot of drinking as I suspect in probably any war under those kinds of situations. Now out in the jungle, of course it was obviously a much different story, they didn't have access to that kind of thing. We would take a couple of cases of beer, put it in a mail sack, throw a bunch of ice in there and send it out on the Log Birds so everybody got a couple of beers. And that was much appreciated.

RV: I'm sure.

PC: And in a way, the Army really subsidized it. I mean, you could get a bottle of pretty good Bourbon for about a dollar seventy-five. And of course, cigarettes were like a dime a pack or something like that.

RV: Did you smoke?

PC: Yes I did, yeah, a lot. And you know, in that way it was kind of subsidized. We had a Captain who was our S4 for a while, really good guy. And he kept a bottle of Jack, of Jim Bean on the floor beside his bed. He'd get up in the morning; his feet hit the floor, picked up that bottle of Jim Bean and took a big old slug to get the day started.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And we had a Sergeant Major who would when he went to bed at night, he'd open a can of beer and put it under his bed and when he got up in the morning, he drank that warm flat beer. If I hadn't seen it, I would never have believed it.

RV: Why did he do that?

PC: Beats the hell out of me.

RV: That was just his routine.

PC: Was just his routine to get his day started, I guess get his pump ticking or something.

RV: What about drugs, did you see any of this? And I guess, you know, Tay Ninh also at the firebase and then at Quan Loi.

PC: Never saw any on the firebase, I'm not going to say it wasn't near, but I never saw it.

RV: Okay.

PC: Didn't really see any at Tay Ninh. The drugs were around, but they were not as prevalent, not as common as they were later on. I first started seeing significant drugs when I was Company Commander up at Quan Loi and I had a couple of guys I knew were using.

RV: Using what?

PC: Mostly hash. That's what I found, I never found any heroin, but we found marijuana and hash, which was, I mean, if you went off the firebase, then it was just as common as you know, dirt. So I think I actually left Vietnam before it got real, real bad. But it did get real, real bad. They tried to frag my successor.

RV: In Quan Loi?

PC: In Quan Loi. They put a hand grenade and a bucket of gasoline with a rubber band around the hand grenade holding the pin; gasoline dissolves rubber bands. And so had the First Sergeant not found it, it would've dissolved the rubber band, the

handle would've come off, the grenade would've gone off and it was right outside where he slept.

RV: And that's because he was strict?

PC: I have no idea. I was strict; I was a mean son of a bitch at first.

RV: Why would you say at first?

PC: Well here I was a First Lieutenant when I took over as Company Commander, I was First Lieutenant and I guess I had five or six months in grade, something like that and I knew there were going to be serious credibility issues and I knew there were going to be tests. And I was right on both counts and so we had to have an understanding between them and me. And the understanding had to be if I said it, they did it. And if they had a problem, then they could tell me about it and I would make a decision and once the decision was made, that was the end of the conversation. And so I wound up giving a lot of Article 15s at the beginning. And in fact, my Battalion Commander told me he wondered if he made a serious mistake. But after three or four weeks, the word got around, if you screw up, you are going to get hammered, period, that's the end of the conversation. No hope, no help.

RV: Lieutenant Curry will take care of you.

PC: Lieutenant Curry will jump right on your ass. And once that word got around, things got much better. And then my Article 15 rate dropped really far, far down, I just didn't have to do it. They knew that if I had to, I was certainly going to and there was no doubt about it.

RV: Right.

PC: I had a really great group of guys for the most part.

RV: We'll talk about that when we get to Quan Loi. That's interesting; I wanted to discuss what you saw with drug use, alcohol use. The alcohol use you saw pretty much across the board…

PC: Across the board from the day I walked in country.

RV: Do you think it hampered the American effort in anyway in Vietnam?

PC: I can't say that I have first hand experience where I saw a guy too drunk to do his duty or something like that. I cannot see logically how it could not have hampered us. I mean, there was so much of it, guys walking around kind of in a daze and…

RV: Hung over.

PC: Hung over or drunk and I just don't see how it couldn't have hampered us.

RV: Okay. At Tay Ninh…

PC: I mean, I mentioned a couple of things where guys and I'm talking six o'clock in the morning are taking a slug.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: I just don't see how it couldn't have hampered.

RV: At Tay Ninh, what did you eat?

PC: (Laughing) Well, we had the Mess Hall and we actually had a pretty good Mess Hall. And that was where I was introduced to fried tomatoes. I never had them before, but we ate a lot of, you know, the eggs were powdered, not that I ever ate them. Kind of standard Mess Hall affair.

RV: Was the food bad or just average?

PC: Uh, it was just, you know, it was just there. You ate because you had to, you certainly didn't eat for enjoyment. You know, we used to buy bread from a Vietnamese bakery and get this bread in, cook it, slice it up; it would be just full of baked bugs. (Laughing) I mean, you sit through…

RV: On purpose?

PC: No, no, no.

RV: Oh.

PC: Just there were bugs in the bakery and they got in the dough and when the dough went in the oven, they got baked right in with it. And so you'd sit there with a piece of break and it's be flecked with black spots and you'd go through and pick them all out and then you'd turn it over and get the other side. And of course, the trick was, cut the slice thin enough so you can see both sides.

RV: Right.

PC: And then you'd butter it up and (Laughing).

RV: Wow.

PC: God, the things we did. But I mean, it was not a bad Mess Hall. And of course, out on the firebase, you usually ate C-rations for lunch. A lot of times in the jungle you ate C-rations three times a day. Although we tried whenever we could, I had a

maramite can, which was an insulated container, probably twenty-four inches long and twelve inches wide and maybe twenty-four inches high. And you could put hot food in that and it would stay hot for a while. And so we tried to put those on a Log Bird so we could get at least one hot meal to the guys in the jungle everyday, if possible, did breakfast too.

RV: So this was while you're at the firebase at…

PC: Yeah, I'm sorry, I keep bouncing back and forth.

RV: That's fine, that's fine. We're talking about general topics like food. You all were responsible for getting the food out to the field.

PC: Yes, absolutely. Food, ammunition, everything they needed to survive.

RV: Everything, yeah. So this was, tell me, this was at the firebase at Katum?

PC: Well, all of them. LZ Dolly, Katum…

RV: All of them?

PC: Yeah.

RV: And this was before you went to the 27th Maintenance Battalion.

PC: Yes, this was while I was still in 1st of the 5th and we were trying to support the guys out in the jungle.

RV: Okay. Before we talk about that, I want to hear about how you all would do that. At Tay Ninh, is there anything else as far as your jobs that you did? You described in detail writing the citations for the awards, you talked about the defense council of a prosecution, personnel action, paperwork. What else would you do?

PC: Letters of indebtedness. At that time, the Army would try to help a collection agency or a debtor collect money from a soldier.

RV: Really?

PC: Oh yeah.

RV: From the United States?

PC: From the United States. So if they wrote us, we had to try to do something about it. But the main part was the personnel actions and the administration, that kind of thing. That was the first job I had. I worked for an infantry First Lieutenant and although I remember his name quite well, I won't mention it. He nearly ended my military career.

RV: How?

PC: He didn't feel that I was…once I was moved out to the firebase; he didn't feel I was working hard enough and doing enough.

RV: Why did he think that?

PC: I don't know. He certainly never talked to me about it.

RV: He just formed this opinion?

PC: Yeah and wrote it down. And so then I was an assistant S4 working for Captain Joe Davis who was the S4. This was at Tay Ninh and Captain Davis was a great guy, I really liked him. And I went to him very bluntly and told him, "You know, I got trashed and I'm going to work my ass off for you and try to get you to cover that up for me."

RV: Meaning what?

PC: Meaning that I had a bad efficiency report, I wanted to earn a good one to put on top of it so that when somebody looked at my efficiency reports, they would say, "Well wait a minute, you got this one bad one, but look right on top of it from a Captain, is a much better OER."

RV: How often would the efficiency reports be done?

PC: They are done once a year or when the rating officer changes. So if I got a new boss, I got an OER (Officer Evaluation Report). Or if I moved to a new position and got a new boss, I got an OER from the old one.

RV: Right. So the new one coming in would know exactly what he was dealing with.

PC: Oh, he didn't get to see them.

RV: He did not get to see them.

PC: He did not get to see them. Those are pretty confidential, not officially anyway, but those are pretty confidential and the new boss didn't get to see them.

RV: These efficiency reports follow you around.

PC: When I retired after twenty-five years, the first OER I ever had was still in my file. Now they're all electronic now, but…

RV: Sure, sure.

PC: Yeah, they stay with you forever. Now, as time goes on, you know, the older it is, the less weight it carries. And so as time goes on, you can cover up one or two bad

ones. If you get a string of bad ones, you're out. But the old myth that one bad OER will end your career is not true and I'm living proof of it.

RV: What happened with that guy, the one who wrote the bad efficiency report for you? Where was this again, this was at Dolly?

PC: This was at Tay Ninh.

RV: Okay, Tay Ninh.

PC: And also when I was out on the firebase at Katum.

RV: Same guy?

PC: Oh yeah, same guy. Well, one OER.

RV: Right.

PC: I had two jobs, I mean, the same job; they just decided I would move out forward. And I really learned something from that.

RV: From what, moving forward or from the whole…?

PC: No, from the whole experience with this guy and being sent out to the firebase and etc. And you know, here I was Second Lieutenant, had never been an adjutant, knew nothing about it, knew very little about administration, that kind of stuff. They send me out to a firebase as a brand new Second Lieutenant, well relatively new Second Lieutenant, and nobody gives me any guidance. I don't have any supervisor anywhere around to ask questions. I'm supposed to go out there as this, you know, green guy and know what to do. Well, I didn't know what to do, you know. I did what I could, but I just didn't know what needed to be done and I didn't have anybody to ask. And when I was a Battalion Commander, I tried my hardest to make sure that did not happen to our Second Lieutenants, that they were not just thrown out in there into a platoon and said, "Okay, lead this platoon and do this job." That somebody worked with them, somebody guided them, counseled them. And I did the same thing as a Battalion Executive Officer too.

RV: So he basically taught you how not to be…?

PC: He taught me how not to deal with a new officer and it was such a traumatic experience for me, that I learned it well and acted on it much later in life.

RV: Okay.

PC: But Joe Davis, and I told him real frankly, you know, "I got trashed; I want it covered up."

RV: Joe was the replacement?

PC: He was the, well see; I changed jobs. I went from the S1 to the S4.

RV: Okay.

PC: From the administrative to the logistic side. I was a little more comfortable on logistics. And so I did work hard for Captain Davis and I think I did a good job for him and he certainly took care of me.

RV: So it worked out?

PC: It worked out.

RV: Obviously because you…

PC: I got just a max OER from him and the XO, Battalion XO…you have two officers who rate you, one's the rater, one's the endorser. And the XO was the endorser and he backed up Captain Davis. So, I was able to cover that up and as you can see, from the fact that I was selected for the undergraduate degree program.

RV: Well you're…yes.

PC: That wasn't the reason; the reason is because when I was a Company Commander.

RV: Right. But that bad report didn't mess you up at all. Do you think Pat, just kind of as an aside, could the business world, the corporate world or say the university world administration; could it learn from the military in this kind of efficiency reports? And I know we have annual reviews, you know, and corporations and companies have their reviews of their employees, I can only assume that you would say, "Yeah, you can learn from this experience and it can translate into the private sector into the civilian life." And I, you, have taken this with you of how to interact with and rate those whom you supervised, is that fair to say?

PC: That is very fair to say.

RV: Your military career in that sense has followed you.

PC: Absolutely, yeah. And yeah, you know, the real good ones that just walk on the water people and the real bad ones are easy to write. It's that ninety percent in the middle that are difficult to write, but if you do it correctly, especially in a civilian

occupation where you know, that's not the kiss of death, if you write it right, you can really show them what they need to focus on, what they need to do differently. And then if they do and everybody wins, you can give them a higher rating next time and that has really worked real for me here at Texas Tech.

RV: Do you think the military puts too much emphasis on the efficiency reports?

PC: No I don't. I'll tell you, the system works, the system works. We went through an exercise one time because I mean, everybody's always complaining about OER or something, especially the guys who get bad ones because you know, the system's not fair, etc., etc.

RV: Well that's why I'm asking because I've heard a lot said about OERs.

PC: Yeah, I'm sure. We went through an exercise one time when I became a Battalion Commander and what they did was they took real promotion board records. The way it works is when they're ready to promote or select Majors for instance for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, they'll convene a promotion board of senior officers. They will pull the records of all the officers, all the Majors who are eligible for Lieutenant Colonel and they'll go through them. And each member of this board rates them, gives them an overall score. And so they simulated this for us with actual promotion board records.

RV: As training?

PC: As, well, more as showing that the system works, just to give us some confidence in the system. And we had probably thirty people in this room and we had these promotion records and the names and social security numbers, had all been blacked out, we didn't know who they really were. Everybody has a picture and the faces were taken out, etc. So, we went through this, simulating being a promotion board and we had about a ninety-eight percent overlap with the actual promotion board.

RV: Wow.

PC: And so the guys that we thought were the good guys, that really were best qualified to be promoted were the guys who actually had been selected for promotion.

RV: What about those who are "passed over?" And obviously each individual doesn't think they should be passed over, but can you speak to that? I mean, there must be a reason in there somewhere or no?

PC: Oh yeah. You might have all good OERs; they just might not be as good as the guy ahead of you. And the way it works is they rate everybody and everybody gets a numerical score. And so then they have this long list of people rated from one hundred down to zero. Well then the Department of the Army says, and there might be five thousand people on this list. Department of the Army says, "We need two thousand six hundred and eighty two Lieutenant Colonels next year." So they'd go down to number two thousand six hundred and eight two and they draw a line right under his name.

RV: And that's it.

PC: And that's it. Now, if number seven hundred and twenty resigns or gets court marshaled or otherwise ineligible for promotion, number two thousand six hundred and thirty three gets lucky, you know, because it'll drop down one more.

RV: Right.

PC: That kind of thing and that's how it works. And it's not that somebody who gets passed over is necessarily a bad guy. Although, if you get down to the real bottom, yeah.

RV: Sure.

PC: But not necessarily a bad guy, just don't have as strong a file as somebody else, a kind of assignment counts. You know, I mentioned being lucky going to a division as a Lieutenant working with the troops. I mean, that's the assignment you want, Company Commander. They used to weight your assignments, a command position was weighted three times as much as a regular staff position.

RV: Appropriately.

PC: Appropriately, much more difficult job and a lot more responsibility. And a command in a combat area was rated higher than that.

RV: I was going to say, did they put weight on the fact that you were doing this in country in Vietnam versus doing it in, you know, non-war time?

PC: Absolutely. I came back and at that time, you really needed that three years of command time. Vietnam counted two for one and I came back and commanded for two more years.

RV: Two years…one year in Vietnam was two years…?

PC: Well, I commanded for six months, it counted as a year.

RV: Gotcha.

PC: Of command time.

RV: Yes.

PC: And I came back two more years in the States, that probably didn't do me one tenth as much good as six months in Vietnam.

RV: Do you think that's why a lot of officers were real happy when a war crops up; not happy, but the war is happening, but it's an opportunity?

PC: They certainly see it as a career opportunity.

RV: As well as that's what they're trying to do.

PC: Yeah, sure, absolutely.

RV: Okay.

PC: You know, that's why we're in the Army. If you don't want to fight a war, you should not be in the military. I mean, that's what the military does. You know, that's why they're there. I will say I think that the emphasis on me and my career in Vietnam was way over done.

RV: You saw that?

PC: I saw that and I think to the detriment of the troops and the detriment of the war effort and the detriment of the Army. You know, the idea of having a Battalion Commander, an Infantry Battalion Commander for six months and then rotating him out so some other Lieutenant Colonel can get a chance is a ludicrous.

RV: Just to have that experience.

PC: Just to give them that opportunity for promotion. You know, that guy gets in country, if he's good enough to get selected for command, leave him in there for the full year. Hell, about the time he gets warmed up and figures out what's going on, he rotates out.

RV: But wasn't this the common thing, six months here and six months there?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah, it was the thing.

RV: And that was not a good thing.

PC: It was definitely not a good thing. I mean, how'd you like to change bosses every six months? A new guy has to come in, he has to learn the people, he has to figure out what's going on. You know, at best, they had been in combat in Korea or had a

previous tour in Vietnam, but not as a Battalion Commander. And I think that was totally ludicrous.

RV: While we're on this subject, and this is something that I usually save until the latter part of the interview, but while we're on the subject, tell me what you thought about the one-year rotation policy? You know, this is different from Korea, it's different…well, Korea was a different situation altogether, the "police action," but it's very different from World War I, very different from World War II. It's very unique in the American experience in the twentieth century. What did you think about it then, about the one-year rotation?

PC: Boy, I liked it then. (Laughing)

RV: Yeah.

PC: I don't think it was good military judgment necessarily.

RV: And this is now hindsight.

PC: Hindsight. But boy, I sure liked it then.

RV: Why now, why do you see it now as not such a great idea?

PC: The same thing, the experience factor. You know, I had just about learned to be a pretty good Company Commander when I DEROSed. In fact, the Battalion Commander asked me if I would extend. And a lot of guys did and I told him if he paid my alimony that I would extend. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) He said, "See you later Curry."

PC: Yeah, pretty much. (Laughing)

RV: "You're out of here."

PC: Yup.

RV: Okay.

PC: Hit the road. And that's a true story. We really did go through that.

RV: Oh really?

PC: Yeah.

RV: You and Diana or you and your…?

PC: Me and the Battalion Commander.

RV: Battalion Commander.

PC: Yeah, he was a terrific guy. When we get to Quan Loi, I'll tell you about him.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: Amazing guy.

RV: So tell me a little bit about what, when you moved from Tay Ninh up to the firebase and then you're to Dolly, how do you get around country, are you flown?

PC: Yes.

RV: Do you take deuce-and-a-halfs?

PC: No, no. The 1st Cav as an airmobile division had…every unit has what's called a MTO&E, which is their Modified Table of Organization & Equipment and it tells you what equipment among other things; what equipment you're allowed to have. And as an airmobile unit, the 1st Cav had no two and a half or bigger, two and a half ton or bigger trucks on their TO&E. Now we had some just as a special allocation because the little ones, you couldn't carry enough ammunition, enough food, so we did have a bunch of two and a half ton trucks. But you tended, I never drove in a vehicle between one town and another or one firebase and another, we flew. Now re-supplying, I had guys that would drive down, pick up a bunch of parts or supplies and then drive back.

RV: Right.

PC: But any personnel movement was by aircraft.

RV: How'd you like flying?

PC: Oh it was fine; I had a ball in the helicopters. And I got an air medal. When I was in 1st of the 5th, I went on several combat assaults.

RV: Did you really?

PC: Yeah.

RV: Why? This is after your ten-day initiation, visiting everyone?

PC: Well both, both.

RV: Both, okay.

PC: But mostly during that ten day.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so I went on a bunch of combat assaults, well not a bunch, but several.

RV: Right.

PC: And I don't want to exaggerate, but that's an interesting, interesting sensation.

RV: Tell me about that, what is it like to be on a combat assault and the Vietnam Verb as I call it, "I combat assaulted into an area." What is that like from your experience?

PC: Well typically there's been an artillery prep before hand, so the ground is kind of smoking and trees are burning and that kind of thing because they put in a bunch of artillery. And you're in a helicopter with four or five other guys, six other guys, plus the crew. And you look around, there's a whole bunch of other helicopters around you and they tend to come in and descend very rapidly, trying to make a less lucrative target. And sometimes they would land, actually touch down on the ground. Other times you'd be standing on the skids, they would hover above the ground and you would just jump off. Well, the pilots didn't like that because if the two guys didn't jump at the same time, the weight would skew.

RV: Sure.

PC: And that was a bad thing, with that long rotor blade on top. But a lot of times that's what we did. And most of the time when there was a Log Bird, they would hover and throw things out and then take off as quickly as possible.

RV: Did you go with the Log Bird a lot; did you go out with the materials and supplies?

PC: Yeah, yeah. But you're looking down and you're just wondering, you know, are there two bad guys, are there two hundred? You know, what kind of weapons do they have, do they have 51-Calibers, which will knock a helicopter out of the sky in a heartbeat? You know, what's going to happen when I hit the ground? Are they going to wait until we're ten feet off the ground and open up? What's going to happen? And it was usually pretty damn quiet on those things going in.

RV: Did you ever see the enemy?

PC: You know, never up close, you know.

RV: Right.

PC: Some guy, one lone guy way off in the jungle, yeah or as a POW (Prisoner of War) or as a body.

RV: Right.

PC: But in terms of coming face to face, no I never did. I never fired my weapon in anger. For an officer, it wasn't that unusual.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, especially for a non-combat arms officer.

RV: Right.

PC: But no, I never fired my weapon.

RV: Do you want to make some comments about the enemy, about the Viet Cong, the North Vietnamese? What were your general impressions about these two groups?

PC: Boy, just tough little SOBs. Of course, like I said before, they just owned the night. I mean, they would basically go anywhere and do anything they wanted at night; really courageous, really courageous people.

RV: What makes you say that, what did you hear?

PC: You know, we'd be sitting there on a brigade firebase; we had a whole bunch of infantry troops. We had Sheratons, M551s with flachette rounds. We had 105s direct fire, we had M-16s, we had Claymores out, we had mortars, we had row and row after row of concertina with the ground in-between just plowed. I mean, a grasshopper couldn't move, you'd see it. And these guys would come right through that outer ring of wire, right across that dirt strip, right up to that inner ring and try to cut through it and just keep coming. You know, you mentioned Pickett's Charge the other day and it's just that kind of thing, you know, except the weaponry is far more lethal. And you know they're living out in the jungle on a handful of rice. And I mean literally, you know, you find the body and that's what they would have in their food sack. I'm not saying I love them, but you got to respect them.

RV: Did you respect them then or is this kind of looking back at…?

PC: It's more kind of looking back than it was at the time. But you know, I remember, I was walking along the green line after a big ground attack one night.

RV: What's the green line?

PC: The perimeter. And a bunch of NVA and VC bodies laying inside the wire. I mean, inside the inner. I mentioned there was a 175 Battery and they were trying to get to that.

RV: Is this the daytime or nighttime?

PC: Nighttime. The attack was nighttime; I'm walking around in daytime. And I remember thinking, you know, "How the hell did they get this far, how did they get clear up here?" When you think of the weaponry that was pointed outwards, how in the world did anybody get through that? I mean, flachette grounds, they would pin them into a tree. Are you familiar with the flachettes, the little steel darts?

RV: I am, but describe it for everyone else listening.

PC: It's an artillery round or tank round or a recoilless rifle round, but instead of explosives, it's filled with about two inch long steel darts with little fins on them. And when you fire it, they come out of the tube of whatever you're firing, the barrel of whatever you're firing out of and they expand into a broad sweep. Well, here's all these steel darts moving at pretty fast speed and if there is any living thing in its way, they are not living after it's done. And these darts would just pin them to trees.

RV: What do you think was their motivation? Why would they attack like that?

PC: I think it's the same as at Dien Bien Phu. They had a real strong value system, a real strong ideology, a real strong belief in what they were doing. They didn't want to die anymore than we did, but they believed in what they were doing so strongly that they were willing to die for it. You know, it was their country and they really, I think, I think they really saw us as invaders just like they did the French. And you know, to some extent, they were right. I mentioned before, I think we went in there for the right reason, but you know, in terms of how they see us, I'm sure they saw us as you know, invaders.

RV: What do you think were the enemy's major strengths?

PC: Well, I think the stealth, the ability to move at night, that dedication that I talked about, that motivation to live under terrible conditions and still attack into the face of what must have been almost certain death. I think that was their strong points, just really, really courageous people. And the weak point obviously is they just didn't have the weaponry that we did. If it came to any kind of real fixed battle, I mean, we were

going to win and militarily Tet should have been… You know, like when we would get a ground attack, we'd have a C-130 with a mini-gun and a 105 Howitzer circulating overhead. Well I mean, they could flat out raise some hell and they were essentially out of touch, out of reach, they can circle with total impunity.

RV: Puff the Magic Dragon.

PC: Exactly. But you know, shoot it's the middle of the night; we can't see them, where do we shoot at?

RV: Of course, now we have infrared and we can see everything at night.

PC: Yup.

RV: Much safer weapon system.

PC: Much different story now. We can see them with thermal imaging. We can see each individual now on the ground from several thousand feet.

RV: Did you hear scuttlebutt or discussion about the enemy, you know, just you guys hanging out at the base or during your normal workdays, did you all talk about them or was this something that you just, you kind of concentrated on what you were doing?

PC: In the infantry unit, yeah, in 1st of the 5th Cav, yeah, we did talk about them.

RV: Because these guys were, as you said, had come out of the field, some of them that work for you, came out of the field and they had significant contact.

PC: And the guys who were in the field talked about them a lot too, you know. You know, what're they going to do, how are they going to do it, what is this bunker complex used for? But don't ever try to blow up a well. (Laughing)

RV: Why?

PC: We came through a bunker complex one time.

RV: When was this?

PC: This was when I was with 1st of the 5th. And we were real close to the Cambodian border. I mean, I'm not prepared to say we were over it, but man; we were on the edge.

RV: What were you doing, I thought you were back in the rear?

PC: Well, this was, you know, and I don't really remember whether this was during that initial period or whether this was later on and I was out there for a day or two.

RV: So you would periodically go out in the field.

PC: Yeah, yeah, everybody did, the officers. And so everybody did periodically.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I really don't remember when it was, but we came into this deserted bunker complex and it had been pretty well cleaned out. So I mean, it hadn't been used in some time. But there was a well in there and we used to, you know, if we can deprive them on their source of water, then we might do that. Threw a bunch of C-4 down there and it had been lined with wooden poles, maybe seven or eight inches in diameter. All it did was blow those all over the place and the well was still perfectly fine. (Laughing)

RV: Less hole in the ground, but everything else is blown up.

PC: Yup, everything is fine, yeah.

RV: Okay, interesting lesson.

PC: Blew the bunkers and all that, but there just wasn't much we could do with the wells.

RV: Did you hear or did you sense that the United States solider, those that you were around during your year there have respect for the enemy as far as soldier to soldier? I'm not talking about, you know, whether they were prejudiced or whether they didn't like the Vietnamese people, but really did the United States soldier that you saw respect their combatant?

PC: I'm not sure that's the right word.

RV: Okay.

PC: Gosh, that's a hard one to answer. Certainly we saw them as difficult to defeat. You know, we never knew whether they were going to walk into one of our ambushes, which they did. They were good soldiers, but they weren't Superman, you know. They walked in to a few of our ambushes too. I think it was more of just, I can't say respect or disrespect, it was just soldier-to-soldier I think. You know, I want to kill him before he kills me kind of thing. That was really the deal. And some of these guys got really, really wound up in that. I mean, staying out in the jungle for month after month, year after year.

RV: Meaning Americans?

PC: Americans extending and staying out there. We had one guy, he had been over there a couple of years at least and he was a Staff Sergeant and he liked to walk

point and he was walking down the trail and everybody wondered when his luck was going to run out because he'd been there so long and everybody knew it was just a matter of time. And he was walking down the trail on patrol one time and all of a sudden he just pitched right over backwards, flat on his back in the middle of the trail, just out. And then of course you heard the report of the gunshot and everybody ran up and figured, well that's it, his luck ran out. And he had gotten a spent round, it was just right at the extreme edge of its range and it had hit the front of his steel helmet, gone completely through and hit him in the forehead and stopped.

RV: Wow!

PC: And knocked him out cold and put a big bite in his forehead and that was all. He had a hell of a headache.

RV: Wow.

PC: He was on the bird back to the rear that night.

RV: That was it for him?

PC: That was it for him. And the Company Commander said, "Damn right, get on the helicopter."

RV: Wow.

PC: Somebody was sending him a message and he heard it. But I mean, probably fifty feet forward, he'd of been dead.

RV: What do you think the United States as far as when you were out in the field, when you would go out there periodically, was the attitude that you saw one of, "Okay, lets find these guys and make contact," or "Lets clean up this area and get out of here?" I mean, what did you sense and I'm talking morale as well as just an overall attitude?

PC: Really, really individualized kind of thing. I saw some officers and NCOs who just wanted to find them and kill them. I mean, that's what we were there for, we wanted to win the war and that's how we were going to do it.

RV: Search and Destroy.

PC: Search and Destroy. And they would make every effort to find them and set up ambushes and that kind of thing. And at the opposite extreme, I saw guys who would just essentially do anything to hide and not do anything that would precipitate a firefight.

RV: Officers?

PC: Officers. And the vast majority of course fell in the middle, that we're gonna go out and do our job and we're not gonna necessarily go spoiling for a fight, but when one comes up, we're certainly gonna win it and that was the majority. But you did see some of both extremes. I mentioned the Company Commander yesterday who looked like Robert Redford and he was good. He could find them before they found him and he could get setup. He had his company so well trained, they could get setup and he surprised them every time.

RV: Tell me a little bit about the supply missions when you were up at the firebase and at LZ Dolly and you were in charge of bringing, getting ammunition out, getting the letters out, getting food out, is that correct?

PC: Everything. Everything came (Coughs) excuse me, from the rear; in that case, Tay Ninh. And everything came out there; mail, water was all brought in by helicopter in big five hundred gallon rubber bags called blivets. Fuel was brought out in fuel blivets and those were heavy enough to where they were carried by CH-47s normally. And of course, LZ Dolly was on top of a mountain, so a fixed wing could not land, there just was not physically space.

RV: Whereabouts was Dolly by the way, just generally, a rough…?

PC: More north of Saigon than previously. I know that's pretty general and I'm trying to remember the name of the town that we used to…The Big Red One was there.

RV: Was it more northwest of Tay Ninh Mountain or Tay Ninh?

PC: Yeah, more west.

RV: Okay.

PC: More west. Yeah. It was near the Michelin Rubber Plantations.

RV: Okay, that says it all right there.

PC: In fact, our Battalion Commander's avowed goal in life was to put the Michelin Rubber Company out of business.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: Colonel Peterson. But anyway, yeah, water came out in blivets, fuel came out in blivets. And C-rations, ammunition, both, well, I say both, but M-16, mortar, M-79. Every infantry battalion had a 105 battery assigned to it, so artillery ammunition

would have to come out for the 105s. When we were first setting up the firebase, we'd move in, it was just a hilltop.

RV: So you went out there initially.

PC: Yes.

RV: I mean, when it was first formed.

PC: Yes, I was on the first movement into LZ Dolly.

RV: Wow. Well then would you mind explaining how you set up the firebase? What do you do?

PC: Well, the first thing you do is you start building the TOC, the Tactical Operations Center. And everybody kind of sleeps in tents and kind of makes do while you're doing this. Well, and that's not a true statement, back up. The first thing you do is set up defensive possessions.

RV: Right.

PC: You set up a perimeter, you dig holes, you fill sandbags, you try to, you establish security, that's the first thing you do. Then you start working on the Tactical Operations Center, the TOC and that is basically kind of a bunker, it's usually built out of twelve by twelves and covered with dirt and sandbags and that kind of thing so it can withstand a pretty good sized mortar or artillery attack because that's your operation center, that's the brain of the battalion.

RV: About how many people are you talking about to go out and set it up?

PC: Well, usually there'd be the battalion headquarters, you know, the forward element of the battalion headquarters, maybe forty of fifty people. And then there'd be an infantry company to provide security and you would have the artillery battery there with you. And they actually airlifted a bulldozer in so we could actually dig down into the top of the mountain to put the TOC in. And so you start getting that built up and usually the Battalion Commander has a similar structure right next to the TOC where he and the S3 sleep. S3 is the Operations Officer; he's his right-hand man for combat operations. So you would set up, you would build the TOC. And this particular one, since it was on top of a mountain, we used to get a lot of, we used to call them tourists coming through, visiting congressmen or people like that. So he put a Battalion

Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Peterson put an observation deck on top of the TOC. And we actually had a visiting congressman come through.

RV: I was going to ask if you had any tourists.

PC: Yeah, yeah, we used to get them all the time.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah.

RV: Anybody of note that you remember?

PC: Mostly miscellaneous congressmen and I don't remember any of their names from that time.

RV: How would you all treat them?

PC: Oh, like visiting royalty, yeah. But Colonel Peterson was up there and he had his map set up and he was giving this guy a briefing. And he pointed to the map and then he said, "We're going to put in an Arc Light, a B-52 strike right there," he pointed at the map and he set it on the ground and it's right there and he pointed out on the terrain. And right then the Arc Light hit.

RV: Wow.

PC: Just as coincidence. That minute, the Arc Light hit. And about three square miles of Vietnam went up in dust and splinters.

RV: You were there?

PC: No, I heard this story.

RV: Oh okay, okay.

PC: But everybody was laughing about it. And Colonel Peterson looked at that and he went, "Phew!" and blew on his finger. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But it was just one of those coincidences that turned out to be pretty funny. But anyway, you get the TOC built and then you start to working on bunkers, living, and sleeping places, things like that. The S3 was, the Intel Sergeant and those folks were in a tent, it was sandbagged up and then there were bunkers to sleep in. And even though we were actually on top of a mountain or they were, I wasn't there at the time, actually got a big ground attack. There was one side that was real shear and we figured nobody could come up that. Wrong answer. They came right up that and got inside the perimeter and

started shooting the place up. We had one KIA and half a dozen WIAs, Killed in Action and Wounded in Action from that and definitely rearranged the security situation on the firebase.

RV: Wow. That was before you had arrived?

PC: Well, I had been there and had gone back.

RV: Okay, okay. So this whole operation of setting up the firebase, are you talking about two or three weeks or is it two or three days?

PC: Oh, it's, well, to get the TOC up and running, it's real quick, usually less than a week because that's a pretty concentrated effort. And then the improvements and developments go on for many weeks after that. You're constantly improving the perimeter, putting out Claymores, more concertina, that kind of thing.

RV: So tell me about the re-supply and…

PC: Well, everything would come out to the firebase and actually after a while, of course, the first several weeks, you just ate C-rations three times a day. But after a while, we would set up a Mess Hall, so you actually got usually a hot breakfast and a hot dinner. And we would also cook meals for the guys in the jungle, they didn't get one every day, but you know, in rotation. So every company got a Log Bird, a Logistics Bird, once a day, at least once a day, whenever it was possible, you know. If there was weather or terrain or something like that, but the goal was once a day.

RV: And as Assistant S4 you were the one in charge of this?

PC: Well, a lot of it.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah.

RV: Well this was why you were there?

PC: Yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I lost my train of thought. So anyway, the Company Commander out in the field would send in a list, usually to his company XO saying, "Okay, I need this, this, this, this, and this." And his company staff would go to the S4, get all that stuff, put it all together and get it ready. And then of course there was the routine stuff that always went, like mail and that stuff always went. And so then the Log Bird would come in and

land and we'd load the stuff up or sling it up. (Coughs) Excuse me. And give the pilot the coordinates, map coordinates and the radio frequency and call sign. And he would take off, take it out there and deliver, drop it off. And if we could, then we would put maramites of hot food on there and send that out so the guys could have a hot meal. On occasion, the cooks would take their grittles, their portable field grittles out, set them up in the jungle and cook eggs and pancakes and bacon for the guys right there in the middle of the jungle.

RV: Wow, wow. Now did your firebase there have a set area that you were responsible for, people operating off of that firebase, that's who you re-supplied or just any…?

PC: No, just our units.

RV: Just your units that would go off the firebase, do Search and Destroy two or thee days in the field, a week in the field.

PC: Much longer, much longer than that.

RV: Much longer.

PC: Much longer than that, sometimes thirty, thirty-five days. And you know, the Cav, we would have this real small little battalion firebase and we'd usually have a company back for security and they were kind of on their R&R.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean, it certainly wasn't lush and plush, but it was certainly better than walking through the jungle. So they were getting a hot shower and a little rest and that kind of thing while the other companies were out patrolling in the jungle. And after x number of days, they would swap and the company that'd been in the rear would go out in the field, not the rear, on the firebase. And one of the companies who had been out there for awhile would come back to the firebase and they would provide security and at the same time, get a little bit of rest.

RV: Did you really ever talk to these people and just say; you know, see them at the Mess Hall or were you pretty isolated?

PC: No, I wasn't isolated at all. You know, one of the things that I had to do was walk the perimeter at night, make sure everybody was awake and all of that. God, one night and this was back at a previous firebase, I was walking along and needless to say,

these guys were pretty jumpy and I don't blame them. But I was walking the perimeter and it was dark, I mean, no moon, no nothing. And I'm walking along checking the bunkers and all of a sudden I hear a bolt on an M-16 come back and go forth. And you talk about a chilling sound. If I would've been wearing shorts, I would've had to change them. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And I mean, that is just such a cold sound in the middle of the night like that. So I let them know right away who I was.

RV: How did you do that?

PC: I said, "Hey, don't shoot me." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) No fancy code words, just don't shoot.

PC: And so they asked me for the password and I gave it to them and everything, I think they were laughing. But you know, they got the LT.

RV: How would you come up with a password, was this…?

PC: It was set by the battalion everyday.

RV: Oh everyday?

PC: Yeah.

RV: What were some of the passwords?

PC: Oh gosh, I don't remember now.

RV: Was it like, you know…?

PC: There'd be a sign and a counter sign. And when I say they asked me for the password, they would give me like ace of spades, that's not a real one because it's too easy, but that's how it worked.

RV: Like thunder, lightning?

PC: Yeah, something like that, yeah. But usually you'd try to pick two unrelated words. Thunder eggplant.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, so that somebody couldn't just put them together. And so that's kind of how that worked. But I wasn't thinking about that at the time.

RV: Right, right. I'm going to ask you this and we can finish up for today. When you're out there on that, you're not in the rear, you're out there on that LZ out at

the firebase and it's nighttime, you said it's quiet, you know, it's dark, what do you hear, what does that sound, what does Vietnam sound like? I mean, do you hear things from the forest, in the jungle?

PC: Oh yeah, bug sounds just everywhere. I mean, the bugs were just unbelievable. And they weren't just in the bread; they were everywhere. And we were always slathered up with bug juice just to kind of try to, especially if you're out walking in the jungle and the firebase too. Although at Dolly, it wasn't so bad because we were so high, but still, you'd hear them all night long. And every now and then you'd hear something crashing through the jungle, never did find out what it was, you just knew it was big and you didn't want to meet it.

RV: You knew it wasn't an NVA or VC soldier?

PC: No, it was too noisy.

RV: Right.

PC: Yeah, if it's crashing through like that, you know, it's an animal of some kind. And if we were suspicious or worried, we'd fire a couple of flares, you know, from the mortars and just take a look, but everybody hated that because it screwed up your night vision.

RV: Right.

PC: Well, I won't say everybody hated it, but it certainly did screw up your night vision. And we did have night vision scopes, but they not very useful.

RV: Are you talking like star light scopes?

PC: Yeah, exactly, exactly. But they just, I never could see much threw them. I mean, the guy would've had to been ten feet away and by then, I could've seen him with my eyes.

RV: Right, right.

PC: I never did find them very useful.

RV: So it sounds like a jungle?

PC: It sounds like a jungle, it does. It was pretty creepy, especially if you're in a triple canopy and you can't see the sky at all and all you can hear are these sounds around there. And I was out on a LP one night and we were right beside a river and we had that river at our back and we were kind of in an arc around it and we could hear something

across the river. And to me, it sounded just like a gun barrel hitting wood, so I was convinced that the entire NVA Army was right across that river and they were coming to get me. To this day, I don't know what that was. I mean, it might've been VC or NVA, it might've been an elephant or a tiger, it could've been anything.

RV: What kind of animals did you see out there?

PC: Tigers.

RV: You said, yeah, you told me about tigers.

PC: Water buffalo, snakes.

RV: What kind of snakes?

PC: I don't know. The kind I ran away from. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) Pretty often would you see these?

PC: No, they're smarter than we are. Usually they feel us coming and scurry off into the bush, but once in a while. Oh, some kind of what looked like a wild hog, I don't know exactly what it was and it might've been a Farrell hog for all I know, but looked kind of like a wild hog, a javelina or something like that. But you know, typically, you know, pretty distinctive smell because of the diet and all and they kind of stayed away from us.

RV: What about back in the rear? Did you all at Tay Ninh and then at Quan Loi, did you see snakes, did they come up into the…?

PC: Never did, never did. Pretty heavily built up area.

RV: Right.

PC: Not only with the U.S. forces, but Tay Ninh was a pretty good size village itself or town itself. So no, it was pretty urbanized by Vietnam standards at that time. So no, didn't really have any significant encounters with wild animals, except when the tiger set the trick flares off.

RV: Right. What about rats?

PC: Yeah, yeah, I didn't even think of them, but yeah. When you've got bunkers, you've got rats; we had them. I don't know if you remember the old *Willy and Joe* cartoon, is make sure you get him with the first shot because they charge when they're wounded. And yeah, they were about that big.

RV: Wow.

PC: And we had a Vector Control Officer who was supposed to be responsible for controlling the rat population. You know, some poor Lieutenant with five thousand additional duties.

RV: Right, right. Okay, why don't we go head and stop for today?

PC: Okay.

RV: Thanks you Pat.

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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Patrick Curry
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
July 25, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I'm continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Pat Curry. Today is July 25, 2005 and it's approximately ten minutes until two pm Central Standard Time and we're again in the interview room of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project on the campus of Texas Tech. Pat, before we continue with the story, lets back up a second and talk about, we had discussed some of your combat experiences and just, you know, going out and seeing what was in the field so you could have that under your belt when you went to do your job and career. And we talked a little bit after our last session about that and you have a few things that you wanted to add to that. If you would, go ahead.

Patrick Curry: Well, I'm concerned; I don't want anyone to think that I'm trying to pretend that I was a frontline combat soldier. I did not do one one-hundredth of one percent of what the grunts did and I certainly did not go through one one-thousandth of one percent of what they did. And I'm certainly more than willing obviously to talk about the little bit that I did do, but I certainly was not a frontline combat soldier and I think it would be taking something away from those guys if anybody thought I was pretending to be one. I'm proud of what I did, but I certainly did not do what they did.

RV: Okay. Let me follow up on that if you don't mind, it just came to me that you know, what're your thoughts about the combat veteran, the American combat veteran in Vietnam? And this is something we can talk about later; I'm going to reflect you on post-Vietnam and how you think about the war and what you feel about the war now, but

what prompted you to say that and to have that thought after our last session and to kind of make that disclaimer?

PC: Well, you know, these guys, the grunts, the Bravos and the other combat arms guys, the artillery guys, the FOs (Forward Observer) were right out there with the infantry companies. You know, they did so much and under such horrendous conditions much of the time. Living in the field was not fun, it was wet and it was hot and it was nasty, it was dirty. You know, you got a shower or bath when you walk through a stream or about once a month when you got to go to the rear. You know, that constant fear, you know, they went through so much that in no way do I want to try to usurp what they did, to take away from what they did. They ought to be pretty proud of what they did, most of them, and I'm proud of what they did and I don't want them especially to think that I'm trying to insinuate myself in there as a grunt, as a frontline soldier.

RV: Why do you think that Vietnam veterans, especially the combat arms, why do you think that they or do you think that they were more traumatized by this war say than other wars based on what you saw when you were there in Vietnam and you would interact with them when they would come back to the rear?

PC: I don't think necessarily they were more so than other guys by the combat itself. I think the aftermath probably contributed a lot to it, but I think a lot of people missed the fact that a whole lot of Vietnam vets went over and they did their year. I mean, out in the field, out in the jungle and came back and got on with their life. Obviously not all of them stayed in the Army. In fact, the majority got out and that's fine, you know, the Army is not a life for everybody, it was for me, but it's not for everybody. But they just, you know, they kind of got on with their life, they went back to school or they found a job and started a career and a family. But I think the World War II guys, you know, if you've seen *Band of Brothers* or read Tom Brokaw's book, they were pretty traumatized as well. But when they came back, they were welcomed back with open arms and they were heroes and they didn't have to kind of skulk around airports if you will, afraid that somebody's going to accost them like a lot of our Vietnam guys did and things like that and I think that made a big difference.

RV: Can you describe the interactions that you had with the guys who were out on combat and then they would come back to the rear? How much interaction did you have with these types and what was it like?

PC: Well, the first six months when I was with 1st of the 5th Cav, I had quite a bit obviously, and most of them were just so happy to be out of the jungle that, you know, they were kind of smiling and wanted to have a couple of beers and to kind of relax and get clean, which was a big thing. I mean, in that kind of environment where it's so hot and sticky and buggy and just trying to get clean. You know, we didn't have the baby wipes and those kinds of things.

RV: Right.

PC: But like I said, most of them were just trying to kind of relax. They had, to some extent, kind of an attitude, which I think they certainly deserved. You know, they had been out there doing it while the rest of us were sitting there not and so some of them had kind of an attitude and I didn't hold that against them. Most of them just, you know, pretty ordinary guys that under pretty extraordinary circumstances and I think they reacted like pretty ordinary guys would to that kind of thing.

RV: Did they ever confront you all or did you hear of this happening where you were, where, you know, they would say, "You guys back in the rear, you know, what this is really about," or anything like that and I'm of course referring to the term, REMF, you know, was it that kind of attitude, did you hear things like this?

PC: Yeah, yeah, sure did. And of course, you know, you had the guys out in the jungle, to them; the guys on the battalion firebase were REMFs. You know, and to them the guys in the rear were REMFs and to them the guys at Long Binh and Bien Hoa were REMFs. You know, so it kind of flows downhill.

RV: I've heard that the LRRPs, the Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol guys would call the regular combat patrol in the Army infantry the REMFs.

PC: Absolutely.

RV: So you're right.

PC: Yeah, yeah. And it was, and you know, I was a REMF, not as much as some other guys, but the fact is, I was, I was not out there walking around in the jungle. You know, and I watched our LRRPs one time get extracted on ropes hanging from

helicopters and they just dropped the ropes down, the guys jumped on them and that's how they rode back hanging on those ropes. I was impressed because that's one of those things I'm not sure I could've done.

RV: Right.

PC: But there was really, most of it was pretty good humored, not all of it, but I think the majority of it was pretty good humored. Tinged with a little bit of, "I did it and you didn't."

RV: Yeah.

PC: Which is I say they deserved.

RV: How about from your side, from the rear side projecting or any kind of attitude toward the infantry when they would come back? Did you all say anything to them or was there, from your side, what did you hear and see?

PC: Well, you know, we at least, you know, I mentioned the guy I worked for who was the S4, the Captain, and his attitude was, you know, we need to get them what they need and what they want and it was kind of talking, you know, what didn't you have that you wished you had and trying to get that out to them, that kind of thing. And we were a little bit insulated by the fact that we were officers.

RV: Yes.

PC: You know, there's that distance there and so there was a little bit of insulation between us and the enlisted infantry guys that were coming back. They would talk to us just regularly as they would each other. Never any, well, one incident of what I just considered outright disrespect, but even as an Ordnance Officer, you know, the grunts treated me like an officer and never really any incidents. We had a guy on the battalion firebase get drunk one night and decided that he'd do better than everybody else, but it was actually a fairly minor incident.

RV: Is that the one that you were referring to just to…?

PC: Yeah. Yeah, we thought we were getting incoming; small arms fire and turned out to be a very scared young man who was just seeing things that weren't there. Well, this particular Staff Sergeant was drunk sitting in his tent playing cards with his mortar squad and I went over to rout them out and he decided he just knew a whole lot better than I did, which was probably a true statement, but not relevant. You know, the

fact is is that whether you're getting it or not, when you think you're getting incoming, he needed to be outside manning his weapon. Probably a good thing he wasn't, he did realize he had seriously screwed up and came by later to apologize and tell me I was right and, which I knew, and etc., etc.

RV: Do you remember what you said to him? How do you do that, going to a tent of folks you don't know and say, "Hey, you know, you need to do this, this, and this?"

PC: "You need to get outside and man your weapon."

RV: And it was as simple as that.

PC: It was as simple as that. And he jumped up and ran outside and started giving me a pretty hard time. And I could've gotten him in a lot of trouble, obviously, not so much for what he said to me, but for the fact he was sitting in his tent when this was all going on and everybody was supposed to be out there. But, you know…

RV: And he had duty, guard duty or duty out on the perimeter?

PC: Well no, as the mortar guys, when something happened, they were supposed to be out there manning the mortars. I mean, that was their job.

RV: Right.

PC: And they were just frankly too drunk to do it, but I think he learned something from it and I certainly did. I never did get him in any trouble or anything like that.

RV: Did you think about it before the apology?

PC: I sure did. I thought about it, wondering if I'd go to the XO or the headquarters Company Commander and say something. I was still kind of thinking about it when he came by. And it was obvious he was pretty worried and kind of regretted what he had done and that was good enough for me.

RV: Did you see that the combat arms, infantry, individuals that they would drink more or would you know, party more or how did they differ in their downtime experiences than say you guys would?

PC: Well everybody frankly was drinking so much. I'm not sure they drank more.

RV: Right, right.

PC: I think they certainly tried. But that's a hard question to answer. They had so little downtime that…like I say, most of it was, from what I saw, was devoted to trying to get cleaned up and trying to relax a little bit and read mail, write letters, you know, the things that you typically think of, the old clichés from previous wars. And of course, they were not totally; excuse me, on vacation if you can use that word. They had perimeter duty at night.

RV: Right.

PC: And on a reduced scale during the day as well and those kinds of things. I'm not sure I'm answering your question, but I'm not sure what the answer is.

RV: Well, that's an answer right there. Let's go back for a moment. You had asked that you wanted to make some more comments about an individual that touched your life while in Vietnam and somebody that you remember well from that time period and that's Charles Chandler, Chick Chandler.

PC: Yeah, and I did, I kind of got off track on that. And as I mentioned, in a perfect world, his son that he never got to see would see this one day and know that he was, his dad was well thought of, not just by me, but by pretty much everybody. He had been a Captain for about five minutes when the Battalion Commander made him a Company Commander, which tells you that he was well thought of. And Chick was just one of those unusual guys, he just was very charismatic, outgoing without being boisterous and loud about it, very, I think I mentioned, very bright guy, very smart guy. And we got to be, at least from my perspective, pretty good friends and got to know each other a little bit. In fact, after he got killed, Diana and I had been discussing whether to bring Lynn, our oldest daughter who I had not seen, bring her on R&R to Hawaii.

RV: Right.

PC: Because Chick had not and of course, after he got killed, that really made the decision for us. Diana of course brought Lynn and I got to see her when was four months old and just loved every second of it and was really glad that we had made the right decision. And I went back much more comfortable. But anyway, you know, Chick deserves to be remembered just for being the kind of guy he was and the kind of leader he was. You know, he was my friend and it was a real loss personally and professionally, both. And I'm sure obviously his family was pretty devastated and I know his, his wife

wrote me and she was pretty, as you might expect, pretty well trashed. And I mean that in the psychological sense, she was just destroyed. So I had some friends who had notification duty where they would have to go to houses and knock on the door. Man, that's one job I'm not sure I would've…I might've resigned before I took that job.

RV: When you said he was a good leader, what did you see in him that made him a good leader?

PC: You know, he could talk to NCOs and he could talk to soldiers and they would pretty willingly do what he wanted done. It wasn't a matter of, "Well, the Captain said or the Lieutenant said I have to do it so I'm going to do it." It was, they just went out to do it, you know, kind of that ideal of leadership where they did it because they wanted to and they wanted to do it for him and that's a pretty rare quality. Throughout my twenty-five years of service, of Army, it was a pretty rare quality and it just kind of seemed to come effortlessly, just naturally to him and I mentioned he's a pretty charismatic guy. And he could talk to them in a pretty familiar way, but that distance and that sense of discipline was always there. They never stepped over that line like they did with some of the other officers who thought that, you know, well we're going to be buddies, which is not a good approach. But he was able to keep that relationship, if you will, going but still maintain that sense of discipline and sense of Army officer, you know, "You have to do what I say."

RV: Yes. I imagine that's difficult to do.

PC: It's extraordinarily difficult to do. It's something I think most officers struggle with, those that are fortunate enough to be with troops the majority of their career as opposed to staff kind of jobs. I think it's something that those kind of guys struggle with most of their career. And Chick never struggled with it. I mean, it was just there, just seemingly effortless.

RV: Yeah, he commanded respect just by being him.

PC: He did, yeah, and that's a good way to put it, that's a good way to put it, he did. And I had a lot of respect for him. Of course, you know, brother officers, we were friends as well and I just had an immense amount of respect for him.

RV: What do you remember him looking like?

PC: Oh gosh.

RV: And that might be hard after all this time, but…

PC: Well, you know, it's funny; I still have a mental picture of him. I won't swear how accurate it is, but he was a few inches shorter than I am.

RV: And how tall are you?

PC: I'm 6'3".

RV: Okay.

PC: He was probably, gosh, 5'11", maybe somewhere right around there, six foot, a little stockier. At that time, unlike now, I was kind of skinny, but a little bit stockier, had kind of a little round, not a little, but a round face and kind of light brown hair, you know, just kind of an ordinary looking guy.

RV: Was he, you know, clean-shaven or did he have any kind of facial hair or did he keep himself up?

PC: No, he was always, yeah, he did, he did. He kept himself up. He always looked good, always looked like an officer should and clean-shaven and kept his hair trimmed and you know, just kind of maintained a high standard.

RV: Right.

PC: Always. He had very high standards for himself and others and he maintained those standards himself and he expected other people to too.

RV: When you said, when you talk about the two of you as friends, tell me what you all would do together. I guess you worked together.

PC: Well, we worked together; we would play cards in the evening.

RV: What kind of games, what kind of card games?

PC: Oh poker, blackjack. You know, I'm not much of a gambler, but you know, I played in Vietnam. And I don't want call it gambling because gambling implies there's some possibility of a return, which was apparently not much of a responsibility or not much of a possibility for me. But anyway, if they had a movie or a USO Show, we'd go to those together, sit around and talk, you know, have breakfast and have a cup of coffee and that kind of thing.

RV: Do you remember what you would talk about?

PC: Talked about family a lot, you know, talked about our families a lot. And of course, we both had babies we had not seen so that was, you know, a major topic; and

about our wives and what we did in the States and where we went to school. And of course, you know, about the war and what was going on and neither one of us were particularly political, so we didn't really get into that a whole lot. But you know, the things we did during the war and that kind of stuff.

RV: Do you remember anything about him personally, like you know, is he a St. Louis Cardinals fan or just do you remember something he would bring up or talk about? You know how some people you can say, "Oh yeah, that guy's a Red Sox fan."

PC: Yeah, no, you know, I really don't.

RV: Okay.

PC: I really don't. I know he was a fan of his wife and his son, but no, it's just been too many years I'm afraid.

RV: What about, do you remember, and this might be difficult to first remember and second to talk about, but do you remember what he said about what he wanted to do with his son or with his family when he got back? Did he talk about future plans? I often hear veterans of the war that already start talking about what they were going to do after the war. Do you remember any of that discussion?

PC: You know, other than the just spending a lot of time with his family, I really don't. But that stands out and we were both that way. But I remember him talking about that, how he wanted to see his son grow up and get to know his wife again. And I got the feeling they had a pretty close relationship and that the miles didn't necessarily, you know, ten thousand miles didn't necessarily make that relationship less close and less intimate between them. He just talked about her like she was ten minutes away and you know, I had that mental mindset and he was really focused that way. But gosh, you know, it's been almost forty years and I'm just really trying to remember, it's pretty difficult. You know, I'm surprised, that I have a pretty clear mental image. But obviously the things I remember are kind of the high points.

RV: Sure.

PC: Well he certainly seemed to make an impression.

RV: He really did. I mean, like I said, it's been almost forty years and I still remember him and every time I go to the Wall or the Wall comes here, I look him up and I have not made a rubbing of his name, although I've thought about it, I just haven't.

And I don't know why, but it just somehow doesn't seem, I don't know, respectful I guess. But yeah, made a big impression on me. He was one of those people in my life that did make a big positive impression on me.

RV: When you see his name on the Wall, what do you think about?

PC: I think about just what a damn shame, not a waste. He was doing what he wanted to do, it was not a waste, but it's just a damn shame. You know, he could've done things and he should've had time to get to know his family and his son. And that's what I think about it, but I never think it's a waste, not ever.

RV: Okay. Is there anything else that you do want to talk about with him concerning him before we move on?

PC: Just that and I think I've mentioned it before, that one of the regrets in my life was that I didn't stay in touch with his family and I should've done that. It was kind of funny, they kind of really actively discouraged you, they being the command, actively discouraged you from contacting the families of the soldiers killed in action.

RV: Why?

PC: Well, they were afraid and I think rightfully so, afraid is the wrong word, concerned that the family member would get a letter from some friend saying, you know, "Gee I'm really sorry," before the Army had had time to notify them.

RV: I see.

PC: And I think that's a legitimate concern and I certainly waited some time before I wrote to Mrs. Chandler and to express my feelings and tell her how sorry I was. But you know, the other guys, the other officers were saying, "You know, you got to be real careful doing that."

RV: You wrote her from Vietnam?

PC: I wrote her from Vietnam, yeah. And I should've gone and looked her up when I got back.

RV: Is that the only contact you had with her?

PC: That was the only contact I had. I wrote her and told her how I felt and how sorry I was and how much I knew that he loved her and how sorry he would be not to get to know his son. She wrote me back, probably the letter I remember most in my whole life and how glad she was to get my letter and she's going to save it for her son and she

wanted me to stay in touch and I didn't do it. I feel bad to this day and there's just no excuse for it, I just kind of screwed up.

RV: Well tell me about what prompted you to write her. You know, I guess obviously you wanted to tell her about her husband because you knew him well, but when did you decide you wanted to do that and why did you do it?

PC: I decided just almost immediately and I wanted her to know. What she already knew obviously was that her husband was really a good guy and I wanted her to know that other people thought that way and that he had made an impact. And I just told her about some of the things we did together. I mentioned that court marshal that we had worked on together and I mentioned that. And I told her about how much he talked about her and his son and that kind of thing. And it just felt right, you know, that's the only time I ever did it, but for him, it just felt right. And I can't sit here and tell you why he made such a big impact on me. It's certainly something I thought about, but I don't know, but I know that he did, for me to remember him forty years later, I mean, I think that speaks for itself and I think it speaks for him. And I would bet you my house and my car that I'm not the only guy that remembers him. I mean, he was too well thought of and too well respected. And I just know I'm not the only guy that remembers him.

RV: Well, he's living in your memory.

PC: Sure, he is that and I have taken my wife and my daughters to the Wall to show them his name. And only two young ladies that I work with that are kind of special, I've taken them out there, and they're the only ones I've done that with. One day I'll take my grandson out there.

RV: And he can also listen to this interview someday and talk about it because he'll remember, if you do that, your grandson will remember, and you taking him to the Wall and showing him Chick's name.

PC: And I would do that, a couple of more years before he's old enough to understand. He's only seven now, but when he gets a little older, then it'll be time.

RV: Okay. Well, moving on as far as what you did there. I wonder if we could, before we continue, why don't we take a break for a moment.

PC: Okay.

RV: Okay Pat, we're continuing. You were on the side of the supply that not a lot of people know about. You were on the end that you weren't on the receiving end; you were on the end that made sure that the guys got what they needed in the field. You saw what they needed and what they needed most, what they needed least. Could you speak to that, what you saw that you know, what was the thing that you need, you had to get there and what were the things, maybe the extraneous things that the requests came that, "Hey, I need to get, you know, some more socks," what kind of things like that?

PC: Well, priority number one was bullets, I mean, no question hands down. And the ammunition re-supply request was what was processed first. Unless you had, one of the units had been in a big firefight, normally didn't have to move a lot of ammunition, classified we called it. But you know, you might have to send trick flares if some flares got sent off. If they were carrying mortars, elimination rounds for mortars, Claymore mines, if some of those had been set off, that kind of thing.

RV: So the weapons, pieces of war was the first priority?

PC: First priority.

RV: Okay.

PC: Repair parts for weapons or new weapons if something needed to be sent to the rear to be repaired. You know, a guy had to have an M-16; he sent a new weapon out, something like that. On the evening Log Bird, if they were going to set up and if the Company Commander wanted it, we might send out recoilless rifles, we might send out mortars if they had not been carrying them. And our units were so idle, a lot of time they did not carry the heavier weapons, but we could send them out at night so they would set up a perimeter. The recoilless rifles with the flachette rounds; the steel darts were used in ambushes because you could put them adjacent or on a trail and of course, the recoilless rifles have the huge back blast. So no matter which direction they came from on the trail, you have them.

RV: Right.

PC: If they came from the front, the flachette round, if they came from the rear, set the round off anyway and the back blast would certainly ruin their evening. And so that was first. And second was food; tried to get hot food out when we could. Had a

Mess Hall in the battalion firebase and so tried to get, especially in the evening, get hot food out in maramite cans. Occasionally…

RV: I remember you talked about the cooks going out one time.

PC: Several times yeah. The cooks would go out and set up their field grills and cook the guys a hot breakfast right there in the field, you know, eggs and pancakes to order and bacon and was I always thought kind of a pretty good thing to do for the guys because they ate a lot of C-rations and those get old in a hurry. It takes about fifteen minutes for C-rations to get old.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: A ham and limas. And although we had guys that loved them, I just never understood myself. But anyway, to this day, I cannot look a lima bean in the face.

RV: Really?

PC: Oh, I hate lima beans. So anyway, food would be the second, re-supply of C-rations to make sure that they had kind of a minimum load of C-rations. In case, you know, if weather set it and we couldn't get a bird out there, they had something to eat, so they usually carried a couple of days worth of C-rations around. And a high priority, when we could, was mail. We would try to, when we could, take the nylon mailbags and put some ice and some beer in there, two beers a guy and send those out so that they could maybe have no more than two. And the NCOs had to enforce, you know, if you had some guy who didn't drink or a couple of guys, one guy didn't get six beers.

RV: Right.

PC: Because then he was useless the rest of the night. Plus, he was staggering around all night trying to find a place to pee. And then kind of the last priority was the re-supply that the Company Commander wanted. He would send in or radio in a list to his company rear who their Supply Sergeant would work with the S4 to get it put together and that might be, you know, socks or gosh, uniforms. We would periodically just take a bunch of washed uniforms and they were just kind of general issue uniforms, they didn't have nametag on them because they didn't belong to any one guy. Didn't have a nametag, didn't have a unit patch, this kind of thing. They would just go to a laundry in the rear and get washed in mass and then kind of get sorted roughly by size and we'd send those out so the guys could swap their duty uniforms for at least for a clean one and

get some clean clothes, didn't happen often enough, but it was, you know, it was something.

RV: Right. What were some of the more unusual requests from the field; do you remember anything like that?

PC: Oh gosh, they were really kind of routine, kind of standard. Radio batteries are probably should have mentioned it because that was a big one. Radios ran 24/7 and you certainly wanted them to run 24/7. I mean, that was your contact with reinforcements with the artillery support, with TAC air, with gunship supports. So, we shipped a lot of radio batteries. But you know, most of them were pretty routine kinds of things.

RV: Water?

PC: Yes.

RV: Include that with the food I guess.

PC: Include that with the food, yeah.

RV: How much water do you estimate that they would go through, what would you say?

PC: Oh gosh, a couple of canteens a day a man. A lot of the guys carried three canteens, everybody carried at least two, but a lot of guys carried three. You try to send a lot of Tabasco sauce to put on the C-rations, add at least some kind of flavor to them. One of the biggest jokes was the *Playboy C-ration Cookbook*. Obviously, I'm not the first one that mentioned that.

RV: I've heard that before. Why don't you comment on that?

PC: Well, you know, it was a fine cookbook for C-rations if you had an entire grocery store full of spices behind you. But I mean, the availability of the stuff they wanted you to put on your C-rations was ridiculous.

RV: Yeah.

PC: I mean, you didn't have cayenne pepper in the field. And guys would send for that and be all anxious to get it and everything and it would invariably wind up being used for other purposes. And so I mean, that was just a joke. But did have some recipes, if you took the canned bread and some other stuff, you could make kind of a pizza and anything for a little variety.

RV: Sure.

PC: In the MREs (Meal, Ready-to-Eat) that we had later in my career certainly tasted better, but they got old just as fast.

RV: What about, you mentioned the weather that would ground the Log Birds. What kind of weather would keep the helicopter from going up?

PC: You know, the helicopter pilots were just an interesting breed. I mean, those were the gutsiest SOBs around. God, the things they did. And I have to tell you about a guy, Billy May that I went to advanced course with, he was as nuts as the rest of them.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But it took pretty bad weather to ground the Slick pilots, the UH-1, Huey, it took pretty bad weather to ground them. I mean, I saw them going out in weather that was just unbelievable, wind and rain and everything else. And they might not be able to land, but they definitely just get close enough to kick it out the door for the guys to get it. The best ones were the Medevac pilots. Old Billy May was a Medevac pilot.

RV: Tell me about the Dust Off pilots, what did you see?

PC: Oh Jesus, I just can't even comprehend doing what they did. I mean, they had two door gunners, which was a lot like throwing rocks and they would go into some place that was very hot. Old Billy May told me one time that he went in, it was real tight and he had to come right straight down and he saw chips coming off the tree and he thought his main rotor blade was hitting it, he looked, his rear main rotor blade was clear by five feet, it was machine gun fire. Of course, they used to love to shoot down a helicopter. And so they just went into places and got out of places that was just truly amazing. I mean, the Slick was just an amazing piece of equipment and the guys that flew them were just phenomenal guys. So we used to kid the pilots about being cab drivers and all that. But they're just, I mean, those were some brave guys.

RV: Yeah. What kind of weather was bad weather, that would ground…?

PC: A lot of times, if the visibility was real limited because they had to identify, you know, the guys on the ground would throw a smoke and they had to be able to see that smoke and identify it and then enough visibility for somebody to guide them in to a place big enough to land.

RV: Right.

PC: So that was a problem. If the weather was so bad or rain, especially if it was driven by wind so you couldn't see fog, not weather related, but triple canopy jungle was needless to say a challenge. But the Slick had a hook on the bottom and you could kind of lower that down through. And in fact, you could bring people back up, they even had some cages that you could take wounded out without getting them all beat up in the canopy, just extract them right through that three layers of triple canopy jungle. And so that wasn't as much of a problem, except that they were stationary for a long time.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, I mean, they were just hovering there. But I mean, we couldn't see them and a lot of times the bad guys couldn't either. But yeah, mostly the fog, blowing rain, real heavy rain, and I mean, it would rain so hard, you couldn't see twenty feet, I mean, it was coming down that hard and that was miserable.

RV: How often would it rain like that?

PC: Well, the Monsoon season, it would rain essentially daily.

RV: How do you deal with that, this hot, wet, all the time?

PC: Well, and then you have to decide if you're going to get under your poncho because if it's a hundred degrees and a hundred percent humidity outside the poncho, inside this rubber enclave, you know, it's a hundred and twenty degrees and hundred ten percent humidity. And so what degree of suffering were you willing to take and when I talked about the conditions that the grunts lived under, that's one of the things I was referring to is, you know, they go days at a time and never be dry.

RV: Yeah, and you guys can get dry eventually?

PC: Sure. We could always get dry, you know, we could go in our hooch and change clothes and dry off. You know, we were going to get a hot meal that evening and you know, we weren't going to the O-club afterwards, but we certainly had it a lot better than those poor guys.

RV: While we're on the subject, tell me about Vietnam physically, what did it look like to you? You've mentioned triple canopy jungle, what do you remember about Vietnam, what do you see?

PC: Well you know, it really depends on where you were. We came in at I Corps and I was surprised how cold it got at night. We used to have to really kind of roll up.

Now, of course, it got pretty warm during the day, but it was chilly at night. A lot of it was the humidity. But once we get down to III Corps, it was, you know, it's just like Robin Williams in the movie, it's hot, and hot and wet. And down in I Corps, we saw a lot of mountains, it was pretty hilly, pretty mountainous terrain, hence the A Shau Valley. But when we got down to III Corps around Tay Ninh, imagine a pool table with a mound in the middle and that's what it looked like. We had Nui Ba Den Mountain, the Black Virgin Mountain; I think we talked about that right in the middle of this perfectly flat plain. And the infantry officers and the artillery guys were telling me, boy, it's really difficult to navigate, land navigation, there was just, I mean, there were no land marks. You know, you take a look at your map and the grid lines are two feet apart on the map, you know, because it's so flat and it's just very difficult to navigate. A lot of times they would have the artillery shoot a smoke round to a known coordinate and that would at least give them an idea of where they were. But then as you got over a little northwest of there, it started getting a little more hilly again, not much, but a little bit. The jungle would be so thick at times, I mentioned the triple canopy, it would be so thick at times that it just kind of blocked out the daylight. You know, it was always kind of a twilight on the jungle floor. Obviously where we had firebases set up, I mean, we had just, I mean, there was nothing there more than six inches tall that wasn't man made. And the jungle, it got dim and there were times where it was so over grown and down so low that you just had to crawl on hands and knees to get through it. And if you cut through it, it would just take you nine years. And there were trails, I was amazed at the number of trails cut through there; some of them people, some of them animal trails. And obviously if you got around a little village, you got a lot more trails and that's kind of what it was like. The rubber plantations were just what you might expect, just evenly spaced trees as far as you can see, rubber trees as far as you can see, a lot of them shredded by artillery and etc.

RV: How much of a role do you think geography played in the Vietnam War? I mean, obviously it plays a significant role, but just kind of reflecting on that and what you just said?

PC: Gosh. Well, without the helicopter, we certainly would not have landed, lasted, you know, twenty percent of what we did, that's what made us mobile. The other

guys could move, I guess they weren't as used to being motorized or mechanized as we were and they could just move enormous amounts of material, you know, through the jungle. You know, some of the bunker complexes, full hospitals well stocked with medical supplies, tons of ammunition, you just don't see how they carried all that in by hand. But of course, that's what the French said after 1954. "How'd they do that?" You know, and of course, we were pretty well tied to the roads and the helicopters much of the time. But gosh, that's really a hard question to answer, I'm not really a tactics guy, I'm not sure how to answer that.

RV: Well you saw it and you commented on the re-supply problems, sometimes because of the weather and the terrain, the geography would affect the weather or they would intermingle and make it impossible. When I ask you about Vietnam, what's the first kind of thing you see? Do you see a rice paddy; do you see your base there at Tay Ninh?

PC: No, I see a jungle, real green, real wet, real damp and I haven't even thought about the rice paddies. I didn't spend that much time, I flew over them a lot, but I didn't spend much time in them really. But yeah, most of my time either, well, on a battalion firebase kind of thing or on a brigade firebase was in heavy jungle.

RV: Okay, okay. Going back to the re-supply, how often would you all go out or would you just make sure the Copters were out there going and doing…was it as often as possible or often as needed or twice a day?

PC: Tried for twice a day, morning and evening. Kind of an operation minimum was once a day; an evening Log Bird was what we tried for sure to do if at all possible. But we did try for twice a day if we could.

RV: Okay. Did you all have enough of the supplies that the men needed in the field? Could you get what you needed to take out to them?

PC: Absolutely.

RV: So there was never a problem?

PC: There was never a problem. I don't remember anything that we were short of.

RV: Okay.

PC: Sometimes it was interesting moving it from point A to point B. I mentioned Class 5 ammunition, well you know, as an air cav unit, we were pretty light and had pretty light weapons, but we had a squadron of the 11th Armor Cavalry Regiment, actually, I guess it was a troop, 11th ACR, which was armored cav attached to us. And part of that was for logistical support. And they used a lot of 50-Caliber ammunition. Box of 50-Cal ammunition was eighty pounds and they used a lot of it. They would set up a perimeter at night with their tracks and the first thing they do would be to fire all their 50-Caliber machine guns all the way around, just kind of level the jungle. And that uses a lot of bullets and I'll never forget one time, we were back at Tay Ninh and 11th, this troop called a tactical emergency attackee for 50-Cal ammunition. We had officers, we had NCOs, we had enlisted, we had everybody down there taking 50-Caliber ammunition off the back of trucks one box at a time and loading it on CH-47s to get it out to them. They thought they were going to get a ground attack, just imminent and it turned out not to happen, but that was more 50-Caliber ammunition we'd ever moved. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: I mean, we didn't even have 50-Caliber.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean, we had them by MTO&E (Modified Task Organization & Equipment), but like two per battalion or something like that.

RV: Tell me about being out there at LZ Dolly and this is still been your first six months, about casualties coming in and how the Dust Offs would go out and get them and bring them back. Would you see them return with the casualties?

PC: Sometimes. It depended on a couple of variables. One was the conditions. A lot of times if they could, Medevac would pick them up and take them right to a field hospital on the rear. And I mean, the medical support in that context was really good. If it was humanly possible, the Medevac pilots were going to get in there and get them out. If they weren't too bad and there were more guys, you know, maybe it was a relatively minor wound that the battalion surgeon or a Medic could handle, stabilize them and there were other guys waiting, they would bring them to the firebase and the battalion surgeon

who was a doctor and the Medics would treat them until we got another bird in to take them back to the rear. So everybody went to the rear that was wounded.

RV: Right.

PC: And some of them came back fairly quickly if it was real minor, but yeah, sometimes we'd see them. And the KIAs came through. One of my vivid memories was when we were, we were on a firebase, battalion firebase and it was not Dolly, it was one of them before that. And one of our companies had been in a firefight, had a KIA and I walked out and I don't remember what I was doing, but I walked out to the perimeter and out there on the LZ was a stretcher and we used to take and wrap a poncho, put them on a stretcher, wrap a poncho around them real tight and laying out there on the LZ was a stretcher with his poncho around it. And of course, the guy still had his boots on and everything and was an old First Sergeant out there just kneeling down by him just holding his head and waiting for the bird to come in and take the guy out. And the First Sergeant obviously wasn't going to let him wait there by himself. And I mean, and the light was real weird and it was kind of stormy off in the distance and the sunlight was real weird and just that image through the concertina of that First Sergeant laying there or sitting there kneeling there with that guy is just so vivid, it was like it was yesterday.

RV: The guy in the stretcher, he was dead?

PC: Yes, yeah, he was KIA, Killed in Action.

RV: Sure.

PC: Yeah, he'd been killed in that firefight and they brought him back to the firebase, waiting on another bird to come get him and take him back to the rear.

RV: Did you get used to that, casualties…?

PC: No, nobody ever got used to it. Now that's an easy one to answer, you never got used to that. We had a Lieutenant who came in country, Infantry Lieutenant. He had gone through the rotation like we all did and made him a Platoon Leader. And he hadn't been out there a week and nobody could understand why he did it, but they walked into an ambush and they had a Chinese Claymore, which was kind of a round mine and he just stood up and charged it. And I mean, bullets flying all over the place and the story I was told was he just stood up and charged it and got about three feet away from it and they blew it. And I mean, he never had a chance and it shredded him. And nobody ever

understood, I mean, nobody could figure out what was going through his mind, you know? Of course, from what the guys told me was you had to think a lot, you know, you just reacted and if you were trained right, you reacted properly. But yeah, he didn't make it a week. But no, and I had to go through his wallet and make sure there was nothing in there you didn't want his folks to see.

RV: You had to go through the wallet?

PC: Yeah, his First Sergeant and I, well not First Sergeant, Company XO, XO and I went through that just to make sure, but no, you never got used to it. It was always just a, you know, just a twist. So even you didn't know the guy, you know, it was just a twist in your gut that, you know, somebody had been killed.

RV: Did you get a bag of these personal effects or you wouldn't take it off the person, someone would bring it into…

PC: No, somebody would bring it in. You know, we tried to take care of the families, we didn't want them to, you know, guys when they're off by themselves will do things that maybe families shouldn't know about and definitely don't need to know about.

RV: Would family members tried to find out exactly what happened?

PC: That was…

RV: A harmless act to find.

PC: That was reasonably difficult, but a lot of times the Company Commander would write a letter and kind of give him some general details and that kind of thing. If it went up from there, the Battalion Commander would try to deal with it.

RV: Okay. Why don't we take a break just for a minute?

PC: Sure.

RV: Okay Pat, I'd like to know, when you transitioned to the 27th Maintenance Battalion, tell me about that transition and how it came about and how much you knew about where you'd be going, what you'd be doing. I remember you talked a little about that last time; you touched on it, but tell me about that transition.

PC: Well, I mentioned the Combat Arms Replacement Program; it sent combat service support officers to infantry units and for a six-month period. And as I was getting close to six months, I called the division G1 who was the Personnel Officer and said,

"You know, my time's coming up, my six months, and I'd like to go to the maintenance battalion and you know, work in my field." And they said, "Okay, you know, you did your time, we'll move you." And so the time came around and I got orders and got reassigned and I happened to be at, gosh, I want to say Tay Ninh at the time. I wouldn't swear to that, but anyway, I got orders and went out and got on an airplane and flew to the battalion rear for the 27th Maintenance Battalion, which happened to be in Bien Hoa. And they interviewed me, the Battalion Commander and the XO, etc. interviewed me and apparently I didn't do well. They sent me to, they called it B Detachment, but I called it B Company, B Company, the 27th Maintenance Battalion, which was at Quan Loi and I was the XO, Company XO and the Shop Officer and worked for a real good guy named Jack Yanser, he was Captain Yanser. By this time, I was a First Lieutenant with I guess three or four months in grade. And it turned out to be a real life-changing event for me in a couple of different ways. We were more or less, not permanently, but semi-permanently at Quan Loi, was a brigade firebase for the 1st Cav. And our detachment provided maintenance support, to 1st Cav units in that general area. Generally speaking, a weapon or a piece of equipment would come in out of the field and we would repair it and give it back to them. If it was not repairable, we would wash it out of the system and they would requisition a new one. And this is, the stuff that came from Ford was all smaller items. The bigger items, the trucks, those kinds of things, trailers, one of the most important pieces of equipment you had was your water buffalo, water trailer, that's how you moved water to the (Coughs) excuse me, to the airfield to move it forward. And we also were supply for some items. So if they needed repair parts or something along those lines, they could requisition it through our supply element. We didn't do food and we didn't do ammunition, but we did most of the other stuff.

RV: And this is what you were specifically trained to do?

PC: This is what I was specifically trained to do was this job. And I had been a Shop Officer in the 2nd Armor Division in the States.

RV: Right, right. And you felt comfortable doing that and you…?

PC: Very.

RV: And I remember you saying that you thought you did well, you felt good about what you had done and your training had paid off.

PC: It had.

RV: Now, how much difference was there between stateside shop experiences versus in the field, war?

PC: There was a lot of difference. You know, the mix of items that we received was a lot different obviously from an armor division to an airmobile division.

RV: Yes.

PC: You know, we didn't get tracks and those kinds of things in because we didn't have them. We would get a deuce-and-a-half every now and then, a lot of generators, a lot of weapons. Probably the most critical thing that we worked on was sites for artillery. And we had a real problem with them because the seals would fail and in the humidity, they would fog. And so we'd have to purge them with Nitrogen and then put new seals in so that they would last for a while. And one of my real war stories had to do with an artillery site. But anyway, the troops didn't require as much direct first line supervision.

RV: Meaning the folks who worked under you?

PC: Yes.

RV: And to the day-to-day repairs?

PC: Yes. Yeah, and had an old First Sergeant, First Sergeant Jaco who could fix anything. As the cliché goes, if he couldn't fix it, it wasn't broken.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And a great, great big guy. Never make it into today's Army.

RV: How old was he do you think?

PC: Oh gosh, probably in his forties.

RV: And you were what, twenty…?

PC: Twenty-four.

RV: And you were his supervisor?

PC: I was his supervisor, yeah.

RV: You were his boss, his senior. Well how did he take to that, was he...I guess he was used to it.

PC: He was used to it, he was a professional NCO and you know, he would tell me what he thought and he had the best interest of the company at heart.

RV: He was there when you arrived?

PC: He was there when I arrived. And I came in as the XO and Shop Officer, which is the same position and after a couple of months, much to my surprise, Battalion Commander Colonel Hawlk made me Company Commander.

RV: Why do you say much to your surprise?

PC: Well here I was with a Lieutenant, as a Lieutenant with three or four months in grade, Captains were dying for command time. Not many of them were that anxious to get to Quan Loi, which was a pretty miserable place, but of course, anybody who was planning on staying in the Army wanted a command. You know, as an officer, that's what you do. And there were several Captains back at the Tay Ninh headquarters that had not commanded and I was pretty surprised when he asked me if I wanted it. And I said, "Yes sir, you bet." And he said, "Well, we'll try you out," thirty days, sixty days, anyway, "We'll try you out for x number of days and at the end of that period, we'll make a decision." And I thought, fair enough, you know, I'll make it or not on my own. Colonel Hawlk, one of the finest men I ever knew, retired as a Brigadier General, his choice, he could certainly have gone on in my mind to be at least the [Deslow Session 4.wav 1:02:03] of the Army, which is a three star and possibly higher than that. He was just a great guy and a really good leader, another one of those real charismatic leaders.

RV: When you say charismatic leader, what do you mean when you use that?

PC: I mean a guy that it just comes naturally to, that you follow because he's the leader, he knows it, you know it, and you know you have great confidence that the things he's asking you to do are the right things to do and the things that need to be done and you need to do them well.

RV: Okay.

PC: You know, just kind of that natural leadership and he was that way and very relaxed and comfortable in that role and we saw quite a bit of him when we got…him and his wife when we got back to the States. And I don't want to imply that he was an easy guy. I'll never forget one time, completely unannounced, he walks into my orderly room, oh, I had no idea he was even coming and I said, "Yes sir." And he said, "Come on Lieutenant, I'm going to talk, you're going to listen." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And I said, "Yes sir" and that's the way it went. But he was giving me some very good guidance on some things that, you know, I just didn't have the experience to know.

RV: Right.

PC: But he was just a great guy and a good guy to work for and had a lot of confidence in me, which helped me. So anyway, he made me the Company Commander and at the end of whatever that period was, he was pretty happy with what I was doing and wrote me probably the best efficiency report I've ever gotten in my life. It was so good that the DISCOM Commander, the Division Support Command Commander who was his boss popped into my company area unannounced to see if I was really that damn good.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But the OER went through and I mean, I was amazed, I felt good about what I was doing, I felt like I was doing a good job. After that initial spade of Article 15s when I was trying to get everybody's attention.

RV: Right.

PC: But I mentioned I didn't have a degree and I had applied for the Undergraduate Degree Commission Program, the college program. The Undergraduate Degree Completion Program is what it was called and been turned down.

RV: What was the reason, do you know?

PC: Yeah I do. That first OER I got in Vietnam I mentioned before was a stinker and they just figured I had no future in the Army. But then Joe Davis gave me a good one, covered that one up and the XO, the Battalion XO took good care of me. Well then I got there and I good OER as XO of the company. And then this one that Colonel Hawlk wrote, General Hawlk wrote, and when that hit DA (Department of the Army), they called me and said, "Where would you like to go to college and when?" It was that good, it was that good. I was stunned. I wish I had been that good.

RV: Why do you say that? Maybe you were that good?

PC: Well, maybe I was, maybe I was. I certainly had a very successful company.

RV: It sounds like this Colonel would not have done that if you couldn't have backed up your word, his word.

PC: Yes, you've got that right. I'm extremely confident of that. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) So obviously then you were good. Can you tell me…?

PC: I was lucky; I was very lucky. I had a really good First Sergeant, I had some really good soldiers and it was a different Army. I mean, the guys today are top notch, you just can't beat them. But we had a lot of draftees. In my unit, we didn't have so many draftees as we did guys who had enlisted to pick a specific MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), a specific military job. And so we had quite a few of those, although I had one guy, Pops Strangeo. Pops was from Boston, he had a good machine shop business in Boston, his own business and a family and he was the old man of the company, not NCO, old man of the company. He was probably twenty-six or twenty-seven. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) That's funny to hear.

PC: That's why we called him Pops.

RV: Right, right.

PC: Even I as the Company Commander called him Pops. And he used to look at me and here I was, he said, he'd shake his head and say, "The old man." Just shake his head and he'll call the Company Commander the old man. That came from my father's day when the Company Commander's were old men. But anyway, he'd just shake his head. Once I got their attention and they understood me, boy, just had an exceptional company. And everybody has their ten percent and I had mine. But I was fortunate, I had ten percent where other guys had twenty or thirty or forty percent. And one story that Strangeo told me about the First Sergeant, about Jaco, was he'd been, Strangeo had been working on this generator and it was a radio generator, it was a generator to run the radios in the command post, so it was pretty high priority, pretty important. And he'd been working on it for like two days and he just couldn't get it going, he had the book laying right there. First Sergeant Jaco walked out there and looked at it and he said, "Move that wire over there." And Strangeo says, "But the book, I've got the illustration right here. The book says this is right." Jacob says, "Move that wire over there." And he says, "Okay, but I warned you." So he moved the wire, put it all together, fired up on the first kick and ran fine ever after. So, the manual was wrong, Jaco was right.

RV: Wow.

PC: And he just knew that much about the equipment.

RV: That is fortunate to have someone like that under you because you could get lots of stuff fixed.

PC: Well Jaco, at that time, we used to have what they called an MOS test and it was specific to each military specialty. So the generator guys had one, the truck guys, the weapons guys, the signal guys. And Jaco told me one time he thought he could do pretty well on the test in everything except electronics. He thought he'd probably pass electronics, but he wasn't sure he'd do real well.

RV: How do you think he would've done?

PC: I think he'd passed, he probably maxed them all except the electronics and he probably got ninety in that.

RV: You said earlier Pat when you were talking about this transition that this is one of the most fortunate events of your life, of getting transferred to this particular area, this particular company, why did you say that?

PC: Well, you know, professionally, I was able to command in Vietnam in combat as First Lieutenant; a truly rare beauteous thing. So that was one thing that worked out for me. You know, other of my, the experiences that I went through that I wanted to go through, it just changed my whole future and my Army career and my life because I was able to get into the college program and go to school and finish my degree. And it was a great program; all I did for two years was go to school.

RV: Right.

PC: I had no military duties. Full pay in allowances, paid all my tuition fees and books, everything.

RV: That is a good deal.

PC: Oh, it was a heck of a deal. I mean, you just couldn't beat it. So…

RV: Let me ask you this.

PC: Sure.

RV: When did you start thinking career and then I want you to continue with that story, but was it during college, after college, was it when you had finally gotten that command in a war?

PC: No, I wasn't thinking career at that time. The program had not been started when I first took over command. And when they did start, I thought, well this is an opportunity for me to get my degree. Well, of course, you went to school for two years, you were committed to four years of service after you graduated. So I knew I had at least that long to go if I got in the program, I didn't know at that time if I was going to get in it.

RV: Right, right. I guess you have to look at it that way.

PC: You have to because I had to look at my status. You know, I was on what they called an OBV (Obligated Volunteer) tour, an obligated tour for two years. I would've been done with that when I left Vietnam meaning I would've gone back to the United States and got discharged.

RV: Right.

PC: Okay, well there I was, no degree, just back from Vietnam, didn't know anybody, didn't know anything. I had a wife and a baby, no money, what was I going to do? I couldn't get out. Plus they started this program and you had to be vol-indef, Voluntary Indefinite Status to be eligible for the program. So I wasn't thinking career, but I knew that I had to change my status and I did.

RV: Okay. And obviously was the right decision for you.

PC: Yeah. Could not have made a better decision anywhere at anytime.

RV: What about those who needed more than two years to get their degree? Would all they give you was two years?

PC: All you could get was two years.

RV: Okay. You could only do a certain amount of hours or you had two calendar years?

PC: You had two full calendar years.

RV: Okay.

PC: Academic years actually, but it worked out to be the same thing because that included summer school, you had to go year round.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so yeah, you got two years and I had just over sixty hours of credits, so I was, you know…

RV: Yeah, you were in good shape.

PC: Good shape, not GPA wise, but good shape credit hours wise to come and do the program. And the other criteria was you had to be eligible for a regular Army commission, competitive for regular Army commission. But anyway, to get back to what you asked me about, I met some fine people; General Hawlk was a role model for me and my military career for years and years. And in fact, we were in touch up until just very, very recently and we kind of lost touch, but until a year or two ago, we were still in touch.

RV: Really? What happened?

PC: I don't know, we just kind of…

RV: Yeah.

PC: You know how over time and…

RV: Yes.

PC: So, you know, I learned a lot, I learned a lot from Jaco, I learned a lot from General Hawlk and I learned a lot from our Battalion XO, Colonel Anderson, who was also a great guy. I'll tell you the kind of guy Hawlk was and I'll tell you the war story, I mentioned a war story a minute ago.

RV: Yeah, I have that here to ask you actually, was it artillery sites?

PC: Artillery, yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: I had been in 1st of the 5th Cav, came to the 27th Maintenance. Got a call one night, 1st of the 5th Cav was out on a firebase as they always were, that's where they lived. And the intelligence was that they were going to get a massive ground attack that night. Well one of your primary weapons in case of a ground attack is a 105 Howitzer with a direct fire and you just lower the tube until it's level with the ground and fire HA Air flachette or whatever you want to fire that will definitely slow a charge down. Well, one of their sites had fought and they did not have another one and we did not have one. And this one was, we couldn't fix it, at least not in time, we needed to get it out there. Well, it's a long complicated story, but I'll make it simple. We needed to get a site out to them and well there I was, you know, a young hard charging First Lieutenant, so I was going to do this myself. So I went and got a helicopter from the brigade headquarters and I called our operation…

RV: How do you go get a helicopter?

PC: You walk into the brigade TOC, Tactical Operations Center, you walk up to the Brigade Aviation Officer, you say, "I'm Lieutenant Curry and I need a helicopter to do this and such." And he says, "Okay, take this one." And that's exactly the way it happened.

RV: And you've like requisitioned the pilot?

PC: Well, the pilot comes with the helicopters.

RV: Right.

PC: (Laughing) It comes with the helicopter.

RV: It's like; I need a taxi to get out to this LZ (Landing Zone).

PC: And well, we didn't have one, so I needed to go back to Bien Hoa to get one. Well, I called back to our operations section on the radio and said here's what I need and such and such and it was after duty hours, after five or six at night, I guess it probably was dark, it was probably about 7:38 and…

RV: They were trying to attack that night or…?

PC: That night.

RV: Wow.

PC: That night. And otherwise, you know, I could've waited till the next day and gone out on a normal Log Bird.

RV: Sure.

PC: But they said it couldn't wait and I took their word for it, you know. And I'll get back to lucky again in a minute, but anyway, the guy I talked to in the operations section didn't particularly want to do it and he said, "Well you know, tomorrow," and I was trying to tell him, "No it can't." You know, finally I called a different guy and he reluctantly went and got it. So I took the helicopter and I flew from where we were at Quan Loi down to Bien Hoa and they were waiting at the LZ and had the site.

RV: How big is a site?

PC: Oh, it was in a box probably, gosh about eighteen inches long, maybe twelve inches high by twelve inches wide.

RV: Okay.

PC: Not a big thing, but pretty important.

RV: Do you carry it in your hands?

PC: Oh yeah, easily, it didn't weigh hardly anything, but you need it if you're going to fire an artillery piece.

RV: Right.

PC: And know where you're shooting.

RV: Right.

PC: Generally a pretty good idea. And so they were waiting at the LZ and had it and I got it and we took off again right away. It's kind of interesting flying over Vietnam at night; you can see all the firefights going on and all of that. We were so high; we weren't worried, but see all the firefights going on and all that kind of stuff.

RV: And what would you see, the mortars going off?

PC: Well, you'd see rifle flashes, flares, artillery rounds going off, mortar rounds going off, you know, the flash from the explosions.

RV: Tracers.

PC: Tracers going back and forth green and red and that kind of stuff. So it was kind of interesting and I was a real tourist. And so anyway, we were trucking along and we had the grid coordinates for the 1st of the 5th firebase and we went out there. Well the pilots it turns out didn't have the radio frequency, they didn't have the call signs, they didn't have any way to get in touch with 1st of the 5th. And I mean, we weren't too worried; obviously if it was a helicopter, it was good guys.

RV: Sure, sure.

PC: You know, I mean, they weren't going to shoot at us. But since they were expecting a large ground attack imminently, we kind wanted to get in and out. And since I had been in 1st of the 5th Cav, I remembered the radio frequency and call sign and they had not changed them.

RV: Okay.

PC: And we don't do it that way nowadays. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But anyway, I gave that to the pilots, they called, I got on the radio and told them what was going on.

RV: Were you sitting in the back of the helicopter?

PC: Yes.

RV: Just you?

PC: Just me and the door gunners.

RV: Oh okay.

PC: And the door gunners and of course, the AC (Aircraft Commander) and the pilot up front. And so we came in over the firebase and they shot a flare for us and we were outside the wire, it was too small for us to land inside the wire. And so we said, "Okay, here we come." Well, as we started down, we got to a certain altitude and we were coming as straight down as we could and a guy came running out from the wire. And I mean, he was hoofing it and I don't blame him.

RV: What kind of guy?

PC: One of the guys from 1st of the 5th.

RV: Oh okay, coming out to get the piece?

PC: Yeah. And well, he had a box in his hands and we came down and just as we got to the bottom, he got out to the LZ. I threw my box and he threw his box. (Laughing) He caught his and I mean, I don't believe I've seen a guy run that fast, he could've beat Lance Armstrong.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: Turned around, hoofing it for the wire, I caught our box and the pilot never even slowed down, he just started up.

RV: Wow.

PC: And we took off and went back to Quan Loi. So, that was kind of an interesting night. But I told you that story just because I was talking about Colonel Hawlk.

RV: Yes.

PC: He came out a couple of days later and said, "Well how are things going?" And I said, "Well, I had a problem." And I told him about it. I guess he went back and just flayed them alive. On the grounds, that here was a Company Commander out forward trying to support the grunts in the field, the artillery in the field and they had best get off their fat asses and get me what I needed when I needed it. In fact, I didn't even need to need it; I just wanted it.

RV: Right.

PC: Well boy, I'll tell you what, the head of that section was a Major, about three days later, here he comes. He says, "Lieutenant, if you have any problems with my guys and I cannot comprehend that you would in the future, but if you do, please call me and don't tell Colonel Hawlk." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But after that, man, if I needed something, it was on the next bird. I guess he got a hold of that Major who was more or less innocent in the thing and a couple of his Captains and just I mean, ripped their legs off and beat them with it. But boy, I sure got good support after that.

RV: Yeah.

PC: I lost a couple of friends, but…

RV: Well, you did what you had to do for…

PC: I had to do it, no choice; they had to get it out there. He asked me if I was having a problem and I was, so…

RV: I wanted to ask you a general question about yourself. How would you describe Lieutenant Pat Curry as a leader? And I know you talked about Article 15s and all that, but just looking at the XO status and then the Company Commander status, how would you describe yourself?

PC: You know, there were a couple of basic things I always found regardless of whether it was Lieutenant or Lieutenant Colonel. There was a couple of basic things that if you did them and were consistent that you were going to be a good leader and you were going to have a good unit. And I want to emphasize consistency. If you are not consistent, it just confuses the hell out of people because they don't know what to expect. But one is, you know, there's not a lot of gray, it's black or it's white, you know. It's right or it's wrong. If I tell you to do something and you don't think it's right, you should express your opinion and then whatever decision the Commander makes, you do. Discipline, if you are following an order, a legal order and I want to emphasize a legal order, then you do it. And if you don't do it, then you should expect the consequences. And as a leader, it's my job to impose those consequences. The spade of Article 15s came from them learning to understand that I was going to impose those consequences,

you know? It is your choice whether you follow the rule or not, but if you don't, there's going to be consequences, no ifs, ands, buts, or maybes, period; end of discussion. Zero tolerance. And care about your folk; take care of them. You know, there are some things given the nature of Armies that young enlisted soldiers can't do for themselves and you need to help them do those things.

RV: Can you give me an example?

PC: Yeah. I had one scumbag, which is the polite term, who stole another guy's typewriter and started writing letters to hit the guy's wife. Yeah, I thought this was reasonably low. And so the guy finally came and told me about it and I got the company in…I mean, right that minute, got the company in formation. Didn't wait for nothing, got them all out there and said, "I know who it is, all I'm waiting for is a chance to prove it and when I prove it, and I'm going to put you under LBJ." Dismissed. About an hour later, the kid comes in and says, "My typewriter just showed up on my bunk." And his wife never got another letter. And that showed him that I cared, and I did, it wasn't an act.

RV: Sure.

PC: I don't think that's something that you can fake; I was genuinely outraged. And I never did catch the guy, but I wish I had. But that showed everybody in the company that Curry gives a damn. And as a result of that, they would take that extra step, they would do that, maybe they hadn't been specifically instructed to do it, but they would go head and take that extra step. One of the things I never told anybody, especially Colonel Hawlk was Strangeo and his committee, I mentioned Pop Strangeo, he came in. For Strangeo, the world was divided into O's and E's. There was officers and there was enlisted. I was an O, he was an E and that's the way the world was. Although, all things considered, we got to be pretty good friends. But the day before I turned over command, he and his little committee came in and made me an honorary E. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And they gave me a little Spec 5 pin and the fatigues had a flap on the pocket and so I took that pin and put it underneath the flap where it couldn't be seen and I wore that during my change of command.

RV: Oh really?

PC: Yup, yup.

RV: And they knew it?

PC: And they knew it. And well, it was a great honor, you made an honorary E was a great honor.

RV: Usually there's a pretty big gulf between the two parties.

PC: There usually is. And Strangeo told me, he said, "Hey," he said, "I like it." He said, "It's straightforward. I know if I mess up, that I'm going to pay the consequences." He says, "I like it that way."

RV: The boundaries.

PC: The boundaries, yeah. Everybody understood what the rules were. I had one guy, I'll never forget. It was pretty quick after I got there; the 1st Cav had a very strict rule against beer in the barracks. I'm not saying how strictly it was enforced, but it was a pretty strict rule and it was enforced in my company. And I was in one of the barracks just walking through and a guy walked in the other end and he had a beer in each hand. And you talk about deer in the headlights. He knew he was dead meat and he was.

RV: What'd you do?

PC: I gave him an Article 15, fined him; of course, no point in restricting anybody.

RV: Right.

PC: They had nowhere to go anyway. But we had a little company club and I restricted him from that.

RV: Tell me about doing an Article 15, how would you go about doing that?

PC: Well, I mentioned the Article 15 is non-judicial punishment and it is punishment that a commander can impose on a subordinate.

RV: And it goes on your record?

PC: No.

RV: It's not part of your official record?

PC: It's not part of your permanent record because it's non-judicial. And the way it works is the commander decides and usually talks to the 1st Sergeant, at least if he's smart. "So and so did this and he deserves an Article 15," or the 1st Sergeant comes in and says, "So and so did this, he deserves an Article 15." Smart Company Commander's

going to back up his 1st Sergeant. And so you decide what you're going to charge him with, what element of the uniform code in military justice he violated and what you're going to charge him with. The seriousness determines whether it's an Article 15 or it goes to court marshal. Article 15 is for relatively minor offenses, if it's anything at all serious, it's going to go to a court marshal. But if it's a relatively minor thing like being so dumb you walk into the billets or in the barracks with beer in your hand when the Company Commander's in there, then it's going to go to an Article 15. And it's a really good tool for the Company Commander because you can get their attention without permanently damaging them.

RV: Right.

PC: So anyway, obviously it's the Army, there's paperwork, there's forms that you fill out and you call the guy in and you read him his rights. There's a form that has his rights on it and you read them to him. And one of the things you advise him is that he can turn down the Article 15, and I say he because in Vietnam all we had were guys. He can turn down the Article 15 and demand a trial by court marshal. My personal philosophy was never offer a guy an Article 15 if you can't prove it in court. I mean, that's just a matter of credibility.

RV: Right.

PC: Because if one guy turns it down and demands a court marshal and either you don't take it to a court marshal or he beats the court marshal, everybody's going to decline every Article 15 from then on. And that's not in my best interest or theirs because a court marshal is a federal conviction.

RV: Right.

PC: It follows them around the rest of their life and that's a bad thing. So anyway, you read them their rights, you ask them if they want to accept the Article 15, you give them x hours to think about it. And they come back and they say yes or no. If they say no, you say "Thank you, you'll be hearing from me;" you start the process of court marshal. If they say yes, you give them a chance to say what they want to say, explain matters and mitigation and extenuation if you will.

RV: Is it just the two of you in the office?

PC: No, the 1st Sergeant is always there, you always have a witness, always and it's always the 1st Sergeant. And he gets to explain, you explain what he did wrong again and he gets to explain why he did it and although with the guy with the beer, all he said was, "I was stupid, I agree with you."

RV: What can he say?

PC: What can he say? The 1st Sergeant and I both agreed with him. Anyway, then you impose punishment. Well at this moment, he still has the right to refuse it. And so you give him x hours to think about it, he comes back and either declines the process of court marshal or accepts and he signs the Article 15 and you process it. And they take the money out of his pay if there's a fine. If he's reduced, he gets reduced. And actually, the first guy ever reduced in the Army was a guy named Curry.

RV: Really?

PC: Yup.

RV: What did you reduce him for, do you remember?

PC: Gosh, I don't remember, I really don't remember.

RV: But that's pretty serious.

PC: Getting busted is pretty serious. Even in Vietnam where rank came fairly fast, getting busted is pretty serious. You know, you're kind of taking two big steps backwards.

RV: How would they have this not follow them around because obviously the paperwork goes through, there's a paper trail, people know about it, word of mouth, how do you…?

PC: It went in their local record for a certain period of time and then was in the part of their file that nobody else could see.

RV: Okay, I see.

PC: So a guy might come to me and have five Article 15's and I might never know it.

RV: Are you going to ask?

PC: No.

RV: You're not going to call his past commander and say, "Hey, tell me about…?"

PC: Not unless there were some exceptional circumstances. You know, he might come in and he's got one stripe and a space where four used to be or something like that, but even then probably wouldn't.

RV: You're giving him the benefit of the doubt basically?

PC: Yeah.

RV: A fresh start.

PC: Yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: Most of the time, not always, but most of the time. And especially in Vietnam, I mean, his past commander was probably back in the States. And although I did get a couple of what we called rehab transfers. We had, Quan Loi was the worst physical location in terms of the conditions. So if somebody really seriously screwed up, they sent him to Quan Loi.

RV: Why do you say that about Quan Loi, why was it so bad?

PC: Oh, it didn't have nearly the facilities that the other places did. Dust was just, I mean, it would be pouring rain and for eighteen inches off the ground, there'd be a dust storm from the rain beating up the dust.

RV: Wow.

PC: Later with armored Cav had a site right across the street from us and their tracks would just chew up that street. And I mean, the dust would be literally twenty inches deep, just like talcum powder. They used to come down and spray it down with diesel to try and keep it down. I mean, it was in everything.

RV: Wow.

PC: And it was just this red, it's a lot like west Texas red and it was real red. And it's funny, once a month I'd go back to Bien Hoa for our Company Commander's conference with the Battalion Commander. Hot shower, hot puppies. I'd go in and stand in the hot shower and we had a shower, you know, it was an old container, a metal container of some kind just gravity fit. But I'd go back and get an actual hot shower in a real shower. And you know, I had to shower everyday, there would be this ring of red mud around me in the shower as it got out of the creases and pores of my skin and out of my hair and I mean, this is…

RV: Wow.

PC: So I did get a few rehab transfer guys who had screwed up elsewhere and they were going to give them a fresh start in my company. And you know, I mean, that was just the way it was done; I didn't take that personally or anything.

RV: Right. Let me ask you one more thing before we stop. Tell me about, you kept saying that you learned so much doing this. Can you comment just briefly for now, we'll go into some more detail later. What did you learn there in this six months of your tour, what were some of the major overall looking back lessons of this particular time period?

PC: Well watching General Hawlk I think I really learned a lot about leadership. I certainly learned things that I've used throughout my career. I think more, perhaps more importantly, I've learned from General Hawlk what it really meant to be an Army officer, a professional Army officer. And I say from Colonel Hawlk, but his Command Sergeant Major was I think I mentioned before was Sergeant Major Grenda, Casimir Grenda. And I mean, look up Sergeant Major in the dictionary and there is Sergeant Major Grenda's picture.

RV: G-r-i-n-d…

PC: G-r-e-n-d-a.

RV: Okay.

PC: Casimir, C-a-s-i-m-i-r. And he was just, I mean, he looked, Sergeant Major Grenda looked, I mean, god, it's four years later and I still call him Sergeant Major, just looked like a soldier. He had the short cropped steel gray hair, you know, he was real lean and kind of muscular and had that very erect baring, you know. And just, I never saw him let down. I'm sure he did, but he never did it around an officer. He was just old school.

RV: What did you learn from him?

PC: He'd come in and say, "Sir," I hear he's got more time in the pay vine than I have in the Army as the cliché goes. But he always called me sir; he was always very respectful. "Sir, would you have a moment to step outside so we could talk?" And I always did, being no fool. And he would take me outside and tell me as suggestions and

comments and never, "You need to do this," never did that, how to deal with the NCOs. You know, as a young man, I admit to being a little intimidated sometimes.

RV: Sure.

PC: And he would give me hints on how to deal with the NCOs and specific NCOs that might be having…I might be having difficulty with or they might. And it was never just hit him between the eyes with the ball being hammered, there was always some good way of dealing with them, bring them in and counsel them or sit down and have a beer with them or some good way of dealing with them.

RV: Right.

PC: And so I learned a lot about dealing with NCOs.

RV: Do you remember some of the specific examples or some of the things he might ask you to talk to you about and what did he say?

PC: Well…

RV: Or just an example of what he might tell you?

PC: Yeah well, I had one Staff Sergeant who was the supply guy and ran the warehouse that we had and supplies and all. And he was having a little problem with alcohol and a little problem with family at home and etc. And so our Major kind of alerted me to this. And I mean, there you are, you're a lot closer in age to the junior enlisted guys than you are the NCOs, and so you tended to know a lot more about the personal lives of the junior enlisted guys than you did the NCOs, who certainly were not going to come, generally speaking, talk to some twenty-four year old to, you know, a 1st Lieutenant.

RV: Right.

PC: But told me about the problems that he was having and suggested that maybe he needed to go back to Bien Hoa for a few days and just get a little rest and get away from it for a few day and that the suggestion would be really better if it came from the Company Commander.

RV: I see.

PC: And so we did that and I think it did the guy a lot of good; we being the 1st Sergeant and I. And anything that I never did with NCOs I did with the First Sergeant. For one thing, it was smart because he knew a lot. For another thing, he deserved that

from his position. And so that was one of the things that, you know, he could've said just you know, the guy's drinking too much, hammer him and get him out and there was a lot of that feeling around, but he did it a smart way. And he was always so tactful about it, you know.

RV: And you still remember that to this day?

PC: I still remember that and I remember him to this day. And you know, I didn't understand the OER system, this was General Hawlk, I didn't understand the OER system. The OER system less so now, but at that time was very inflated. You know, you got numerical ratings in several areas and comments and an overall numerical rating.

RV: Right.

PC: And if you got less than about a ninety-eight, I mean, you were doomed. And there was and still is a system where you can convey your feelings without, you know, giving the guy a twelve or something. Well, I had this one Lieutenant that worked for me allegedly and he just really wasn't very much enjoying what we were doing and just wasn't very much participating in what we were doing.

RV: This was a 2nd Lieutenant?

PC: No, he was a 1st Lieutenant, but he's junior to me.

RV: I see.

PC: I mean you know, rank among Lieutenants like virtue among whores and all that. But anyway, I was Company Commander and I more or less expected that he would do to me as I would've done to him had our positions been reversed. But he was really kind of a dud and just not very aggressive, not doing much, way too close to the enlisted men, I mean, buddies, pals, and that was a non-starter. And so anyway, I wrote him an appropriate OER. This was the time or one of the times General Hawlk got off the helicopter when I didn't know he was coming and said, "I'm going to talk and you're going to listen." He had this OER in his hand and he said, "Lieutenant, if I process this OER, we are both going to be relieved for not having this guy shot." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) By the way you wrote it?

PC: By the way I wrote it because I just wrote it straightforward and honest.

RV: Right.

PC: And I gave him a seventy-two and said, "You know, he's a moron." And General Hawlk took that opportunity to educate me on the intricacies of the Officer Efficiency Reporting system.

RV: (Laughing) What were they?

PC: Well, you don't give a guy a seventy-two. You know, you should've relieved him long before, relieved him for cause long before you ever gave him an OER like that and that you know, you give him numbers in this range, you know like a ninety-six and then you write your words, it's really an art, you write your words so that it conveys the meaning to anybody who's reading it without actually coming right out and say it.

RV: It sounds like writing citations for the medals, the awards.

PC: Pretty much so.

RV: And how you wrote up what they reported from the field, but you turned it into a language that was acceptable and…

PC: Exactly, that's a good analogy. There's a protocol that you follow and I wasn't aware of the protocol and I hadn't had half a dozen myself and hadn't seen any others, I just had no idea. But he took that opportunity to educate me. He was forceful, but he didn't chew my butt or anything like that, but he certainly conveyed his idea.

RV: He gave it back to you and said, "Hey, let's try this again."

PC: Yeah, and we did. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: So, but the one time I got to educate Colonel Hawlk or General Hawlk, I got another Lieutenant in, a 2nd Lieutenant, Chuck Case and Chuck was just a fireball, just couldn't learn fast enough, couldn't do enough and just a pleasure to work with. And so we had to give up an officer to go to another division. And so General Hawlk came up on one of his visits and he was up there all the time. And he said, "Well, we have to give up an officer." He says, "Case is the newest guy and so I think we're going to have to send him to the 9th ID." And I said, "Sir, I have a better idea," because I had this other guy.

RV: The 72 guy.

PC: So I had this other guy and I said, "I have a much better idea than that." Hawlk says, "Lieutenant, sometimes you're smarter than I am." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) So Case stayed?

PC: Case stayed and the other guy went and everybody was happy.

RV: Solved your problem?

PC: Solved our problem.

RV: Yeah.

PC: I later heard they were about as glad to have him in the 9th ID as I was.

RV: (Laughing) Wow.

PC: So that's one time I got to educate General Hawlk. Well, he was a Colonel then, but…

RV: Yes, yes. Well, we can continue this…

PC: And fortunately, pardon me, I'm sorry.

RV: No, go ahead.

PC: Fortunately, Hawlk was the kind of guy that you could say that to. You know, he wasn't the kind of guy you were so scared of that you just said yes sir to anything he said, he didn't lead that way. I felt perfectly comfortable saying, "Sir, I have a better idea." I had no qualms about that whatsoever and it didn't ever cross my mind that he would chew my butt.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean, I didn't expect him necessarily to do it, but I knew he'd listen.

RV: Well that says a lot about him.

PC: It does, it really does.

RV: And is that what you took into your future as an officer?

PC: Oh you bet, I always tried to listen. I'm not going to say I always succeeded, but I always tried to listen.

RV: That's a good place where we can stop today.

PC: Okay.

RV: And we'll continue with our next session, thanks a lot Pat.

PC: Okay.

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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Patrick Curry
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
July 26, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone and I'm continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Pat Curry. Today is July 26, 2005 and I'm in the same location again in the Special Collections Library, Vietnam Archive Oral History Interview Room. It's around 3:15 Central Standard Time and Pat, why don't we continue with some discussion about your time there at Quan Loi. I wanted to ask you if you could differentiate between the role as you saw it in your MOS, but also in general, the difference between the XO and his or her responsibilities, at that time, his responsibilities at least in your branch and the Commander of the compound and how that relationship works, the responsibilities, and then how the two interact.

Patrick Curry: Well, there's not really a firm model for saying, here's the responsibilities of the executive officer, it's pretty much up to the Commander. The Commander of course is responsible for everything and in charge and command of everything. But the Commander is responsible for overall accomplishing the mission and everything he does or she does should be focused on that objective. You know, what's the mission and what's the best thing to do to accomplish that mission in the best way possible? And that includes making sure that the guys are working on the right thing, it includes making sure that they're doing it right. If you see the distinction I'm doing, I'm making that you got to do the right things and you have to do them right.

RV: Right.

PC: And so kind of that overall kind of guidance is the Commander's responsibility. Military justice is totally the Commander's responsibility and may not be delegated, not that you would want to, but you can't even if you do.

RV: Right.

PC: A lot of times, well to back up, the XOs were always whatever the Company Commander wants it to be. Many times the XO was responsible for a lot of the administration, overseas personnel, does those kinds of things, tries to take some of the administration burden (Coughs) excuse me, off the Commander to free the Commander up for more directly relevant things. Pardon me. A lot of the times the XO will also be responsible for what we call Organizational Maintenance. And that is maintenance of your own unit's equipment. In a direct support maintenance unit like I commanded, B Company, we were responsible for doing repairs to our customer unit's equipment. But that was a higher-level repair; replacing an engine, replacing the transmission, something like that. Every unit is responsible for maintaining its own equipment at a lower level and that's called Organizational Maintenance. Maintenance units have a lot of equipment and they're no different, they have to take care of it. A lot of times the XO is responsible for that. In a maintenance unit, your Company XO is also your Shop Officer, which means that he controls the flow of equipment through the repair process; he manages that through the repair process.

RV: Is that usually hands on or is that done with basically the section heads reporting to him?

PC: It is done with the section heads reporting to him.

RV: Okay.

PC: One of his jobs is to prioritize. And so he'll be telling for instance the Army repair shop, "Okay, I want you to do this. Howitzer first," you always do Howitzers first.

RV: Why?

PC: Because they're such a high priority weapon.

RV: Okay.

PC: They were so important in direct support of the infantry units. I mean, that was one of their main, main support weapons. And each battalion had its own battery of 105s and they usually had one extra, one float they called it. But if one went down, you

jumped on it immediately. And we used to carry the big stock repair parts for Howitzers so we could turn them around real quickly. Well, they were important enough that I mentioned the other day, flew to Bien Hoa, picked up a site and flew out.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean, that's important.

RV: Oh yeah.

PC: So in a maintenance unit, the XO will also be the Shop Officer. And of course, the Company Commander always is watching and making sure that it's going the way he wants. One of the Company Commander's big jobs is liaison with the customers. Are the customer units getting what they need from your unit? What do we need to do to do it better? Do we have the priorities right? Do our priorities match yours? You know, do you want us to do that 81mm mortar next or do you want us to do the 106 recoilless rifle next?

RV: And that's the call of that Commander, basically that middle rank tier, the Company Commander in the field I guess making that request?

PC: Oh no, we would deal, the Company Commanders in the field we hardly ever…as a support unit, we never talked to the infantry Company Commanders. They were out in the jungle. We would talk to the battalion rear. The S4 is the section that's responsible for logistics and we would talk to them, they had a battalion maintenance section, we would talk to them or their S4.

RV: Okay.

PC: Maybe their Battalion XO, the Major, and see you know, were they satisfied with what they were getting. If they were having a problem, the XO would've called me and said, "Hey, I need this." And if it's important enough for the Battalion XO to call you, you usually kind of hustle right on to get it done.

RV: Yeah, yeah. So it is that, it's not the Generals and it's not necessarily the Colonels, it's the Majors and the Captains and Lieutenants who are making these decisions and communicating back and forth about what's priority, what you need and when you need it and are you all meeting each other's needs?

PC: Yes.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, one of the big things that I did as a Company Commander was go around and visit all the customers as often as I could.

RV: How many would you say?

PC: Oh, a dozen, fifteen. You know, it varied depending on who was coming through the area. And in theory, we would support a specific brigade, but they would take a battalion and attach it to the brigade and we'd pick up support for them. And they'd take one of our battalions and attach it to another brigade and we'd drop support for them and back and forth. So it varied.

RV: Okay. Which role did you prefer, and I know probably Commander…

PC: Oh yeah, it was no question, yeah, no question about it. You know, they always joke about a Major. You know, it's a worse rank in the Army, you're not eligible to command anything and that's not strictly true, there are some Major command positions, but not many.

RV: Right.

PC: Because you know, they've done Major commands. It's a terrible rank.

RV: You're stuck in the middle.

PC: You're stuck. But yeah, no, Commander is always the best, always the best job.

RV: Could you tell me what you remember about what was the most common piece of equipment that you all were servicing?

PC: Radios. The electronics had a lot of trouble with the dust.

RV: How about the humidity and the water, was that a problem for radios?

PC: Not so much the water, the humidity yeah, that would be it'd corrode things and short circuit things and etc. They usually tried to…the radios that were actually out in the weather; the backpack type radios were pretty well protected. It was the, I'm trying to think of the word for it here, but the station mount, the centrally located radios that we had a lot of trouble with. Of course, it was a pretty high priority for communications and etc. If you have one mounted on a jeep and you start the jeep with the radio on, there's a good chance that a power surge will fry the radio. And they could never at that time, had been a filter that was fast enough to catch that transit spike. And

so we used to get radios that had been fried for that reason. But more often it was dust and humidity that was causing problems; and I mean, they ran 24/7.

RV: Yeah. What about after radios, what do you think is the most…?

PC: Oh gosh, probably weapons, not so much M-16s because most of those could be fixed. Most of the things that'd go wrong with an M-16 could be fixed at Organizational Maintenance at the unit level or could you turned in and requisition a new one. And it'd go back to depot and be fixed back there or it would be scrapped.

RV: Did you all have to deal with the jamming problem? Basically that had been solved by the time you arrived.

PC: That's correct. No, we did not have to deal with that.

RV: Okay.

PC: One of the things we did have to deal with at that time was guys used to like to take two clips and tape them together. Well, at that time, the spring in the M-16 that held the clip in place wasn't strong enough to hold the weight of two fold clips.

RV: Right.

PC: Now this was before the banana clips and etc. And so it would eventually break that spring and we'd have to go in and replace that. That was a problem.

RV: How much did you…did you know how to repair all of this stuff yourself or did you leave it…you left it to your specialists obviously?

PC: Oh yeah, no, I didn't know how to fix very much of it myself. That really wasn't my job.

RV: Right, of course.

PC: You know, I used to go out there once in a while and try to get down and have one of them teach me something, just, you know, just for the interaction and it was kind of interesting. But in terms of replacing an engine or something like that, no, I didn't know how to do that. Now I knew how to, at organizational level, I know how to inspect a vehicle.

RV: Right.

PC: To see if it's being maintained, if the driver's doing what he should do, if the motor pool's doing what they should do, those kinds of things. So I know what's wrong, I'm not sure I could fix it.

RV: Right. How big of an operation was Quan Loi? I mean, your responsibility there for the shop and then you're the Commander; what're we talking about? You know, two buildings, one giant warehouse or can you estimate?

PC: My Company?

RV: Yes.

PC: We had about four hooches that were barracks; they were kind of long and low, just one-story jobs and they had bunkers in-between. The NCOs had a separate hooch where they stayed. We had a fairly sizeable, by Quan Loi standards, warehouse. It was a two-story, two-story building. We had kind of a metal type shed that was a vehicle maintenance facility, had a couple of bays in it. We had an electronics repair shop that was essentially two mobile units that had been put together and taken off the wheels. If we were ever to move, then we would put them back on the wheels and they'd moved with us. And we had a separate armament repair shop that was basically the same kind of facility. We had a little headquarters building, had the company offices in the front, the officers quarters in the back.

RV: Okay.

PC: Oh, and we had a little company club.

RV: Were all these buildings air-conditioned?

PC: Oh no, none of them were air-conditioned. I don't remember seeing air conditioning. I guess when I went back to Bien Hoa and went to the club, I guess the club was air-conditioned; we had a nice club.

RV: How did you guys acclimatize, was it difficult?

PC: Nah, it really wasn't, you got used to it. It was a lot harder getting used to wearing the steel pot than it was getting used to the helmet because until you've worn it for a couple of weeks everyday and that's all you wore in the Cav was a steel pot, you never wore a soft cap.

RV: You were required to wear it all the time?

PC: All the time. And you also had to carry the weapon anytime you went outside your company area.

RV: Okay.

PC: Now this was at Quan Loi.

RV: Right.

PC: At Bien Hoa while I was there, they turned in their weapons and put them in connexes so they didn't carry them. But if you wear that steel pot until you got used to it, boy it'd really get your neck. But no, we were all so young that acclimatizing really wasn't difficult.

RV: Okay. We were looking before we started recording at the map here, we have a map of Southeast Asia and a close-up of Vietnam, South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam, Thailand and we were looking at Quan Loi and it is located just outside An Loc and it's almost due north of Saigon or Ho Chi Minh City today. How often did you get into An Loc? You said it was off limits, you guys weren't allowed to get in.

PC: I never even saw An Loc other than flying over it in a helicopter. My guys that drove, the convoys used to come through there, they'd have to go down and pick up a load of repaired parts or something like that and bring it in. So they went through the village and I'm not going to tell you that some of them didn't sneak into the village at times, but I never saw it in mine.

RV: Did you know for a fact that they were sneaking into the village and just kind of let that go or…?

PC: I didn't know it at the time and I would not have let it go.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: We had one guy and his nickname was Weasel, he kept coming up with a case of VD (Venereal Disease), so I figured he was going into town somewhere.

RV: He wasn't catching it from the M-16 he was preparing. (Laughing)

PC: No, he was… (Laughing) And so I figured he had to be sneaking in, he was a driver.

RV: Ah, okay.

PC: So he had plenty of chances, but I never did catch him.

RV: Why weren't you all off base, was that just a Cav regulation that you all followed or was it more of a safety thing?

PC: I think it was some of both. I'm not sure why, but I know that the restriction against going into Saigon, which was pretty rigidly enforced, I think I mentioned that the

MPs (Military Police) in Saigon would go around and look at the left shoulder and if you had a faded spot, you know, around a Cav patch, you were going to the bureaus marshal's office. But no, and it's kind of like the restriction on hooch maids almost all the other units had or they didn't. I think it was part of being, you know, a combat unit, being a forward mine division, maintaining that kind of mindset, that kind of image.

RV: And you were right out there by the Cambodian border, so you're just literally a few miles out from that. What did you feel about operations in Cambodia, did you know that anybody was over there or that the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) using it as a sanctuary and we were trying to infiltrate or…?

PC: Well we knew that they were over there, I mean, that was just real obvious. There's no place else they could've been. We didn't really start getting a lot of stuff until after I left. My replacement as Company Commander was a guy named Tom Skinner and Tom wrote me and told me they were, when we started the big operations/incursions into Cambodia, one of the things our company did was collect the weapons and stuff that had been captured and prepare them and retrograde them back to Bien Hoa where they wanted us to send them. And he said there was just mountains of stuff coming through there. He said they were working twenty hours a day trying to process it and get it loaded and get it shipped out. There was just an amazing amount of stuff right across the border.

RV: Were you all aware of how many of the enemy were around you? It might seem like a silly question, but…

PC: No, no, it's not a silly question at all and it's something that we used to wonder about, you know, how many of them are there out there watching us?

RV: Right.

PC: How many of them are there in here inside the perimeter watching us? After one ground attack, we found there was an artillery battalion right across the street, 175s and we found our barber hanging in the wire after a ground attack, he'd been one of the bad guys. And coming in shaving the Battery Commander everyday and all of that. So, you know, you did wonder about that because you just, it was so dense you couldn't see. They could've been two feet inside the tree line and you'd never see them. And then, you know, periodically could be a ground attack or something like that.

RV: How many of those incidents happened?

PC: Ground attacks?

RV: Yeah.

PC: Oh, probably half a dozen or so.

RV: Was this mainly at night you said, can you clarify that?

PC: Yeah, almost always. Now, we got mortared gosh, every couple of days; it might be at noon. This one time we were having a company formation at noon, one of our regular formations and all of a sudden mortar shells started coming in. I mean, they were way far away and you get kind of callous, you know, to it and you can tell by the sound how far or how close they are. And it didn't particularly bother me, but I looked out there and I could see a few deer's in the headlights or deer in the headlights. And so I thought, "Okay." I just told them to fall out and they hoofed it off and went in the bunkers. So we got mortared probably every few days. But you can tell by how sharp the crack is, how far away they are. But we probably got a half dozen pretty good size ground attacks.

RV: Did you all feel confident out there that you could defend yourself adequately and handle yourself if the "human wave" attacks would come?

PC: Well, you know, I don't know that we ever thought about human wave attacks, they really weren't…in the attacks that we did have, they really weren't that numerous. I'm not sure we were that confident we could keep every single one of them outside the wire. We never believed that they could actually take control of the base.

RV: How large was that base?

PC: Well, it was a brigade headquarters, so we had some aviation units, we had, one time we had a troop in the 11th ACR there and those poor guys, wow, but…

RV: Was it as large as the Texas Tech campus, a little bit smaller?

PC: Probably a little larger. We had an airfield that C-130s used to land on, so that's big enough to add that. We had, the Officers Club was an old French house, two story, real nice, had been real nice at one time and there was a French plantation. If you Google Quan Loi and look, you'll pictures of an old French plantation with, I mean, just unbelievable. A huge swimming pool, these big stone columns at one end, this beautiful little bathhouse at the other end.

RV: Was it functional?

PC: Not when I was there, but I found out from the website that later they cleaned it up and opened it up to the troops.

RV: Wow.

PC: And it looked beautiful in the pictures after it had been all cleaned up. But clearly it had been a very upscale, very nice place at one time and it was right there inside the wire.

RV: Right. Let me ask you about if you could comment on the flow of equipment and materials from the United States into Quan Loi. A long way, and I want to also ask a larger question about war and the effects upon the economy of the United States. But before that, how did equipment get to you all? I mean, did you know the steps then or now looking at this from where it's manufactured in the United States, you know, shipped over or flown over and then how it made its way. And I'll want people who are listening to this to kind of picture as I am, I'm picturing the buildings with your equipment in the shop and the work being done and you saying, you know; you get these parts in. Well, are the parts coming in one at a time, are they coming in a bin of things, how did that whole thing work?

PC: Well, if we can break the world into two parts in that context.

RV: Sure.

PC: One is a complete item, which is what we used to call Class 7. It might be a rifle, it might be a tank, it might be a radio, it might be a truck, but it's a complete item that is ready to use and that's a Class 7 item.

RV: Okay.

PC: And no, at the time, I had no clue, but after twenty plus years in logistics, I think I have a fair idea now. The Army material command in the States would be responsible for projecting how many of the given item that we were, that the Army was going to need totally, be it the Army in Europe, the Army in Southeast Asia, wherever and for procuring those. And they would contract with civilian contractors to build a tank or build an M-16 or go to radio, go to trunk, whatever.

RV: Right.

PC: Build x number of them. And then they would send those out. Now we didn't, if we requisitioned something from Quan Loi. For instance, had a unit, their water buffalo got stolen. Okay, major crisis.

RV: Yes.

PC: I mean truly was. That poor Company XO was panicked; he didn't know how he was going to keep water moving. And oh, we took care of them. So then we requisitioned, they requisitioned through us a new water buffalo. And that requisition went through the system and went back to Bien Hoa or Long Binh Depot.

RV: How long would that take, you know, just…?

PC: For the requisition to get there?

RV: Yes.

PC: Oh, four or five days.

RV: Okay.

PC: Don't forget, then, it was a lot of paper.

RV: Yes.

PC: You know, now it's all electronic, but back then, it was a lot of paper and multi-part forms and all that kind of stuff.

RV: And I think people lose sight of that, I think people lose sight of it that today it's all done electronically, then, you all had, you didn't even have photocopiers, you had mimeograph machines.

PC: Mimeograph machines, that's right.

RV: And you worked with carbon paper, right. And so you're talking about a mountain of paperwork.

PC: A mountain of paperwork.

RV: For items. And I've heard other veterans who worked in the rear and worked actually in logistics about how much paper you had to keep up with.

PC: Yup, it was unbelievable.

RV: Yeah. So okay, so four or five days for that stuff to get…

PC: They would transfer the piece of paper, it would work its way through the system, go to our next level of supply. Did they have it there, no, not a water buffalo, moved back to the next level of entry lined up since it's a complete Class 7 item at Long

Binh Depot. Long Binh Depot processes the requisitions, says yes, we have one to fill this requisition. They take it out of their storage, put it in the pipeline, in the supply pipeline, and it would go to a transportation unit for them to move forward.

RV: Usually a C-130 would fly out or…?

PC: Oh no, it was all by land.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah. And I mean, those kinds of times.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so then it would go, the transportation unit move into a staging point where we would pick up our supplies from, we'd go back on a run to pick stuff up and it'd be there for us to pick up.

RV: Pick up in deuce-and-a-halfs or…?

PC: Well, we had deuce and a half, we'd pitch it to the back of our deuce-and-a-half, haul it up to Quan Loi, call the customer, said, "It's here, come get it." And that essentially is how, in real simple terms, how the re-supply chain would work. Now if it was a smaller…

RV: Let me…

PC: Okay, I'm sorry.

RV: This is Class 7.

PC: Yes.

RV: That was a priority item, water buffalo; they needed water.

PC: Yes.

RV: They needed to have this piece of equipment. So are you talking about ten days, maybe seven days on average, do you remember?

PC: No, not for a water buffalo because there's an Army system called MILSTRIP. Well, it's not an Army system; it's a DOD system, Department of Defense system, MILSTRIP. Are you ready, acronym of the day; Military Standard Requisition and Issue Procedures, MILSTRIP?

RV: Can you say that again slower for the transcriptionist? (Laughing)

PC: Yeah. Military Standard Requisition and Issue Procedures.

RV: Okay.

PC: MILSTRIP. And basically all the services used essentially the same system. But it would say for this type of item, the maximum priority that you can use is a 3. Okay. For a Howitzer, of course you can use a 1A. For a water buffalo, you can use a 4 and that determined how fast and to some extent, how fast it got processed.

RV: Who coded it?

PC: The unit did.

RV: What if they miscoded it?

PC: Then eventually the system would change it.

RV: Okay. So based on…

PC: And that really, it had some effect on how fast it was processed. The real effect was is if you didn't have any, how much effort the system put out to get some and get it to them.

RV: Right.

PC: So that if it is a priority 1A, there's a lot of people running around trying to find one to get to them. If it's a priority 4, as an example, then there might be one guy who's saying, "Well, this can wait until this next shipment, that I already have on order, comes in."

RV: I'm trying to picture now the Infantry Company Commander in the field who needs socks. What would that be graded? Would it be a…?

PC: Oh, it'd be a pretty low…

RV: Pretty low.

PC: Pretty low priority, yeah.

RV: But to him, he knows that, right? The Infantry Company Commander knows it's a pretty low priority in the whole requisition system.

PC: Yeah.

RV: But for him, it's a high priority because his men need fresh socks.

PC: Sure.

RV: Let's just say for example. And he tells his Battalion S4 or the Assistant S4, "This is high priority. I have, you know, seven or ten of my men who need them now, the rest we can go through the system." Does it matter at all?

PC: Well, the clothing is kind of a bad example because they used to stock such massive quantities of that, that wasn't an issue. But maybe an example might be a radio.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: Such high demands, such high in turnover that they might be a stock on it. And whereas one backpack radio might not seem like a real high priority to somebody sitting in Virginia, it might be very high priority, that Company Commander.

RV: Right.

PC: Now there were methods to take care of things like this, systems. For instance, we had what we called a float and what that was was a stock of Class 7 items that I kept at my unit. If somebody had a very high priority requirement for one of these units, I could float them one, which means I gave them a new one; they gave me their broken one.

RV: And do they have to requisition another one, a Class 7 item for you to replace the one you have in float?

PC: It depends. If I could fix it, I would fix it…well, technically with float, if it couldn't be repaired, I wasn't allowed to float it.

RV: Okay.

PC: Okay. Because I was supposed to keep my float at a certain stock level technically. If a guy out in the, you know, out on a battalion firebase somewhere needs a Howitzer and I have one in float, he's going to get it. I don't care if I can fix it or not, he's going to get it.

RV: Right, right.

PC: Hawlk will always back me up. You know, rules are great, but the guy in the field needed a Howitzer a lot worse than I needed it sitting there so that my books were exactly straight.

RV: Right.

PC: And we kind of operated on the "It's easier to get forgiveness than permission" theory. So like I say, if they needed it, the got it.

RV: It seems that you and other mid-level officers worked the system. Had a lot of autonomy to prioritize, to like you said, if they needed a Howitzer, you're going to do

whatever you can, you can, to get that thing out there no matter if it messes up your float for a day or two, is that correct?

PC: Oh absolutely.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I think all the Company Commanders in our battalion were that way. I think they would absolutely, I wasn't the only one, they'd just absolutely bust their butts to get the guys who were doing the fighting, get them what they needed.

RV: So do you think that was an overall attitude in general in the Army? I mean, not just for your Cav unit, but do you know, do you have any idea?

PC: No, I really don't.

RV: Okay, it's not much of a fair question.

PC: I really don't. You know, as a Lieutenant, I didn't have too much perspective on that. I knew if you wanted to work for General Hawlk, you better have that attitude. And I never had a problem with it; it was just my attitude anyway, maybe because I spent six months with the infantry.

RV: Sure.

PC: But, like I said, the other guys, the other Company Commanders had the same attitude and they hadn't spent six months with the infantry, so I don't think it was…you know, that was their job, you know, they were the guys that were doing the fighting and we owed it to them to do anything we could to give them what they needed. And if we had to bend a rule…now, bending the rule thing got way out of control, way, way out of control.

RV: Are you referring to the barter system, the famous Vietnam barter system or I guess maybe the military barter system where you guys could exchange certain items, "Hey, do you have a…?"

PC: If you had a pallet of plywood, you could get anything you wanted.

RV: Is that what you're referring to, when it got out of hand?

PC: Yeah, that got way out of hand.

RV: Tell me; tell me about it.

PC: It got way out of hand and a lot of just, I mean, criminal or border-line criminal stuff went on too and that's just, there's no justification for that. And the

distinction I'm drawing here and I guess it's kind of situational ethics, but the distinction that I draw is that, you know, if it's an administrative thing, like keeping a float record straight, that's one side and you know, getting the guy what he needed far out weighed the administrative convenience.

RV: Right.

PC: Even though I understood the system and technically the system was right, you needed to keep that float so that when the next guy came in, you had something for him.

RV: Right.

PC: But still, you know, you solved the immediate problem. But the administrative side of it was one thing; the criminal side was another thing. And I mean, they used to catch people driving out of Long Binh Depot with trailer loads of stuff with fake requisitions.

RV: I mean, what were they doing?

PC: Sell it; sell it on the black market, huge black market in Saigon.

RV: Yes.

PC: Not that I ever saw it, but there was a huge black market there and they could sell all this stuff in the black market.

RV: Were you all made aware of this black market?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah, we were told to watch for it, but carefully and etc.

RV: Can you give me examples of how it got out of hand besides or maybe what you meant by the plywood, but how did this thing get out of hand?

PC: Guy in the rear, the rear rear would have, you know, a shipment of plywood would come in and they would take pallets of it and trade it to other guys for their AK-47s so they'd have a war souvenir.

RV: And then falsify their records, that they got it and promised they'd send it to such and such unit…

PC: Such and such yes, so that they're inventory legit.

RV: But somewhere along the line, that'll be caught, right?

PC: Probably not, it wasn't.

RV: I'm asking this…

PC: You know, there's such massive amounts of material leaving.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean, it's just huge; it's hard to envision the size of Long Binh Depot. I mean, it just went on and on and on and on and on. And a lot of times they had no clue what they had out there. You know, so much stuff came in so fast that it just wasn't possible to keep it all organized and categorized and inventoried. And that one-year turnover that we talked about didn't help. About the time the guy figured out the inventory system, knew enough about it to make some real improvements, he went on.

RV: Now that's interesting to contrast those infantry officers that say the same thing. "As soon as I learn how to do things in the field, I was sent to the rear," or vise versa, "I started in the rear, then I went to the field for six months and then I was home." You know, and there were problems too even in the rear, that one-year rotation caused problems.

PC: Yeah, there wasn't a lot of danger, but it's a real technical job and it's a pretty difficult job. I mean, think about managing the parts in inventory for General Motors, you know, one of their big plants. Well this was bigger than that.

RV: Yes.

PC: And it's not something you walk in and pick up in twenty-four hours.

RV: It was much, much larger. We're talking about really millions and millions of tons of material.

PC: Yes.

RV: And I think that people might lose sight on the fact that, you know, how do you put on a war, how do you do a war? It's not just the people in the field, you got to have, I think one out of every seven men in Vietnam were in the rear, were, you know, supporting those in the field.

PC: I'd be surprised if it wasn't the other way around. One was fighting and six was…

RV: Oh I'm sorry, yes, one was fighting, yes, that's what I meant.

PC: Yeah.

RV: And so putting on a war, especially by an industrialized country like the United States and then especially like an industrialized country super power like the

United States, it's done on a massive scale once the commitment is made. And your comment here, perhaps they clarify, are clarifying and will clarify the question of did we commit to Vietnam, did we commit ourselves to South Vietnam and logistically, what I hear you saying is absolutely.

PC: Boy, we sure did. I mean, and the guys in the States were saying we have to make sure they have everything they need, everything. And if they might need it, we need to have it there on the site and they were shipping this stuff. And boy, here it comes; it's like trying to sip out of a fire hose.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And this was not unique to Vietnam.

RV: No.

PC: Desert Storm was the same thing, I knew some guys that went over there and the same thing happened. So much stuff came in so fast…we used to have guys called MREs, Material Readiness Expediters and they used to joke that that meant they were legal thieves. The depot, like I say, many times didn't know what they had and these guys had badges, they were allowed access to the depot, them and their driver only and they can go through the depot and look for things. Like if I needed a truck engine and the depot said, "We don't have any." These guys could go through the depot and look for a truck engine. When they found it, they would take a requisition and the location back, hand the guy the requisition, he'd cut the release, they go pick up the engine and drive it in.

RV: So they work on a special needs basis I assume?

PC: Yup. If I needed something real bad, like water buffalo.

RV: Right.

PC: I mentioned that. That's one of the things I called our MRE about. He'd been a Lieutenant and I just called him and said, "Hey, we need a water buffalo," for whichever unit it was, 1st of the 7th, whatever it was, "real bad, can you look for me?" And he just took a fistful of blank requisitions, going to have him drive through Long Binh Depot to see if he could find a water buffalo, he did too.

RV: Would you say that the log system worked, the logistical system?

PC: Maybe a little too well in terms of putting so much stuff in the system that it couldn't be kept track of, but overall, I think it did work, yeah, I do. You know, I don't know of any incidences of guys running out of bullets or guys running out of food, those kinds of things. They might not have had dry socks every night or very few nights in fact, but if they needed bullets or needed food, something like that, you know the aviation units didn't run out of fuel. I don't recall waiting a long time for repaired parts; you know, if it was a high priority requirement. And a little while ago I made the distinction divide the world into two parts.

RV: Yes.

PC: Class 7 is one part of the complete item, the other side of the world is the repair parts and the system works much the same, except you're dealing with individual items and a lot more of them, both in terms of the number of items and the number of each item if you see the distinction I'm drawing. That's what I kept in my warehouse was repair parts and some other supplies as well. And so if 1st of the 7th Cav motor pull needed a jeep carburetor, they would fill out a requisition; bring it to me. If I had one, I'd give it to them.

RV: How many questions asked; no questions asked or…?

PC: No questions asked.

RV: You had the requisition form and that's what you needed.

PC: I had the requisition form and that's what I needed.

RV: Okay.

PC: And then I gave them a jeep carburetor, that's why I had them.

RV: Right, right.

PC: And then, and I had a stock of jeep carburetors, as an example, and maybe my stock agreement was twenty, that's how many I was to keep on hand. And so then my re-supply level was twelve, so I'd issue out eight, when I got down to twelve, I would order eight more to bring me back up to twenty so that your inventory looked like a sawed tooth, at least, that's the theoretical model.

RV: This is a question that I've asked others before and I want to ask you the same one and I've asked people mainly in the rear and it has to do with, it's a bit of

counterfactual history, which is maybe not very relevant, but it might shed some light on what you saw and what you experienced.

PC: Sure.

RV: How much do you think modern computer technology and this is in the year 2005, which we're talking would have simplified or aided or hampered the process that you had in Vietnam or what kind of effects do you think that would have had?'

PC: Oh, I think it would've been immense, just immense. You know, if we could've had, you know, a lot of times items were shipped in connex.

RV: Right.

PC: This six by six by six steel box also at times used as a jail cell. Not a comfortable one, but a jail cell. But anyway, if we could've had it come in, shoot a barcode, had the computer update the inventory, had the operator and shoot back a location, had the operator take it to that location and put it in that location. I mean, think how much simpler that would have been. There would've been no pieces of paper to get lost.

RV: It's almost like or akin to the modern Federal Express or UPS shipping today in 2005.

PC: Exactly, exactly.

RV: I mean, you can literally barcode, stop, and track it from origination to destination.

PC: Exactly, instead of filling out a long green piece of paper for a work order to get something prepared, you know, you shoot that barcode and it fills out all the information for you.

RV: What kind of effects do you think that would've had on the war effort in the field? It would've sped things up…

PC: It certainly would've sped things up, but I think the biggest savings probably would've been in time and money because we could've maintained a smaller inventory because we wouldn't have requisitioned twenty widgets because we didn't know we had fifty sitting over there.

RV: Right.

PC: And so it could've potentially saved an awful lot of time and an awful lot of money.

RV: How frustrating was your job or how enjoyable was your job?

PC: Oh, it was an enormously enjoyable.

RV: Why?

PC: Just enormous. Tremendous sense of satisfaction on the…internal basis had a good company, had ninety-five percent good guys. Everybody's got their ten percent; I think I had a lower percentage than most. And just a good bunch of people that worked together well for the most part. I mean, you know, we had some incidents, every unit does.

RV: Sure.

PC: But relatively few compared to some guys that were in the rear. We felt like we had a purpose and a mission and they did it. I had very good relations with my customers. They knew if they needed something that we were going to do everything humanly possible to get it for them and that we were not going to be bureaucrats and we were not going to, you know… I mean, we were going to try to do it right, but we were going to get it for them. And so, you know, they said lots of good things about the company and the Battalion Commander and the XO (Commanding Officer) and all of them, so that reflected well on us. And it was satisfying to go down there to a battalion headquarters and hear good things about B Company. Colonel Hawlk had or General Hawlk had an internal inspection program. I mentioned he high standards and so he had an internal inspection program internal to the battalion where the battalion staff would descend upon you and inspect.

RV: Unannounced?

PC: No, no, it was announced.

RV: Okay.

PC: And they look at your organizational maintenance that you administration, that your inventory, how accurate was your inventory, all of those kinds of things. And we did very well on those. One of the few companies that did do well, they were known as just hellacious inspections.

RV: And this was something indigenous just to Colonel Hawlk?

PC: Just to Colonel Hawlk, yeah. And we did very well on it, so it was a real sense of accomplishment and real sense of pride in what we were doing. And Hawlk fostered that, you know, throughout the battalion, you know.

RV: Do you spell Hawlk with an E on the end?

PC: No, H-a-w-l-k.

RV: Okay.

PC: H-a-w-l-k.

RV: Pat, let me ask you a larger question, kind of an overview type question. Being in logistics and seeing firsthand what the war effort is about when it comes to supply and how all the stuff moves from home, from the domestic scene basically out, literally out to where the war is going on, on an individual basis out field. What kind of overall effects do you think that the war has on the economy of the country fighting the war and using the United States and Vietnam as the example based on what you saw on the massive amounts of stuff coming in and out?

PC: Well, I think it kind of came out towards the end and after the war, it brings a lot of waste, but you know, I think it certainly created a huge deficit. The way Johnson funded the war was with deficits and I think he kind of opened Pandora's Box and now we can't close it again.

RV: In the sense that we still have the deficit or in the sense that that's how we finance our foreign policy excursions?

PC: Well, in the sense that's how we finance a lot of things. We got used to it and we discovered that if you had a big deficit, it wouldn't come up this afternoon and bite you on the butt, you know. And so the fear of deficit, of any deficit I think went away and that's what I meant by opened Pandora's Box. We discovered that in terms of immediate short-term repercussions, maybe there weren't any real political repercussions. So people could get away with it, use the deficit to finance things in the home districts, something like that. But I think it was really tough on the economy of the country in the long-term. Like I said, we still in my opinion have not recovered, not maybe from that specific deficit, but from the idea that deficit funding is an acceptable means of operating.

RV: And I take it that you don't think it is.

PC: Oh, I don't think it is, no. And I'm no different than everybody else, you know, don't [cover my ox? Session 5.wav 47:50] You know, cut the other guy's budget, not mine.

RV: Right

PC: But we just are not able to make the hard decisions. I thought we had it under control until Iraq started and a couple of other things and then, you know, 9-11 kind of ended that for us.

RV: Okay. Let's take a break for a moment.

PC: Okay.

RV: Okay Pat, continuing. Let me talk about, we talked about Tay Ninh, your barracks and your personal life there and kind of logistically how you would function everyday. Tell me about Quan Loi; describe the barracks briefly. Tell me about your Mess Hall and how you all ate, where your lavatory facilities were, tell me about the bunkers you had to go into. What was that base like for living day to day?

PC: It was very uncomfortable. It was just, I mean, I keep going back to hot and wet, but I mean that's what it was. But I kind of mentioned our company area, it was kind of a little bit spread out, you wanted some dispersion for in case you got a mortar attack or an artillery attack, something like that. And so as far as Mess Hall goes, we had a company cook, but we had kind of a community Mess Hall. And the cook who was technically assigned to my company worked in this community Mess Hall and then we all ate there.

RV: Meaning other companies, other units…?

PC: Yeah, it was kind of an area kind of thing, all the companies or all the units in that area eating at that Mess Hall.

RV: Was it air-conditioned?

PC: Oh no, no. There was no, I don't know of any air conditioning on Quan Loi at all. I don't know, maybe the Brigade Commander's trailer or something, but no, nothing. I didn't see air conditioning except when I went on R&R. Like I said, maybe once in a while when I went to the club in Bien Hoa when we got back there once a month. And you know, for Mess Hall food, it really wasn't bad. The advantage of having the cook who was actually in my company, even though he didn't work for me,

was if we were on alert or something and we were up in the middle of the night, he would make a tub of coffee or something like that. I mean, the old fashioned way, you take a tub of boiling water and you pour coffee grinds in it and then you put, I guess it's egg shells, in it to settle the grounds out and that was your coffee.

RV: Wow.

PC: And he carried that out to the guys to help stay awake and that kind of stuff. It was noisy.

RV: In what way?

PC: It was always real noisy; there were always aircraft overhead; fixed wing and rotary wing. You know, as a brigade base camp, we had a lot of traffic in and out, so there are always C-130s going in and out, always CH-47s going in and out and of course hundreds of Slicks; it seemed like hundreds.

RV: Right.

PC: There was a 175 Artillery Battery across the street. That's a big gun and it made a big bang. And so when they had a fire mission, the whole area would shake. So it was always real noisy. Our company, it was kind of a perimeter within a perimeter and there were some concertina right next to our company area, Vietnamese on the other side and that's how we got our laundry done, we'd throw our stuff over the concertina.

RV: Really?

PC: And they would do our laundry, they'd bring it back all wrapped in brown paper and we'd hand them a few p, piasters, and they'd throw our laundry back to us.

RV: That's interesting. This was a little village.

PC: A little village.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so that's how we got our laundry done, our uniforms clean. We didn't just exchange uniforms in mass like the guys in the field did. We had our uniforms and that's what we wore, we had our names on them.

RV: Right.

PC: And I had my rank sewn on. The guys, the infantry guys, they'd get a shirt and you know, who knew who had it last and they'd take a ball point pen and draw their rank on it and put the x for the infantry crossed rifle sign. But I never had to do that.

Right down the center was the airstrip and there were buildings all around it. The brigade TOC, the Tactical Operations Center, mine was I kind of think at the south end of this long oval. And with the airstrip up the middle with the oval, the brigade, if you're looking north, the brigade TOC would be on the east side, kind of close to the inside of the perimeter; although, they almost got blown up there in a ground attack one night. We were having a big ground attack on both sides of the perimeter, both sides of this oval simultaneously and one guy got through the wire and was running up the street toward the TOC, the brigade TOC and of course he knew where absolutely where everything was.

RV: How did they know that?

PC: Well they had guys working on the base. You know, I mentioned the barber, you know, and these guys would wander around the base and draw maps.

RV: Pace off things.

PC: Pace off things. And you know, they probably had better grid coordinates on our brigade TOC than we did. So he knew right where it was and he had a big satchel charge, he was hoofing up the street and just as he got about half way up the street, one of our guys came to the top of the stairs…I mean, the bunker, the perimeter was full of men, but this guy had been down in the bunker and he came to the top of the bunker and saw this guy running up the street. Well fortunately he had his M-16 with him, hadn't left it downstairs and cut him down in the street.

RV: Wow.

PC: And feet come up, five seconds later, that guy probably would've taken out the brigade TOC; although there was security around the TOC too.

RV: Right.

PC: So that was kind of a near thing. But anyway, we had a little PX (Post Exchange) that was, you know, all things considered pretty nicely stocked.

RV: What could you buy in there?

PC: Well, you know, all your basic toiletries and that kind of thing, letter writing supplies, film, basic cameras, that kind of stuff. And you could get a catalog where you could order just about anything.

RV: Wow.

PC: And good prices. I ordered a pretty nice stereo that I had shipped directly to Diana and bought her a nice camera while I was there.

RV: Did you take any pictures by any chance?

PC: I took a lot of pictures and I've got them at home. I've been meaning to dig them out and let you take a look at them and see what you want.

RV: Why did you document your experience? Did you have a sense of trying to do that or did you just want to take pictures because you were on a foreign land or in a war?

PC: A little of both, a little of both. You know, I wanted to be able to show what it was like and look and see and remember what it was like. And you know, it's funny how you remember some things. One thing that I really remember I took pictures of was flying in a helicopter, you look down and you could see where there'd been a B-52 strike.

RV: Right.

PC: An Arc Light. These huge holes in the ground and no trees, there was just brown, just dirt, no trees, no shrubbery, nothing living. And those things were just so enormously destructive.

RV: Did you witness any of those?

PC: From a distance.

RV: What did it look like from a distance?

PC: It just looked like about three square miles of Vietnam blowing up in dust and splinters. I mean, it would be, of course, you couldn't hear the sound, you couldn't hear the airplanes because they were too high.

RV: Right.

PC: And when we were in 1st of the 5th, the TOCs would know when there was one going into their area, so you'd kind of be watching for it and it was just a very sudden thing, just all of a sudden, just dust and smoke would just go right straight up in the air, just any kind of, like pouring syrup, you know, but just in a sequence and just an awesome looking things. And I never saw the aftermath, but guys said that there would be guys, you know, if they hit a bunker complex or enemy unit or something like that, there'd be guys there dead, not a mark on them, just concussion.

RV: Wow.

PC: And other guys would just be, just I mean shredded. There'd be parts of people in trees and what was left of trees and just an enormously destructive…of course, that was the point kind of thing.

RV: Right, right. Its unleashing maximum firepower.

PC: Maximum violence.

RV: In 1998 when I was traveling to Vietnam, on the train between Hanoi and Hue, when dawn broke, I stood out and watched as we were passing the countryside and I saw pot marks and some of them were kind of overgrown with some creepy weeds or something of that, but I could tell they were craters from bombs and it's amazing that after all this time it's still there.

PC: Yeah. Well, you know, if you think that in Europe they're still finding bodies from World War II.

RV: Yeah.

PC: You know.

RV: Live ordnance and I mean, all kinds of things.

PC: Yeah. I mean, Europe's fairly dense and populated.

RV: Yes.

PC: Not too surprising that the effects would still be there in Vietnam.

RV: Let me ask you a question that might sound a bit odd, but when you were there, did you feel like you were in a war? Did you consciously go, "Wow, I'm in a war," or "This is serious!" Did that hit you?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah, I think we were all conscious of that, very much so. For one thing, there were people you didn't even know shooting at you, you know, relatively frequently by ordinary standards, people you didn't even see. You know, I mean you were just out there in the jungle somewhere a lot with mortar rounds or 122s at you. And then you had this sense of urgency, you really did have a sense of urgency about what you were doing, that you know, it was important and that needed to be done and it needed to be done right and quickly. So yeah, I think that was something that was with us all the time.

RV: Did you feel then that we were winning the war; the United States was winning the war? Did you have thoughts about that big picture and kind of why you were there and were you succeeding along those lines?

PC: I think that…I can't say I ever thought we were really winning the war. I think the general feeling of the guys that I talked to about it was we could win it.

RV: Talked to then?

PC: Yes, yeah, we could win it, we weren't.

RV: So you were aware that or the impression then was that the United States was not winning, not progressing?

PC: Yeah, yeah, not progressing. And of course, by that time, that was the big focus of the media too. But you know, we knew all they had to do was get across the border into Cambodia and they were safe. You know, we knew the Chinese were helping them. We knew the Russians were helping them, which we kind of understood, you know. If somebody was at war against the Soviets, we'd have helped them too. I mean, that was the game at that time.

RV: So you guys did see it then in kind of the Cold War context?

PC: Yeah, I think so. I can't say that we really, you know, analyzed it deeply or thought about it or talked about it for hours, but there was this sense of frustration that, you know, they were right there and there was nothing separating us but this imaginary, if you will, line on the border. You know bear in mind, we were twenty-five years old, you know.

RV: Sure.

PC: The big geo-political picture didn't mean a lot to us. And I won't say that the Cambodian border ever stopped us all the time either, but it certainly didn't. But you know, the LRRPs from 1st of the 5th used to go over there reasonably routinely. This is no national secret I think.

RV: Not at all.

PC: I don't know that I ever went, but I was pretty close from what we saw on the map, we were pretty darn close. You know, I'm talking about within yards.

RV: Yeah. How frustrating was that for you all?

PC: Oh, very, very. And we were all with Nixon, you know. You know, they're hiding in Cambodia, Cambodia's letting them do it, you know. They paid their nickel, they're going to take their chances, let's go get them. And you know, we didn't think much about the possibility of drawing China into the war as we had in Korea or the Soviet Union into the war more actively and wasn't too worried about the Soviet Union, but the Chinese I think were a real possibility, that kind of thing. But yeah, it was very frustrating.

RV: You had a change of administration while during your tour there. What did you think about Richard Nixon, the incoming President and kind of the direction where he was going to take the war and the country?

PC: We thought he was going to be a little more aggressive about it. But we thought that, I thought truly his mandate was to get us out and he started talking about peace with honor and I didn't see how we were going to do that at the time, I still don't see how we could've done that. I mean, I don't know of anybody that ever thought Vietnamization was going to work.

RV: As far as your conversations?

PC: Then and later. I mean, the heart, the fighting heart…I'm not saying they were bad, they were all bad soldiers, they weren't, some of them were very good. South Vietnamese Marines were tough guys. But the fighting heart just wasn't there and I just don't know of anybody that thought that was going to work.

RV: Did the fact that negotiations were starting in earnest in Paris toward the end of your tour and then when you came home, what do you think that did to morale? Did it have any effect upon you guys there? I mean, I don't know how aware you are of it then, but you know…?

PC: Well, we had a television in the company area, had kind of a little dayroom kind of thing. And we had a television, we got AFN (American Forces Network), so we got the news and that kind of thing, so we kind of knew what was going on. I watched the first landing on the moon.

RV: Did you really?

PC: Yeah, standing in my company dayroom. So we weren't completely isolated.

RV: How'd you feel when you saw that? Were you proud?

PC: Oh, I was very proud. I thought, "Man, this is amazing! How in the world could they ever do that?" I mean, I was just, I still am, I am just awed by that. I mean, that is such a huge accomplishment. You know, when Bush said we're going to go to Mars, I just thought, "Man, that's great; let's go! You know, can I go?" (Laughing) He'd probably think I was a little long in the tooth for that. But I just thought that was amazing. I've always been a science fiction fan and I just think that's something humanity, mankind needs to do and should do. So, yeah, I just thought that was, I mean, my jaw just hit the floor.

RV: And here you are standing in Vietnam ten thousand miles away from home in the middle of a war and you've got an American up there on the surface of the moon. I mean, that had to have been a weird feeling.

PC: It was very weird and I never looked at the full moon the same since. It was just an amazing feeling. You know, I had the feeling that, as I do now in the war on terror, that the United States can do anything that it gets really serious about, that it really puts its mind to and that's one thing that was pretty frustrating about Vietnam.

RV: So does that follow for Vietnam?

PC: Oh yeah, we could have, you know. But obviously the collective American, America collectively, we didn't put our mind to it. I'm not worried about the war on terror, we're going to win it, it may take a while, but we're going to win it. You know, anything that this country puts its mind to like we did going to the moon, we can do. And I don't think that's bravado and I don't think it's bragging, I think we have shown that as a nation.

RV: I interrupted you with the story about the television. You were able to see maybe the news going on back home?

PC: Oh yeah, so we could see. You know, as like I said, as twenty-four, twenty-five year olds, we were just terribly frustrated and cynical about the lack of progress at the talks. You know, at that time, why in the hell are we spending six weeks talking about the shape of the table? Well, I'm a little older now, hopefully will grow wiser, think I understand it a little better now. It was the same thing at the end of the Korean War, you know, what shape is the table going to be, how long is the table, who's going to

sit where, it's just jockeying for a position kind of thing. But of course, we didn't understand that at the time. We thought, "Who the hell cares, sit down and talk about ending the war!"

RV: Did you all want the war to end?

PC: Oh yeah, we wanted to go home.

RV: What about the overall war effort? Did you say, "Hey, we want to go home and lets end this thing," or did you say, "Let me just get out of here?"

PC: "Let me just go home." You know, I want to go home. By that time, you know, I had, one of the mistakes I made was I took my R&R way too early.

RV: I want you to tell me about your R&R. But tell me about that, why did you take it so early?

PC: Well because I wanted to go see my wife and my baby, I'd never seen my baby, you know. And I figured, okay, I'll split the tour more or less in half, that's a good way to do it. It turned out to be a terrible way to do it because after that time I really dragged. I mean, the first half of that tour went by like that because…

RV: Because you're looking forward…

PC: Just a blink of an eye. And after that, I mean it dragged, it really dragged. And even though I was doing something I enjoyed, I liked what I was doing, it was exciting, it was interesting, don't get me wrong, but you know, I wanted to go home and see my wife and see my baby again. And I mean, it just dragged by after that R&R.

RV: Like you were counting days.

PC: Oh, I definitely was counting days.

RV: Did you have your calendar?

PC: Oh yeah, everybody did, yeah.

RV: What did your calendar look like?

PC: Oh gosh. It was I think an eagle that had three hundred and sixty five little boxes and I did it right down to the end.

RV: Faithfully.

PC: Faithfully.

RV: Did you every morning when you would wake up, color in or every night or everyday?

PC: Everyday, yeah.

RV: Everyday.

PC: Every morning.

RV: Okay. We'll save R&R for our next session.

PC: Okay.

RV: Tell me about writing home when you were at Quan Loi, you wrote Diana?

PC: Virtually every day.

RV: And did she write you in return?

PC: Virtually every day. I can't think of a day that Diana missed writing. If I was, you know, in the middle of something, moving or something like that, I might not write, but I think she wrote every single day. She sent me pictures and…

RV: What did that do for you?

PC: Oh, I just couldn't wait for mail call. And you know, the Company Commander, the company clerk would bring me my mail right away. And Denny Honaker, Denny was my company clerk and he was not a company clerk, he was a mechanic, but he had a little bit of education and a smart guy and screwed up and said he could type, so he became the company clerk.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But just getting those letters and everybody would just stop what you were doing, didn't matter what you were doing, you stopped and you sat down and you read your mail right then.

RV: Did mail come at a certain time everyday?

PC: Generally, generally. You know, within an hour or two. You know, obviously on some days, the convoy got slowed down; it'd be later or might be a little earlier if they moved fast.

RV: When was that time, was it noontime or…?

PC: Oh gosh, I want to say around three in the afternoon, something like that. And like I said, you just couldn't wait to feel them first to see if there's pictures in there, you know, and that kind of stuff. And then you got to sort them because you might go two weeks and not get a letter.

RV: How did you sort them, did you do it by…?

PC: By date.

RV: Once you opened it up by date or by postmark?

PC: By postmark. Yeah, Diana mailed them everyday, but they'd sit in an APO (Army Post Office) somewhere.

RV: Right.

PC: And stack up, so you sorted them into order by postmark and you opened one at a time so that you know, you kind of live it, live through it with Diana. That's the way I did it, I guess different guys had different ways, but I always sorted mine.

RV: Did you tell her about everything that was happening or did you try to just not talk about the unpleasantries or what?

PC: No, I tried to spare her a little bit, she was worried, enough, she didn't need to know that we got a big ground attack last night and you know, there were bad guys in the wire and one of them was fifty feet from my company perimeter and you know, stuff like that.

RV: Right.

PC: But she didn't need to know about that, you know, she had enough going on; being scared that I was over there anyway and you know, worried about…and of course, what the media covered was the guys in the field and that was appropriate. They were the guys that needed to get covered, but all you heard about was the dead and the wounded. You know, the guys in my line of work, we didn't have a real high casualty rate. I mean, that's just the way it was, you know. I mean, I was inside, a couple of perimeters inside a brigade firebase, you know, with a couple of infantry companies providing security. You know, it wasn't a high mortality job, but Diana didn't know that and so she was worried enough.

RV: Right.

PC: And I didn't see any reason to add to that.

RV: Did she know where you were located at Quan Loi or Tay Ninh?

PC: You know, it's funny. Yeah, we talked about that last night when we were talking about her coming in for an interview and she said, "Well you know, by the time I got your letters, you were never where you said you were in the letters, you'd always moved on." And I don't mean there was no censorship, I could always tell her where we

were and I'd tell her, you know, x miles north of Saigon or whatever it happened to be. And she would do the same thing, she'd go a week without a letter and then she'd get seven all at once.

RV: Right, okay. Let's end on this note, let me ask you, what was it like for you to be at war and have a baby at home? Obviously it's difficult, but tell me about that process, how did you deal with that day to day just knowing that your little girl is slowly growing there without you, obviously well taken care of and loved.

PC: Oh yeah.

RV: No question there, but just that separation as a father, what was that like?

PC: Well that was really difficult. I had pictures of Diana and the baby I mean just all over the place.

RV: What was her name, did you want to share?

PC: Lynn.

RV: Lynn. Okay.

PC: Lynn, yeah. And Lynn was four months old when I saw her on R&R and then she was ten months old when I got home. And of course, she had no clue who I was when I got…well, either time.

RV: Right. I'm sure you informed her that...

PC: Oh yes.

RV: I am your father.

PC: Well, I got home and I surprised Diana. I got a drop, which means I came home a few days earlier than I would've been scheduled. And so I surprised Diana and after I hugged her and everything, Lynn was sitting on the living room floor, you know, ten months old and I went over and scooped her up and hugged her and she just screamed bloody murder, scared the poor kid half to death.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And I haven't let her forget to this day.

RV: (Laughing) Is she now an only child?

PC: Oh no, we have two girls.

RV: Right, okay.

PC: Lynn and Cathy.

RV: Okay, is that L-y-n-n?

PC: Yes.

RV: And C-a, or K-a?

PC: C-a-t-h-y.

RV: Okay. Have you told Lynn about kind of that first year of her life, the first ten months?

PC: Yes.

RV: You know, I saw you one time and here's what you looked like in Hawaii and…?

PC: Yeah, we've talked about it and she knows and she knows I scared her half to death the first time and that kind of stuff. So yeah, it was difficult being away. In fact, when Lynn was born, I was on a firebase with 1st of the 5th Cav and the Red Cross would call and tell you, so we got the message and everything. And the PX bird had just been out, the PX system used to fly a helicopter out to battalion firebases for some basic stocks from the PX, you know, basic toiletries, cigarettes, that kind of stuff. And I had bought a box of cigars, so I passed around the cigars and that kind of stuff. And one of my jobs at that time was to report at the evening briefing for the Battalion Commander and the foxhole strength of each company; how many men not were in the company, but were actually out in the jungle fighting. And one of the other guys, one of the other Lieutenants stood up and announced that the foxhole strength of the Curry family had increased by one that day.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: So that's how Lynn's announcement was brought into Vietnam.

RV: That's neat.

PC: Yeah, I thought so.

RV: That's great.

PC: But anyway, yeah, it was pretty difficult and I mean you just coped, you know. We had pictures all over the place and Company Commander, I kind of had my own little room with the supreme luxury, I had a door to my room. You could never close it because it was too hot, but I had one.

RV: A door to your office during the day or a door to where you bunked?

PC: Both, both.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I mentioned that we had kind of a little company administrative, it was a Quonset hut is what it was. The front half was company offices; Company Commander, First Sergeant, the company clerk had an open area out there. The back half was the officer's quarters and we had around two or three officers at any given time. And the other officers had kind of an open bay kind of area and the Company Commander had a little, it was more like a glorified closet, but you had a little private area with a couple of wall lockers and that kind of stuff. And I had pictures in there and I had pictures in my office. And I'm lucky you didn't care what anybody did.

RV: Right. Would you all spend time talking about your families?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah, sure, all the time.

RV: Well why don't we end on that note today and we'll continue with the next session.

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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Patrick Curry
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
July 29, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I'm continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Pat Curry. Pat and I are again in Lubbock in the interview room on the campus of Texas Tech University. Today is July 29, 2005 and it's about 9:20am Central Standard Time. Pat, why don't we pick up with a couple of things? First though you said that you did have some thoughts and you wanted to make a comment about the enemy and their leadership. Why don't you go ahead?

Patrick Curry: Well, I said before a couple of times that I had a lot of respect for their soldiers, that they were tough soldiers, that they were good soldiers, they had a cause they really believed in. But I have absolutely no use for, respect for, nothing but loathing for the leadership mostly because of the way they treated the prisoners. It was torture for torture sake; there was no rationale for it, no justification for it. A civilized society like they report to have does not treat human being that way and it was disgusting and still is and they should pay the price for that for the way they treated those people.

RV: Were you all aware that POWs were there and some of the stories coming out while you're in country or was this what you heard like when they came home?

PC: Oh no, no, we had heard and heard the stories and heard of the torture and that kind of thing. And of course, then we had our buddy Jane Fonda's word that they were all being treated humanely and you know, three squares a day and all that good stuff, which of course was total BS. And we tended to get a lot of that from her. But yeah, we were pretty much aware of it.

RV: Tell me about Jane Fonda and the antiwar movement that a lot of veterans consider and I'm not including you in on this until you say you're in or not in, but a lot of veterans look at the antiwar movement protestors who focused on the "sympathy" for the enemy, who didn't see North Vietnam as say the Pentagon or the White House did or maybe some of the veterans, a lot of the veterans in country did. What can you say about that portion of the antiwar movement and Jane was out there in front literally in Hanoi?

PC: Well, I can explain my position to you this way that when the guy spit tobacco juice on her at the bookstore, I called and contributed to his bail and certainly would contribute to his defense should anything be necessary and would be more than willing to go up there and stand near and cheer.

RV: That was just recently here, just a few months ago.

PC: Just recently, yeah, yeah, when she put her book out. And there was…of course, she started up again on the Iraq War and there was a quote from a veteran in there that people who were not there have no idea of the loathing that we have for that woman. That's from the paper and it exactly echoes my sentiments.

RV: Is that or why is that so strong still today, continuing?

PC: She committed treason, not once but many times. She stood there on a North Vietnamese artillery piece, antiaircraft piece while our guys were dying in South Vietnam and she encouraged the enemy. She clearly was on their side; she clearly lied about how the POWs were being treated. Part of the problem is that she is dumb as a bag of hammers. Two more points on her IQ, she'd be a brick.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But that does not in any way excuse what she did while our guys were dying over there, she was giving as the saying goes, "Aid and comfort to the enemy" and I just wish I'd thought of spitting tobacco juice on her.

RV: Passions obviously run deep when it comes to that type of protesting against the war. Can you make some comments on the antiwar movement in general and feel free to talk about when you were home and what you saw. I mean, you remained in the military, you came back and you went on with your life. Tell me about your thoughts on the antiwar movement and also is it possible for the antiwar movement to do it appropriately?

PC: It certainly is possible for them to do it appropriately and one of the reasons that we have a military and that we have soldiers is so that it's to protect peoples right to protest and to voice their opinions. I mean, that's, you know, we defend the constitution of the United States, that's what we do, that's our job and our profession. And they certainly have the right to do that and if they're speaking out of conscience, then they have every right and probably to some degree an obligation to speak out. My problem was and I had a couple of problems with the antiwar movement. One was some of the methods that they chose, the idea of blowing up laboratories, college labs and killing people as a protest against violence just somehow doesn't ring true with me, doesn't seem to be a very consistent position with me. The violent protests I think were way out of hand. The other problem I had with it was that I felt there were a lot of people of conscience who just felt strongly about the war and I disagree with them, but I respect their position. There were a lot of people who were in it because it was trendy, because it was the thing to do and because that's what their friends were doing and they just wanted to be in with the group. And I have no respect for them at all, they had no clue what they were talking about, no idea, they had not done any thinking about it, they had not done any real research or study or anything else, they were just out there because it was the thing to do.

RV: Do you remember Nixon's comment and his discussions and announcements to the United States about the silent majority? Silent majority is out there, the minority are the ones who are vocal and protesting, did you believe that at the time?

PC: Yeah I sure did. And to some extent, I still do and I think that a lot of people who supported the war or at least who were not violently opposed to it strongly opposed to it just kind of didn't do anything. And so yeah, I think that was a very real phenomenon. I think it's a real shame what Nixon did to the country.

RV: As far as Watergate's concerned?

PC: As far as Watergate and all of that over what was in essence a very minor break-in. I mean, there was no reason for it is the thing. But anyway, and of course what was going on with Nixon and I think added fuel to the antiwar fire. But you know, when I came back, my wife was living with her parents in the Los Angeles area and we went with her sister and brother-in-law to see *Hair*, which was the big musical at that time.

RV: Yes.

PC: Well one of the things they do is start…

RV: And it's back and popular now.

PC: Yeah, yeah. And one of the things in there was they start playing with the flag and I got up and walked out. And of course, Diana was scared to death I was going to start throwing hand grenades or something.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: That I was really upset and all that and I wasn't. You know, like I told her, I had just come back from twelve months of trying to make sure that the right to do that continues. I just disagreed with it and I didn't want to watch it. I was a little disappointed, I was the only one in the theatre that got up and walked out, but no, I wasn't thrilled about it, but I wasn't angry about it, I just didn't want to watch it. And that to me, that's a parallel with the antiwar movement and they have a right to do that. They do not have a right to become violent, to kill people, to blow up a property and that kind of thing.

RV: Okay. We'll talk a little bit more about that when you get back home and your experiences and what you saw. I wanted to go back to Vietnam for a little while and ask you, if you could, tell me about your R&R and what that experience was like. Most of the married men went to Hawaii to see their wives. Tell me about that and your emotions, your feelings about seeing Diana and that, but also having to leave her and go back to the war and knowing you had some time left over there.

PC: R&R of course needless to say it was great. I mean, we hit Hawaii the same time as fourteen thousand International Rotarians. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: It was the International Rotary Convention that year in Hawaii.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: So it was just us and fourteen thousand of our closest friends.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: I had sent off for hotel reservations, but they had not gotten back to me in time. But they had a pretty good system, they, the military had a pretty good system set up and despite the crunch, they found a nice room for us and it was actually a little

apartment. And I remember this just as clear as if it was last week. And of course, Diana had brought the baby.

RV: What was that like for you?

PC: Oh it was amazing, I mean…

RV: You're seeing, you're coming out of a war for a little while, you're seeing your wife for the first time in quite a while and you're a new dad.

PC: Well it was amazing. I mean, you just look at that, you know, it's the typical dad thing, you know, except it's a delayed reaction. You look at that little baby and you think, you know, "Good grief, I had a hand in creating that little baby," and it was really great. And Diana used to tell me if I didn't put her down, I was going to rub shiny spots on her. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) So you just couldn't get enough of her?

PC: I just couldn't get enough of her. And we had a great time. I was late picking Diana up at the airport; I got lost on the way to the airport. But she was still there getting ready to get on the bus to the R&R center, so I caught her and she had worn my favorite dress and she remembered and wore that and had the baby and all. So we of course had a long hello. But we spent the next week just, I don't think we were ever apart more than ten seconds us and the baby; it was generally all three of us. We did find a babysitter one night and the three of us or the two of us I mean went out by ourselves. And I mean, we did the whole touristy thing. We wore matching Hawaiian shirts and the whole works. We had a rental car; we toured around the island and walked on Waikiki. When I got back, I got my hotel reservations at the Ilikai, which was a very nice hotel, of course a little late then. I could not get enough of baked potatoes with sour cream and fresh salad.

RV: (Laughing) So you ate a bunch?

PC: Oh I ate a bunch, yeah. And I drank some wine and all that good stuff. It was extremely difficult going back. It was very, very difficult going back. We actually, we had bought Diana and the baby so much stuff; we had to buy another suitcase. But it was tough; it was tough going back. I'll tell you, that airplane going back to Vietnam from Hawaii was awful quiet; full of guys who were still back in Hawaii mentally with their families. And it was real quiet on that airplane.

RV: How long did you have back in Vietnam?

PC: I had about five months left.

RV: What did you all say to each other? I mean, did you tell her, "Yeah, we're getting mortared every two or three nights and you know, this is the size…"

PC: No, I tried not to dwell on those kinds of things. I think I mentioned before, I figured she was scared enough; I didn't need to add to that. She knew we were getting shot at and I didn't hide it. I told her yeah we did, we got shot at every now and then. But there was no sense in, you know, trying to make her think that, you know, we were going through World War III. For one thing, we weren't.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Which is not to say that, you know, it was a lot of fun, but there was just no sense in piling on her more than we needed to. When I got back, I told her a little more than I had, than I did while I was there.

RV: Yeah. What do you think you all talked about the most about the war or did you try not to talk about the war?

PC: Really didn't talk about it very much, really talked about us and the baby and what our plans were for what's going to happen when I got back. You know, was I going to stay in the Army, and at that point, I knew I was going to stay in at least another year. But what was going to happen past that. We both knew I needed to go back to school. We didn't know the Army was going to send me back at that point, so we talked about that. And there were just long silences where we just sat there together. We didn't talk about the war that much.

RV: When you left, did you say I'll definitely be seeing you back or did you, how do you do that, how do you leave you wife and go back into a war?

PC: Well, you know, you don't have much choice, you just do what you got to do and I just said, "Well, I'll see you in five months," or you know, "I'm scheduled to come home on this day and look for me that day." And we actually had made, that early, even made some plans and she was going to come up to San Francisco and we came into Travis just outside of San Francisco, she was going to come up and meet me and we were going to rent a car and drive down the coast just back together. It didn't work out that way because I came home a few days early. But yeah, we had actually even made some

plans, so we kind of had that to look forward to and we kind of had…we were kind of looking more forward past Vietnam I think is probably the way we really kind of got through it is we were really looking. In November, when I got home, we were together again; I think is probably the way we got through it best.

RV: Yeah, that makes sense from a human standpoint to focus on what your future's going to be. Did you feel and think at this time, this is going to be my career?

PC: No.

RV: Weren't thinking that yet.

PC: No, not at all.

RV: Okay. Did you know, did you realize that having a command in Vietnam during a war was really going to propel you forward, that was going to be a very good thing for your career?

PC: Oh yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah. And I think every officer knew a command…number one, command is good.

RV: Yes.

PC: And command in Vietnam is better and command in Vietnam as a 1st Lieutenant is just an extraordinary opportunity. And I kind of figured if I did well, it certainly would help me out. And I subsequently was proved right.

RV: Yes, yes. Did you tell her about Colonel Hawlk?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. In fact, told her a lot about him, I had written her in letters and all that about Colonel Hawlk. And so the name was somewhat familiar to her. And you know, he was a big part of my life over there. Obviously as a Battalion Commander when you're a Company Commander, the Battalion Commander's kind of like, you know, god. And so yeah, and she knew that I was actually enjoying what I was doing, which I was. And I mean, command, there is just nothing like it in the world, it's just the best thing, the best job in the world, bar none. And I was just so much more fortunate than a lot of my colleagues who…if you ever wanted to make Major, you had to be a Company Commander, but some of them kind of went out, did their command and then went back to a staff job or a depot job or something like that, didn't really get to work

with troops a lot. And so I was pretty fortunate and that I spent a lot of time with the troops as a Lieutenant, as a Captain and a Major and a Lieutenant Colonel, so I was pretty fortunate in my career path. And it wasn't all luck either; I pretty actively worked for it.

RV: Yes.

PC: And I didn't have all troop assignments, I don't think anybody does, but I certainly tried to do that whenever I could.

RV: Why do you say command is the best job and you were good at it?

PC: Well, for one thing, it's just a tremendous level of responsibility. You know, the cliché is that you're responsible for everything a unit does or fails to do, but you're really kind of the master of your own fate. And you can really decide whether you're going to be successful or not to a very large extent. Obviously a lot of it depends on your boss, but you know, it's a lot of responsibility and it's a lot of authority. You're getting to work directly with soldiers and that's the best part of it. At that time, and I'm sure it's the same now, but at that time, it was a real interesting mix because of the draft and I think I mentioned we had everything from guys who had been homeless to guys with Master's degrees.

RV: Yes.

PC: And so that made kind of an interesting mix. We had a very solid professional NCO corps at that time. So it was just an amazing job, it's hard to describe.

RV: Obviously your personality fits that of a leader because you've liked the responsibility.

PC: Yeah.

RV: You say that now upon, you know, a few months out from your retirement from Texas Tech University. When you were back then, what, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven there in country?

PC: Yes.

RV: Did you realize that then, you know, "This does fit me, this leadership does fit me, I'm okay with this and I can actually use this to propel my forward either in the military if I choose that but also in life." Were you feeling that then?

PC: No, I really wasn't. It just kind of seemed natural. I had a superb role model.

RV: Yes.

PC: You know, I could watch Colonel Hawlk and how he acted towards his staff and towards me, get a lot of good ideas from that, but it just kind of seemed to fit, it just kind of seemed to come naturally. And I believe then and I believe now, if you treat people right, let them know what the standards are and expect them to meet those standards and then get out of the way, that ninety-five people out of a hundred are going to meet those standards or at least bust their butts trying to meet those standards. And that was certainly true in B Company.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I mentioned all the, you know, the Article 15s and all of that when I first took over and that was part of setting those standards and letting them know what the standards were and that they had to be met. And guys are not dumb, they caught on real quick and I had more than one tell me they appreciated it. Not all of them, you know.

RV: Sure.

PC: You know, when I took a stripe off a guy, he very rarely appreciated it. But I never had anybody tell me superior or subordinate or peer tell me that, you know, "You shouldn't have given that Article 15, that wasn't right," or something like that. And it just kind of, I enjoyed it and I think that showed. I was good at getting along with the customers, not because I was smart, I guess I was a good salesman or something. But I would go out and visit and see if they needed something, if there was something that I could get for them and they said, "Yeah, I really need one of these," and I'd really try to get it for them and I think they appreciated that.

RV: Okay. When you did travel and go out and see your customers as you say, did you have anything ever happen, anything interesting experiences, incidents that come to mind? You know, when you talk about that today, what do you see when you…?

PC: No, not really. One interesting kind of thing that happened was we'd had an infantry unit that had been one of our customers while they were in the rear and in logistics, that's how we referred to them.

RV: Yes.

PC: As customers.

RV: Was that an Army instruction or was that you?

PC: No, that was just the way it was.

RV: Okay.

PC: You know, that was the culture. You know, and I had a Captain tell me, you know, he said, "You got to take care of your customers; that's the best way to succeed," and he was right. And that was just the culture, that's what we called them and we really took it seriously. But anyway, we had an infantry unit who had been a customer, they had moved out and I had gone over to their old area that they had vacated and for some reason, there was an old wall locker in there and for some reason I opened that up and more out of vital curiosity I guess more than anything, there was a 50-Caliber machine gun in there and I thought, "Okay." Apparently somebody had stuck it in this locker and forgot it and property accountability was not one of our strong points in Vietnam. So anyway, I picked it up, threw it in my jeep, took it back and it was unserviceable and we couldn't repair it. It had what's called lose rivets, which means that it has to go back to the depot to be repaired, we couldn't do it. But boy, I knew one of the infantry units could use this thing. I took this 50-Caliber receiver and a case of beer and walked across the street to the 11th ACR and swapped it for a good 50-Caliber receiver. And as long as…11th ACR, of course, they had a bunch of tracks, so they had more 50-Calibers than they knew what to do with. But our guys were always scrounging for them for base defense. So anyway, I swapped them, they had the unserviceable one they could turn in to account for it and I had nice serviceable one and gave it to one of the infantry battalions and they took it out and set it up on their firebase for base defense and made a friend there.

RV: Sure, well yeah.

PC: I didn't make much of a friend to the accountability system, but sure made a friend to that battalion, so.

RV: Well, that was purely on your, you had that kind of I guess authority or you could move around freely like that and not, I don't mean this in a bad way, but take advantage of the system.

PC: Absolutely.

RV: And of course, in the best interest of the effort, the war effort as you saw.

PC: Sure, and I felt it was. But you know, it was a different culture in terms of things like that, then it was a lot more permissive, way too permissive in many instances. You know, when you're in a war zone, things that are important in a peacetime Army, important in the States are not important. And so there was a lot of stuff that we just didn't mess with and didn't bother with.

RV: You said that you would go into Bien Hoa once a month. Can you tell me and describe Bien Hoa what it looked like to you? And this is right outside of Saigon, this is one of the major areas that the United States has all kinds of troops coming in and out of there, major airbase, what was it like there?

PC: I thought it was huge. Yeah, it was just huge. And the difference I think was that it had relatively permanent buildings. It had paved roads, it had hot showers and flush toilets and all those things I didn't get to see the rest of the time. And of course, at that age, it didn't bother you.

RV: Right.

PC: Not to see those kinds of things, I just never really thought about it very much. But I would go down to the airfield, well, it divided into before and after. The Battalion Commander eventually got his own helicopter and he would send that out to pick up the Company Commanders to bring them back for the monthly meeting, which was kind of nice.

RV: Would you stay overnight?

PC: Yes, usually for a couple of nights. You just turned the company over to the XO. You were in radio contact, but turned the company over to the XO and come on down. But before the helicopter, you go down the airfield and scrounge a ride down to Bien Hoa and there was enough air traffic where it never took you very long. Go down to Bien Hoa and somebody would meet you at the airfield with a vehicle and take you back to battalion headquarters. You know, as officers, we had kind of our own little cubicle in a hooch somewhere, not air conditioned, but we would have staff meetings during the day and take lots of hot showers in the evenings and get some nice clean clothes. Like I say, the big difference I think was the semi-permanent buildings and the paved roads. Had a very nice club, air conditioned, you could go in there and get a nice

steak dinner, which I did; I enjoyed that. So yeah, it was kind of a nice time to let the pressure kind of bleed off.

RV: Could you ever take anybody with you, your XO with you?

PC: No.

RV: Or your NCOs or nobody would go with you?

PC: No, no, it was just the Commander.

RV: Okay. What kind of entertainment did they have down there at the Officer's Club? (Laughing)

PC: (Laughing) Well…

RV: And of course, you don't have to comment on any of this, but just to kind of paint a picture.

PC: Well, it's fine. They would have USO shows that came through periodically, usually with women dancers and a rock-n-roll band of some kind. We had one in our battalion area in Tay Ninh, came through and set up in one of the buildings and everybody just dragged in a folding chair and a cold beer and we sat there and watched the USO Show.

RV: What was the show, was it like a Filipino band or…?

PC: Yeah, this particular one was, but they would also have them from the U.S.

RV: How were they, were the Filipino bands good?

PC: A lot of enthusiasm.

RV: Oh yeah?

PC: (Laughing)

RV: They had it or you guys had it?

PC: They had it. We had a lot of enthusiasm for the women.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Yeah, they had a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of energy; I put it that way. And of course, they varied from really horrible to fair. But I mean, god, they were there with us, you know, and they were out on the forward, relatively forward area getting shot at, not like the Donut Dollies who would get on a helicopter and go out to the battalion firebase.

RV: Yes.

PC: And I never understood how those ladies did it. So yeah, they would often have some fairly good groups there. Bob Hope came to Bien Hoa and I did not get to see him. I did get to meet him twenty-five years later when he came to Berlin when the wall came down, he came and I got to meet him, shake his hand and went to his show. But of course, Raquel Welch came through Bien Hoa and all of that good stuff. I didn't get to see any of that.

RV: Could you have if you wanted to?

PC: No, no way, no way. There were five hundred thousand guys that wanted to get into that show and boy, it was pretty…like our infantry battalion would get one allocation to send a guy.

RV: Oh wow. And it wasn't going to be Lieutenant Curry.

PC: No, it wasn't going to be Lieutenant Curry that's for sure. Well actually some other Lieutenant went, a Lieutenant from the S3.

RV: How did that happen, did someone just choose, he got lucky, someone liked him and…?

PC: Yeah, exactly, exactly. And I always thought we should've picked a grunt out of the field, but that was a personal opinion, which 2nd Lieutenant Curry didn't care, he held a lot of weight. But anyway, yeah, they would have shows there. Then off post, I call it off post, not in the main club or something like that, they would have different kinds of shows and other forms of entertainment that the guys would go to. One of the Special Forces groups there had a club that was pretty wild and we used to drink a lot, I mean, a lot. God, I could never survive that today. But all of the guys who were from the more forward areas would, we tended to overdue it to put it very mildly.

RV: Did the USO shows work in the sense that did it boost morale; kind of make things a bit or that day or life in general a little bit better for a while?

PC: Yeah, for an hour or two, it was something different. And it wasn't AFN and it was some a little bit different.

RV: Tell me about the Donut Dollies. We've had some Donut Dollies involved with the program here and I've had commentary on them before from individuals, what was your experience with them?

PC: My experience with them was good. They were nice ladies. Some very young ladies; some of them quite attractive. And of course, you get guys who hadn't seen a Caucasian in eight to ten months and you put these ladies out there and these guys were less than restrained. But they handled it with such grace that I was just always impressed. I mean, I was embarrassed for them, you know, they played these kind of silly little games and the games weren't the point, everybody knew that, the point was they got to talk to a woman and all and see somebody who didn't smell like bug juice. But they always, in my experience anyway, handled it with such grace. And a lot of guys used to make fun of them and kind of give them a hard time and I never really kind of understood that. You know, they didn't have to be there, you know, they did that because they wanted to do that and they wanted to contribute.

RV: They were Red Cross volunteers.

PC: Yeah, yeah. And I had a lot of respect for them. You know, they didn't have to get on that helicopter and take a chance of getting shot down, they could've been back in the States and I had a lot of respect for them and I thought they did some good things. I'm not sure it was a good idea to remind guys of what they were missing, but the ladies themselves were interesting and fun I thought.

RV: When you said that sometimes guys would make fun of them, what did they do, do you remember?

PC: What did the guys do?

RV: Yeah, to make fun of them.

PC: Oh just "Donut Dollies," you know, "give me a donut," and you know, just, you know, "you live in the rear," and that kind of thing. Just, you know, "You're not really out here with the grunts," and that kind of thing. But you know, just pointless, just BS.

RV: Yeah, okay. Pat, what about just incidents in general that maybe we have not touched upon from your time, both Tay Ninh and Quan Loi in general. What do you want to leave on the record as some things that happened to you and of course, we can always come back and talk about things, but are there significant happenings that we have not talked about that you would like to talk about?

PC: Oh just some kind of miscellaneous things. One of my favorite all time Second Lieutenant stories, the battalion rear, when I was in 1st of the 5th, the battalion rear was in Tay Ninh and of course, forward was out on the firebase and we had an infantry 2nd Lieutenant on the firebase and he was one of these guys who was, "I'm not going to ask my men to do anything that I'm not going to do myself," which is a good thing up to a point. But of course, they used to have to rotate what we called, pardon the expression but, "shit burning detail" and you know, the outhouses were just a fifty-five gallon drum.

RV: Yes.

PC: And of course, on a firebase, they were real temporary. Usually what you do is take a sandbag crate, which was maybe a four by four by eight stand it up on its end, slide a board in there with a hole on it and a fifty-five gallon, half a fifty-five gallon drum and back. Did that make sense?

RV: Yes.

PC: You have to slide that drum out once a day, put some diesel in it and burn it.

RV: Right.

PC: And that's one of my most distinctive memories is that smell. I wish it wasn't, but it is. But anyway…

RV: Have you ever smelled it since Vietnam?

PC: Never, not ever since and hope I never do again. But anyway, so we were out on a firebase and this Lieutenant was going to show his men that he was going to do anything they would do, so he was going to take his turn at shit burning duty and he did. He pulled the drum out, put some diesel in it, stirred it up and threw in a match and it started burning. Unfortunately, he'd only pulled it out halfway. (Laughing) So…

RV: Oh boy.

PC: So the Battalion Commander comes out of the TOC, roll of toilet paper in hand just in time to see his outhouse going up in flames. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) The Battalion Commander was in there?

PC: The Battalion Commander, he wasn't in there…

RV: Oh, he was going over there.

PC: He was over at TOC; he was on his way to it.

RV: Okay.

PC: And of course, the troops, if we had had an attack then, we would've been done for because everybody was laughing so hard, we couldn't even stand up let alone…(Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: I mean, guys came from all over the firebase to see that.

RV: What did the Battalion Commander do?

PC: He just shook his head, turned around and walked back in. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) Did that, that Lieutenant I guess, what happened?

PC: There wasn't anything he could do at that point, he just kind of stood there and watched. And he never took that particular duty again, I'm not sure anybody would've let him.

RV: Right. What else?

PC: But that's one of my favorite 2nd Lieutenant stories. Bear in mind; I was 2nd Lieutenant at the time.

RV: Right, right, right.

PC: I had one casualty in my company when I was a Company Commander. We had been getting a bit series of ground attacks and of course, like every other unit, tenant unit we called them. On the insulation, we had to provide guys for perimeter duty and…

RV: Was this at Tay Ninh or Quan Loi?

PC: This was at Quan Loi. This was after when I was the B Company Commander. And this guy, we got a big ground attack and he actually got a very, very slight head wound, a piece of shrapnel. And of course, I went to see him and he was one of my real problems.

RV: Oh really?

PC: Yeah, he was, I had a couple of two or thee guys that were problems and he was one of them.

RV: What was his problem?

PC: Well number one, he didn't like to do anything, you know, so the other guys were going to have to kind of carry his load, lazy as hell. He was a discipline problem. I suspected he was using drugs, etc. But anyway, and I knew I was going to have to do something, I just wasn't sure what yet and I wasn't sure what he was going to do that was

going to require me to take some kind of action. But anyway, head wounds were automatically Medevaced and I went down to see him and he had kind of this cut on his forehead and I took his stuff down to him and so they Medevaced him out and that was just kind of a win-win for everybody. He got out and I got rid of him.

RV: So he stayed out?

PC: He stayed gone, yeah, yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: And I'm sure he didn't get much farther back than, you know, than the field hospital because he just wasn't hurt that bad. But like I say, head wounds were automatically Medevaced. And that was the only casualty. God, we walked along the perimeter and there were bodies everywhere.

RV: American or the VC (Viet Cong)?

PC: Oh no, no, no. God, the American bodies didn't lay there ninety seconds, that just didn't happen, just did not happen. But it took a little longer to police up the VC.

RV: Did you have that duty, did you have to go out and do that?

PC: No, no, the infantry guys did all that. Well, the infantry units who were commanding that segment of the perimeter and the guys who were assigned to them.

RV: Sure.

PC: But just, you know, they almost didn't look human. Some of them were so torn up, you know, when you get hit by a direct fire from a 105 or from a recoilless rifle, it doesn't leave a very pretty sight. And you just don't even think about them as people. I think you can't, you know. But it was pretty rough to see that. You know, the closest I came to getting killed was by our own guys. When you fire a 4-deuce flare, some stuff comes out the back. Well, you're supposed to fire it so that stuff comes out the back outside the perimeter and our guys weren't doing that and I was standing in the company area and all of a sudden with a couple of guys and we were getting a heavy ground attack off to one side and so we heard this whistling sound and of course, the first thing you think is incoming, so you kind of get down and about five feet away from me I heard this "Chunk!" and it turned out to be a plug from a 4-deuce flare, which is about a five pound piece of steel. Of course, at that time, it's traveling at terminal velocity. If it hit

anybody, it would've gone right straight through them and fortunately it missed us. But some of the other stuff that came out hit the company dog and we had to take her down and put her down, hit her on the head. I won't go into details. But she clearly was suffering and there wasn't much call for a vet service, so we had to take her out and put her down. You know, it's interesting that we were going through all this, one of the guys that kind of adopted her and was taking care of her, one of my guys, took her down and put her down and came back and he was crying, you know, he was really I mean genuinely upset. And he had gotten real close to this just old stray dog, you know. So it was pretty tough on him and several of the guys, but he was the one I remember crying and feeling bad and I felt bad for him.

RV: Did you all have pets besides this dog?

PC: Just stray dogs wandering through.

RV: Do you remember the name of this dog?

PC: No I sure don't.

RV: Okay.

PC: Not after all this time.

RV: Okay.

PC: And there were lots of stray dogs wandering around and that kind of thing. Anyway, by the time Colonel Hawk got up, after this big ground attack, all the bodies had been policed up and everything, still lots of craters and that kind of thing. But the interesting part is, we had just gotten a new (Coughs) excuse me, got a new Brigade Commander about a month before. One of his major priorities was upgrading the green line, the perimeter. And fortunately, what the green line was, was in essence two rows of concertina wire, razor wire separated by a space.

RV: How tall were the concertina wire out in the field there?

PC: Nine feet.

RV: It was nine feet tall.

PC: Yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: And it was designed to be so thick that you couldn't get through it. Well of course you can always get through it, but the point was to slow them down enough that they became a target.

RV: How'd they get through it, cutting it and…?

PC: Cutting it, yeah.

RV: And going very slowly.

PC: Man, they put on a demonstration, they had a Sapper who was a POW and they put on a demonstration where this guy went through concertina. It was amazing. I mean, he went through that stuff like it wasn't even there.

RV: Wow.

PC: He just, I mean, it was so thick, but he just kind of wiggled and wove his way through it, totally silently and in a couple seconds, he was through this six foot wide nine foot high triple strand concertina barrier. It was incredible. We were all standing there with our mouths open, scared the hell out of us to tell you the truth. But anyway, the Brigade Commander's priority was to upgrade this. And fortunately, one of the things he did was get some bulldozers out there and dozed that space in between just perfectly flat, nothing but dirt and flat dirt so there wasn't any little depressions or anything that somebody could hide in. So when they did start coming, we saw them. They did get through and they did get through the inner wire. And one of their main targets was the 175 Battery across the street, but they did not…and they got up to it, but they did not get in and get the guns.

RV: Did you all have Sentry Dog, MP Sentry dog?

PC: I'm sure they did, but I never saw it with them.

RV: Okay.

PC: No, never saw them.

RV: Were there spotlights or lights out there at night or was it…?

PC: Mostly what you depended on was night vision devices and flares.

RV: Okay. So no, there were no spotlight electrical thing?

PC: Not really, no. Not really, no.

RV: Okay.

PC: Not really.

RV: Pat, did you ever worry about fragging or hear about any incidents?

PC: Heard about it, I never worried about it and I don't know why, maybe I should have. I guess I just never really thought about it very much. I think I mentioned they tried to frag my successor.

RV: Yes.

PC: But I really got there and left before that got to be a real big thing, real big problem. It was just not something that you heard a lot about while I was there.

RV: Right.

PC: And I left in October '69 and you know, six months later it was a big thing, but not while I was there.

RV: Did you see, go ahead…

PC: We had a little bit of drugs. I had one investigation in my company. And it's funny, we had, well it's not funny, but we had one kid who was, I mean picture the corn fed home grown Iowa red hair and freckles, apple cheeked, all American boy. Somebody and I believe this to this day put a hash pipe in his area. There is no way and I knew this kid, he was just a real young kid, very immature and there's just no way I ever believed he was smoking dope. And I had a couple of guys I knew were or strongly believed were, but there is no way I believed this kid. In fact, when they found this pipe and I looked and saw who it was, I laughed because I just knew there was no way he was doing that. Of course, he was scared to death.

RV: So someone found the pipe and…

PC: Somebody was using it and planted it in his area so it wouldn't be found in their own area.

RV: Who found it?

PC: The CID (Criminal Investigation Command) and unfortunately. But we had some vibrations if you will, information that there might be some dope there, so CID was right next door and so I went and got them and they came over and did a search and found this thing, so.

RV: What happened to the kid?

PC: Nothing. They took him over and interrogated him and did all that stuff.

RV: And it wasn't him?

PC: It was not him, no. There was no way it was him. I think if he'd ever taken one puff on a hash pipe, he would've probably passed out and been unconscious for three days. He was just one of those kids.

RV: One of those types, yeah.

PC: And you know, just very naïve. And I suspect I knew who it belonged to. But that was really the only real drug incident that we had.

RV: Pat, on base there at Quan Loi and at Tay Ninh, tell me about the opportunity to attend religious services, was that there?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. We had Chaplains all over the place; the Chaplains would actually go out in the field with the infantry companies and conduct services, you know, when they could. There were services every Sunday, all denominations, yeah, that was very readily available. I didn't myself participate, but a lot of guys did.

RV: Did your personal spiritual beliefs change during the war or because of the war or can you make some general comments on that?

PC: No, it really didn't. Like I say, I'm not sure it's one of the things I thought about a lot, I was pretty young, pretty naïve, not something I really thought about a lot. I can't say that I had any big spiritual awakening, any, you know, for or against, no; I can't really say that it impacted me that way.

RV: Okay. What about the ideas of courage and bravery in the warfare, what did you see in your positions during your tour there?

PC: Well you know, in 1st of the 5th, that was something that was always there and you would expect it to be more part of the culture in an infantry unit than in a log unit. It was just something that was always there. You know, the officers, the infantry guys were always very much aware of their role and the expectations that they were expected to fulfill. And my experience was far away; most of them did it. You know, one incident that I remember. We were sitting there, one of our companies was in contact and we had been alerted to move to reinforce them and we were sitting there waiting for the helicopters to come in and pick us up and there was a shot and one of the infantry officers, Lieutenant, I mean he jumped up and was just in two steps at full speed heading for the sound of that shot. There was obviously never any thought in his mind of hit the dirt, hide, turn around and do something with his troops, he was going to get over there

and do something and that struck me at that time and it still does. I mean, that was I thought just a pretty telling incident about the mindset that most of the infantry guys had. They knew they were expected to be leaders and they wanted to be and they wanted to fulfill that role. And you know, I understand that this is a little idealized by the passage of time. We had infantry guys, infantry officers who were scared to death and who huddled in the bottom of their foxholes, but far and away the majority of them didn't, the majority of them were pretty courageous guys.

RV: What happened at that incident, did the guy find…?

PC: It turned out to be an accidental discharge. (Laughing)

RV: But it left an indelible impression it sounds like.

PC: It did because of the reaction.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And the guy, if you'll remember a little while ago, I told you about the guy who got drunk and got in all kinds of trouble.

RV: Yes.

PC: It was that guy.

RV: Oh really?

PC: Yeah.

RV: Before or after?

PC: Before, before.

RV: Wow.

PC: He never went back to the field after that incident. But he was a pretty brave guy, he screwed up royally, but he was a pretty brave guy. And I think the majority of them were that way.

RV: The officers or the…?

PC: The officers, yeah.

RV: What about fear? Tell me about that in a war zone that you personally experienced or that you…?

PC: The worst feeling, unquestionably the worst feeling is when you were getting a rocket or mortar attack because there just wasn't anything you could do. You know, they were way outside the perimeter, you were nowhere near the perimeter, all you could

do was just kind of hit the ground and huddle up and hope. You know, and that was the worst experience of all and yeah, boy you were scared. I mean, you could hear things whistling overhead and explosions going off all over, you know, and some of them close and some of them not. But boy, that was the worst experience because you were so helpless, you know. During the ground attacks, at least you could get out and put the guys that you had left in kind of an internal perimeter, make sure that they were down, that their weapons were ready and that kind of thing and you could at least kind of be prepared to defend yourself. But boy, when you were getting mortared or getting rockets coming in, it was just a helpless feeling.

RV: Do you think they did it to cause some psychological trauma and cause that fear?

PC: Oh, I don't think there's any question about it, sure. I think that was a big part of it. I don't think it really had any real lasting effect. You know, twenty minutes after it was over, everybody knew it was over and it was kind of business as usual. But every once in a while, they'd get lucky. You know, one time at Tay Ninh, they had some fuel blivets, that made a big fire.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Of course, there was the time that the Sappers got the ammunition depot and that blew up for about two weeks. But most of the time the damage was relatively minor.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, but there's no question they did it as much for psychological impact, at least no question in my mind, they did it as much for psychological impact as to cause actual damage. Let us know they were there, they were watching us, they could shoot us anytime they wanted.

RV: Did you, as you went through your tour and as you're approaching your time to leave, did you start to check out a little bit from the war and start focusing back on the United States or were you focused enough where you know, I'm going to do this as much as I can right up to the last day?

PC: Well, as a Company Commander, you're pretty focused. You don't really have a lot of time to start thinking about what comes after and etc. My replacement came in, a guy named Tom Skinner and he spent a couple, oh I guess a week or ten days with

me and then we had the change of command, about eight days before, I was ready to DEROS (Date Eligible for Return From Overseas). And that was a tough eight days because you go from sixty to zero in you know, point two inches.

RV: Were you still there at Quan Loi?

PC: No, no, you don't leave the former Commander hanging around to look over the new Commander's shoulder.

RV: Right, you get out.

PC: You get out. And in fact, right after the change in command, then half an hour, I was gone.

RV: Wow.

PC: I got on a helicopter and went back to Bien Hoa.

RV: Now, tell me about leaving your men. Tell me about what that was like, leaving Quan Loi, knowing that, "Boy, I might not ever see this place again, I'm out of here."

PC: Well, leaving Quan Loi did not break my heart.

RV: Right.

PC: But I'll tell you, it was like leaving family. I really had the same kind of, much to my surprise, had the same kind of pains and emotions, not to the same degree, but the same kind of feelings about leaving the company as I did about leaving family. I mean, you get really close, been through nothing like the infantry guys, but some fairly intense experiences. I mean, you lived together, ate together, slept together twenty-four hours a day and you get pretty close and it was difficult, it truly was. I was tired, I was ready to go, but it was difficult leaving my guys, it was and I like to think that some of them hated to see me go and I had to get a few of them aside and say, you know, "Listen, this is the way the Army is and…"

RV: You did have to say this?

PC: "And I expect you to give Captain Skinner the same kind of support that you gave me," and I feel sure that they did.

RV: How was Captain Skinner, was he respectful to you as a Lieutenant?

PC: Oh very much so, yeah, he was a good guy. He told me to call him by his first name. And you know, as a Commander, we were kind of peers, you know, he was a Captain and I was a Lieutenant and no, there was never any of that, he was a good guy.

RV: How long was he around; were you kind of training him up?

PC: Yeah, yeah. Oh I guess eight or ten days, probably just about long enough.

RV: Okay, okay. Did you make any good close friends, any individuals that you could look back and say, "Yeah, he was a good friend," on that personal level?

PC: Not really, not really. I stayed in touch with Chuck Case, my XO for a while after the war. But I mean, after I came back, not after the war, but we kind of lost touch over time. And you know, as close as we were, there's still that distance.

RV: What do you mean?

PC: The distance between an officer and an enlisted man.

RV: Right.

PC: Between an officer and an NCO and you have to kind of maintain that distance, you know, discipline demands it. So yeah, we got pretty close, but I can't say we actually made any real close personal friends within the company.

RV: Tell me about leaving. You left Quan Loi and you still what have eight days or so?

PC: Eight days left and…

RV: Where'd you go, what happened?

PC: Well, I went down to Bien Hoa and they put me up in the battalion area and it was a pretty stressful time, I was pretty bored, didn't really have anything to do.

RV: Why was that stressful for you?

PC: Well, like I said, you went from sixty to zero in point two inches and it was, you know, trying to depressurize. And Colonel Hawlk came to me later and he said, "Patrick, I apologize." He said, "I brought you down here too son." He said, "I should've brought you down here a day or two in advance, not seven or eight days." But I could understand his position. Here he had a Captain who had been sent into command, had a Lieutenant in command who was DEROSing and it was appropriate for him to get the Captain in there as quickly as he could and it never bothered me and I never thought

anything about it, just made sense to me, still does. But it was a pretty tough seven or eight days.

RV: What'd you do?

PC: Sat around a lot, read a lot, sat around in the battalion maintenance operations section a lot, didn't know enough about their operation to really help any. People would ask me questions about what went on in the company area as opposed to the battalion and I would try to answer those; went to the PX, that kind of stuff. And then a couple of days before I was actually supposed to get on the plane, you moved to the out processing depot.

RV: Okay.

PC: And it's kind of interesting too from being a Company Commander and being kind of under the big guys, you move here and all of a sudden you're just another Lieutenant, you know.

RV: Right.

PC: And just another one of the guys going home.

RV: How did you get out early, what happened?

PC: That happened actually fairly routinely. They call it giving a drop and I never had any hint of any rationale or rhyme or reason behind it, but I wound up going home I guess about a week early, a week, ten days early. As I mentioned, Diana and I had plans. She and a friend of hers, one of her sorority sisters, were going to drive up and ten the sorority sister was going to fly home and Diana was going to meet me in Los Angeles, I mean in San Francisco, sorry. And we were going to drive down the coast. Well, I got this bright idea of not telling her I was coming home early.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And…

RV: How were you coordinating this, was this all kind of from Hawaii and…?

PC: No, by letter.

RV: Okay. And the last letter you sent her was: "Everything's a go for our plan."

PC: Yeah, exactly.

RV: "I'll see you at Travis?"

PC: "I'll see you in November," god whatever it was, because I already had orders and I just got an amendment to the orders. So I came into Travis and since I was staying in the Army, I did not have to go to Oakland to out process. Once I landed at Travis and went through customs and all that, I was free. And so I went in and…

RV: Pat, before we go there...

PC: Sure.

RV: Tell me about leaving; literally leaving Vietnam and walking out to the plane on the tarmac, what was that like? Did you see people coming in, you know, you remember the if you do, the very first scenes of *Platoon* where you have the young Charlie Sheen arriving and the dust and the heat hitting him and then you've got, you know, the bodies going out, stuff like that.

PC: Nah, you didn't see that.

RV: You see the old thousand yard stair guys walking by. Did you have any…what happened there leaving?

PC: I never saw any of that coming or going. I went to the replacement detachment there, replacement depot and spent a couple of days there out processing. And don't ask me why I remember this, but the night before I was supposed to get on the plane, they showed *Planet of the Apes*. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) Memorable movie.

PC: Yes, yes indeed. And of course, we're all antsy as hell.

RV: Yes.

PC: All we want to do is get on that airplane and go home.

RV: Now you don't know any of these guys, do you?

PC: No, no, they're from all over Vietnam.

RV: Right.

PC: All MOS, everything; officers, enlisted, everything.

RV: Did you talk about your experiences, "Hey, what'd you do, where were you, what happened?"

PC: You know, "What unit were you in?" that kind of stuff. No real detailed war stories, mostly talked about, "Man, I want to go home." So anyway, of course, you're just antsy as hell, couldn't sit through the movie, got up and walked out and went to the

bar and went back and tried to sleep. And got up the next morning, was all packed and everything and finally they took us out to the plane.

RV: How, by bus?

PC: The bus, bus. We got off at the edge and walked across the tarmac and had to climb up the stairs, got on the plane and real live stewardesses.

RV: What were you thinking walking across that tarmac?

PC: I was thinking, "Man, let's go home!" and "I'm glad I'm going home." You know, I was ready; I was ready. Colonel Hawlk has asked me if I wanted to extend. Had I been single, I would have, I would've stayed.

RV: Did you tell him that?

PC: Well, actually what I told him was if he'd pay my alimony, I would extend. (Laughing) Because Diana would've killed me, she wouldn't really have divorced me; she wouldn't have done that.

RV: Right.

PC: It certainly would've hurt her.

RV: Yes.

PC: But there was never any thought in my mind of extending. But no, I was just glad to be home. I got on that airplane and they cranked up the air conditioning and we just kind of leaned back and we came home by way of Alaska.

RV: Okay.

PC: And got off the plane in Alaska in October, late October, it was twenty below.

RV: And you had just come from Vietnam.

PC: Just come from Vietnam, they had given us a field jacket in Vietnam that we would turn in when we got back to the States. But we had to walk across the tarmac to the terminal in Alaska and wandered around in there while they refueled the plane and bought the baby a present.

RV: What was it like leaving Vietnam on the airplane? Do you remember looking out the window or was there an announcement by the pilot that you've cleared airspace, Vietnamese airspace?

PC: Oh yeah, he came on and announced that and the stewardesses were talking to us, "Congratulations!" and there was a buzz through the plane of excitement, you know, and we were all real excited about going and glad to be out of the heat and humidity. But yeah, and the stewardesses were just right on top of it. I mean, building up the experience and happy for us and I guess they had, they were a little older ladies and I guess that they got that because of their seniority and it paid pretty well apparently for them. But they were bringing drinks around and just all kinds of stuff, you know, just being real nice. But it was an exciting kind of thing, you know.

RV: I can imagine. So when you get in Alaska, you refuel, you take off, you go down to San Francisco.

PC: Go down to Travis Air Force Base and get off and I had a trophy weapon, an SKS. There had been a Special Forces unit right outside of Quan Loi and they had come and asked us for some help, even though we weren't technically their support, I'm not really sure they had any. They're pretty nice guys and so we used to help them out, if they need a weapon fixed or a radio fixed or something like that. And so they used to bring us all kinds of stuff. I mentioned that I had one of the piff helmets; they brought me that.

RV: Yes.

PC: And one of the belts and all that kind of stuff. And interestingly enough, one of them, one of the NCOs got blown off a track and Medevaced and I got back to the States and I ran across him again and he worked for me back in the States.

RV: Oh wow, really?

PC: Yeah.

RV: Wow.

PC: I thought that was kind of interesting, small Army.

RV: Yeah, sure. Were you able to keep everything?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. It just took a little time to process it, but there was so much of that. Coming back, all they did was I had filled out the appropriate paperwork and they checked the serial number on the weapon that was it. I got rid of that later, but now of course I wish I'd kept it. But I don't know what I'd do with it, but now I wish I'd kept it.

RV: Well you'd donate it to the Vietnam Archive. (Laughing)

PC: That's what I would've done, no question.

RV: How stringent were they looking through your bags and seeing what you brought home?

PC: Especially as an officer, you know. They made some of the guys empty everything out and I took everything out because everybody had to and they walked by and they said, "Yeah, okay, you can put it back in now," and I did. And I was Mr. Clean, I mean, there was no way I was going to let something like that. And I had also checked in Vietnam too, all your stuff. I had an old rain jacket that I was going to bring back with me. They said, "No, that's Army property, you can't take that back with you." And so I said, "Oh fine, I don't care." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) Right, "Here's your rain jacket."

PC: "Here." If it was going to slow me down more than about half a nanosecond, I was not going to live with it.

RV: Sure.

PC: So anyway…

RV: So Diana has no idea you're back?

PC: None.

RV: Did you call her?

PC: No. And I was going to surprise her. And anyway, this is all in the middle of the night that I'm up at Travis and change clothes and put my greens on, you know, dress uniform and my new shiny new ribbons and all of that kind of stuff.

RV: When were you issued those?

PC: Ribbons?

RV: Yes.

PC: Officers were not issued ribbons.

RV: Okay.

PC: I had actually ordered them by mail.

RV: Okay.

PC: We used to get the *Army Times* and the *Stars and Stripes* and you could order all this stuff by mail.

RV: So you had them with you and…

PC: I had them with me, had my uniform and everything with me.

RV: You had them with you in Vietnam to put on over there once you got back to the States.

PC: Back to the States, yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: What happened was when we came in country, to back up twelve months, we had taken all of our dress uniforms, our civilian clothes, essentially everything except what they issued us and boxed it all up and put it in storage there in country. And I got some of my stuff out, my civilian clothes out when I went on R&R, but Diana just took those home with her.

RV: Now this was, you DEROSed out of Bien Hoa?

PC: Out of Bien Hoa.

RV: Okay. So you had everything stored there then.

PC: Yes. And yeah, and they just gave it back to me and so I had my uniform and I got it soon enough to get that cleaned and pressed and all that kind of stuff. So when I got back, I had all that. And they had locker rooms and all that and I went in and took a shower and shaved and got cleaned up and put my greens on. And took a shuttle, a bunch of us shared a limo into San Francisco Airport, flew from San Francisco to Los Angeles one way for fourteen dollars.

RV: Wow.

PC: Yeah, it was a long time ago. Got to the airport in Los Angeles, got my stuff, never had a problem, nobody was ever anything but very nice to me. In fact, my ribbon came unpinned, the clasp fell off the back and I didn't realize it had swung down and about three people came up to tell me about it and help me fix it and do all that stuff.

RV: Civilians.

PC: Civilians.

RV: Wow.

PC: You know, we hear a lot about the getting spit on and all that kind of stuff, but in my experience, it was a real reaction in the other direction. People who were trying to make up for that, that anti-GI feeling. And I had several incidents like that.

RV: Oh, of helpfulness?

PC: Of helpfulness.

RV: Past the ribbons, were there other incidents?

PC: Well, not that I remember in this particular, at the airport there and things like that. But one time when I was a young enlisted man and the antiwar, anti-GI thing was kind of just getting started, I was going to Diana's for Christmas and we got stranded out in the middle of nowhere, two of us and we were trying to hitchhike. And one guy, I'll never forget this, in a jaguar stopped.

RV: Right.

PC: Did I tell you about this?

RV: I think you did.

PC: Okay.

RV: Go ahead; tell the story.

PC: But anyway, he stopped, picked us both up, took us right to our doorstep, wouldn't just take us in the vicinity of. I think I did mention this before.

RV: Yes you did.

PC: But wouldn't just take us, you know, to the town and drop us off, absolutely insisted on taking us right to the door. But anyway, even a year and a half, two years later coming back from Vietnam, I never had a single negative experience of any kind.

RV: Had they warned you all, you know, "Watch yourself in the airports if you're in uniform?"

PC: I don't remember anybody saying anything.

RV: Nothing like that. How about…?

PC: Of course, most of the guys were getting out.

RV: Right.

PC: And so they had to go from the airport to Oakland Depot and get out-processed and all that kind of stuff. So actually only a few of us stayed on and I mean, were cut loose once we got through the airport at Travis.

RV: When did you decide to stay in the Army? You said now, you know you're not getting out. I mean, you're going to take care of your commitment here, but had you decided then, "I'm going to re-up and keep going?"

PC: No. Actually, the big decision maker was when they sent me back to college.

RV: And was that the first kind of order of business for you was to get back in school at that point?

PC: It really was, personally and professionally. I had been reassigned to Aberdeen Proving Ground, which is the home of the Ordnance Corps. I went back there…

RV: I want to hear about seeing Diana, but go ahead with…you're going to go to Aberdeen.

PC: Yes and I had applied for the Undergraduate Degree Completion Program, I'd been turned down. And I went down to what they called Branch, which is the portion of the Military Personnel Center where they maintained your records and each Branch has their own office there. And so I went down to ordnance branch, asked them what was going on and they said, "Well, we don't have any of your OERs from Vietnam from when you were a Company Commander," and I'd had two.

RV: Right.

PC: And I said, "Okay." And this wasn't unusual; it took months sometimes for paperwork to flow and it was all paper at that time.

RV: And these were the good ones from Hawlk?

PC: These were the really good ones. And so that was obviously, you know, "Don't call us, we'll call you, go away son, you're bothering me." "Fine." So I went back to Aberdeen and waited. Several months later, they called and said, "Well your OERs, your command OERs for Vietnam hit, when would you like to go to school?" That's how much influence Colonel Hawlk had on me.

RV: Did he know that you wanted to go back to college?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. He had told me, he had got me in and said, "Son, you need to go back to college."

RV: Really?

PC: The handwriting is on the wall, if you want to be an officer, you're going to have to have a college degree. And he has said and the Battalion XO had told me the

same thing. And my new Commanders when I got to Aberdeen told me the same thing. But anyway…

RV: What an influence this man had.

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. I mean, my whole life.

RV: Did you ever get to see him again?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. He gave a battalion reunion, he was assigned in Washington because it's obvious he was an up and comer and so he gave a battalion communion, reunion, sorry, a battalion reunion, several of them in fact. And we went down, Diana and I stayed with him and his wife Mickey and just all kinds of stuff. So yeah, we saw them many times. In fact, in 1984, when I was assigned to the Pentagon, he was retired from the Army living in Washington and we got together.

RV: Is he passed away now?

PC: You know, we have regretfully; we have lost touch. There's a new Army system now, AKO (Army Knowledge Online) where I'm going to try to locate him again.

RV: Tell me about seeing Diana and getting there early and what happened.

PC: I was having a blast, I mean; I was having so much fun. I took a cab from the airport. Again, to tell you how long it was, it was probably twenty-five miles, cost me ten dollars. To her doorstep, walked up and rank the doorbell.

RV: What time of day is this?

PC: 9:30 in the morning, 9, 9:30 in the morning. And I walked up and rang the doorbell…

RV: And this is her parents?

PC: Her parent's house.

RV: Okay.

PC: In Seagull Beach, California, which is in Orange County. And rang the doorbell, her mother came. They told me this later, came to the door and looked through the little peep hole and said, "Oh my god!" And she flung the door open and when she said that, Diana heard her. She said she knew instantly who it was. And I asked her, Diana's mom, and a great lady, jumped on me and boy here came Diana: zoom! Ran out and flung her arms around my neck and her mother's arm was caught between us. Don't ask me why I remember all this, but her mother's arm was caught between us and she

couldn't get it out and she was going, "Oh, ow, ow, ow, let me have my arm!" And of course, we were just clung on together and she finally got her arm out. And we hugged and kissed and said hello right there on the doorstep and all of that kind of stuff. And I said, "Where's the baby?" The baby was sitting in the middle of the living room floor and I mentioned I ran over and scooped her up, scared the hell out of her, she starts screaming bloody murder. (Laughing) So that was kind of the homecoming. And then Diana proceeded to give me hell for not telling her I was coming home.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: In a joking way.

RV: Sure.

PC: Not really.

RV: Sure. It sounds like a great homecoming.

PC: It was a terrific homecoming. And after a couple of days, we left the baby with Diana's folks and she and I did drive up the coast.

RV: Very nice.

PC: To San Francisco and just had a real nice few days and did some sight seeing and stayed in the Madonna Inn. I don't know if you've ever heard of it.

RV: I have, I have.

PC: And we just stumbled across it by accident, didn't know what it was, but stayed in Carmel and San Francisco; just had a nice time, it was a nice homecoming.

RV: Pat, you've alluded to this before, but I want to kind of revisit it now and then again later. Did you have any kind of problems adjusting back to the United States?

PC: You know, very few. I am not one of these guys that had nightmares and tossed and turned. It was a little spooky driving at night.

RV: Why?

PC: I just wasn't used to it. You know, I wasn't used to driving at night with headlights. And it was just a little weird that, you know, you didn't have to be looking out and that kind of stuff. After I got to Aberdeen, I had a couple of nights where I had nightmares, but the nightmares were that I was back in Vietnam sitting there talking to Colonel Hawlk, he was welcoming me back and boy, I was depressed because I was back in Vietnam.

RV: Right.

PC: And I would wake up sweating, but after a couple of nights, that went away and I never had any more problems. You know, I never went through the kind of trauma that some of the guys did. So it just wasn't that emotional upheaval, that wrenching that some of the guys went through, it wasn't that way for me.

RV: What about loud noises?

PC: No, I never had any of the loud noises; none of that stuff ever bothered me. Although, I was standing on the street and a car backfired and three guys hit the ground.

RV: Oh really, you saw this?

PC: Really, I saw that, yeah.

RV: That was then?

PC: Coming back, yeah. I wasn't one of them.

RV: Did you know what the reason was?

PC: No, I just know it was a loud noise. I mean, I jumped like…

RV: Did you know why they hit the ground?

PC: Oh I suspected I knew, yeah, yeah. I mean, there's really only one reason for it.

RV: That's interesting.

PC: So yeah.

RV: So you get to Aberdeen and you are waiting, you get the grade reports in and you're off to school. Now, were you able to pick where you wanted to go, did you, you know, what was that process like?

PC: I was absolutely able to pick the school I wanted to go to. I wanted to go right away, but all Captains at that…this is at that time, all Captains go to an Army school called the Advanced Course and it's to teach you how to be a Staff Officer essentially. Aberdeen is where the Ordnance Advanced Course was. Well, I wasn't ready to go to the Advanced Course; I needed another year or two before I was ready for that.

RV: You're still a 1st Lieutenant?

PC: Just made Captain about probably two or three weeks after I got there, I made Captain.

RV: Really? Was that…?

PC: At that time, it was kind of automatic.

RV: Once you're back or…?

PC: No, twelve months as a 2nd Lieutenant you made 1st Lieutenant, twelve months as a 1st lieutenant you made Captain.

RV: Okay, I see.

PC: Okay. And if you didn't really screw up, it was basically automatic.

RV: Okay.

PC: You then stayed a Captain for approximately two hundred years. (Laughing) A slight exaggeration.

RV: You had to take yourself forward then basically, start proving yourself to move up through the ranks.

PC: Oh absolutely, but you had to do that everyday.

RV: Right.

PC: So anyway, I was a Captain, but I wasn't ready to go to the Advanced Course yet. Well the Army was not willing to move me to college and then move me back to Aberdeen to go to the Advanced Course.

RV: Sure.

PC: They said, "You stay here for a couple of years, you go the Advanced Course, and then go to college." Which was a fairly typical pattern.

RV: Were you okay with that?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. They were going to send me to college free.

RV: Right.

PC: I was okay with anything they said. I tried to get them to send me right away, but pretty obvious it was a losing battle, so I didn't fight it very hard. So I stayed at Aberdeen, I was a Company Commander, once in a Student Company. I had the Ordnance School, Ordnance Center and School was at Aberdeen. Once in a student company, I was the Company Commander and once in a Permanent Party Company, which was the instructors and that kind of thing. They all had to have a holding company and that was me. I went to the Advanced Course and then went off to college for two years. Fantastic opportunity, just unbelievable. Full pay and allowances, they paid all

my tuition, all my fees, all my books. The only contact I had with the Army for two years was to draw my paycheck.

RV: Wow.

PC: And I came out with a Bachelor's degree.

RV: And the agreement was you would stay in?

PC: I was two for one. So I was now obligated for four more years.

RV: And were you thinking again, career or…?

PC: At this point I was thinking maybe I'd enjoyed what I'd done; they give me great opportunities. I was thinking, you know, maybe I need to think about staying in. It was good enough for my dad, you know.

RV: Okay. What about Diana, what did she think?

PC: Well, she was used to the military, her father was a career military guy and she liked it. She said she would've had no problem with, excuse me, with me staying in, moving around.

RV: Okay.

PC: It was hard on her leaving her family. I went to school in California so she'd be near her family and it was hard on her leaving her family, but she knew, you know, that's the way the military is and you just deal with it.

RV: Where did you go to school?

PC: I went to Cal State, Long Beach.

RV: Okay. Before we talk about that, one other question about career and Army. Did you have any other interests that, yeah, I could go, think that to yourself, that I could go in that direction, you know, completely not military you know, into advertising or any other career path that interested you that you were considering?

PC: You know, I really didn't. I was so focused on getting a degree. And I really didn't even think about life past a college degree. I knew, at that time, yeah, I mentioned you had two kind of parallel career paths; Army Reserve and Regular Army. I had applied for a Regular Army commission, which if you wanted to stay past twenty years was mandatory. The CG, the Commanding General at the Ordnance School had turned me down. I mentioned I had a very good time in college the first time around.

RV: Yes.

PC: Unfortunately, my transcripts reflected that.

RV: Is that where it came back to get you?

PC: That's where it came back to get me. I had the OERs; I had recommendations, letters and everything. He would not recommend it be approved because my grades were so bad. And I said, "Hmm Dad, you were right." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: So anyway, the advice of some friends. I withdrew my application.

RV: Okay.

PC: If you get a General Officer recommending disapproval, it's a done deal; it's going to get disapproved. Once you get a disapproval in your file, it's five times harder to ever get it approved. So the smart thing to do is just take it back. Well….

RV: Well like it had never happened, like you had not…?

PC: Like I had never applied.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah.

RV: I see.

PC: As it turned out, I went to school and then went to another assignment. Part of the requirement for the Degree Completion Program is that upon completion, you apply for Regular Army commission, which I did and I got it.

RV: So things just fell into line.

PC: Things just kind of started going click, click, click, click, click. I went on to my next assignment. Well, I went to school, was great, graduated.

RV: I want to talk to you about that and your experiences in a little more detail and I want to ask you about your Advanced Course in a little bit more detail.

PC: Okay.

RV: But again, you weren't really considering another career path?

PC: I really was not at that point and I knew that I had four more years to go. And so you know, I didn't feel any time pressure or anything like that. You know, I had plenty of time to make a decision. Of course, as Vietnam drew down, promotions just came to a screeching halt.

RV: Right.

PC: That's why I said you stayed a Captain two hundred years, a whole bunch of us did. They had a couple of RIFs, which is a Reduction in Force. That's where the Army tells an officer, "You're a nice guy, we appreciate your interest in National Defense, but you're out." And we had several guys get RIFed; several guys get passed over. You get passed over x number of times, then you're out. I mean, we had guys with seventeen, eighteen years of service, after eighteen years, you were locked in. Up to eighteen years, you were subject to being bounced for not getting promoted; big guy, sixteen, seventeen years of service. Virtually all of the former NCOs who had gone to Officer Candidate School and got commissions got RIFed. Most of them reverted to their regular grade, which was NCO, which I thought was kind of a dirty deal. But I mean, the personnel system is relatively cold. But I went through all of those, I got the Regular Army commission and only about thirty percent of people who applied were accepted. So that kind of told me that I was in pretty good shape. Our former Battalion XO from Vietnam, from the 27th Maintenance Battalion was now in MILPERCEN (United States Army Military Personnel Center) he told me I was in pretty good shape. So Diana and I got to thinking about it and we decided, well, we'll stick around and see what it's like.

RV: Okay.

PC: My assignment after I went to school was to Ft. Sheridan, Illinois. They were just starting to put a tremendous amount of emphasis on the Reserve and National Guard at that time. And I went to what was called Readiness Group and our job was to train Reserve and National Guard units. And this was in the depths, the pits of the Vietnam War. In fact, I got there in '74 and boy, the Army was not a pretty place at that point. And the Reserves and National Guard, it was really heart breaking. But I just really got fed up with the "me first" and "my career" and the self-promotion. I mean, every Army officer has to promote himself to some extent. If you don't, you're never going to get the jobs you need and you're not going to get promoted and that kind of thing. But you know, there was a real culture and this has been talked about before of "my career first, above anything else and if I have to stomp on you to advance my career, then I'm perfectly willing to do that kind of thing." And I was pretty disgusted and pretty fed up and Diana said, "Well, you know, get out." And I actually went to employment agencies and started interviewing and started looking around.

RV: What kind of jobs were you looking for?

PC: For management level jobs and you know, I knew I was going to have to start all over again. And sure enough, the headhunters that I talked to confirmed my suspicions; I was going to have to start all over again. But you know, I did have the degree and as a young guy, I was fairly marketable and they felt like they could do something for me. But I got orders for Europe.

RV: Pat, before we go to Europe.

PC: Okay.

RV: Let me back up just a bit.

PC: Sure.

RV: Tell me just chronologically some dates here if you can.

PC: Okay.

RV: You got out in October '69, you're back, when did you report like formally to the Advanced Course? Was it January, February of '70 or…?

PC: Well remember, I spent a couple of years at Aberdeen before I went to the Advanced Course.

RV: Oh right, right, excuse me.

PC: I reported to Aberdeen in December of '69. I started the Advanced Course '71.

RV: Okay.

PC: It would've been, it was a nine-month course, so it would've been the center or the middle of '71.

RV: Okay.

PC: I finished in April of '72, started college at Cal State, Long Beach in the summer session June of '72.

RV: Okay.

PC: Graduated June of '74, reported to Ft. Sheridan July of '74.

RV: Okay, okay, very good.

PC: Okay.

RV: How much time did you have with Diana before you…I mean, you're at Aberdeen, but when you got back from Vietnam, did you have two weeks, did you have a month?

PC: Had a month.

RV: You had a month.

PC: Had a full thirty days.

RV: Was that adequate time for you?

PC: Oh yeah.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah, by the time thirty days was up, I was ready to go back to work; she was ready to have me go back to work.

RV: (Laughing) And did you all move to officer's quarters, the two of you or three of you?

PC: Well kind of. The three of us drove; we went from Diana's folk's house in California to my folk's house in San Antonio, visited there, and then drove on to Maryland.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: They told us that they would have quarters for us, so we spent a couple of weeks in guesthouse and in a motel waiting. They had a bunch of quarters that had been enlisted quarters that they had converted to officer's quarters kind of. They were really crummy, god. Weary Housing they called it and they were just horrible. But, you know, you take what you can get.

RV: Right.

PC: And I certainly couldn't afford anything in the surrounding community.

RV: Right.

PC: So we took them, bought furniture. Well, we had nothing; I mean nothing.

RV: Everything fit in one car.

PC: Basically. And bought some furniture and settled down and set up housekeeping and it was nice. It was kind of pretty much a 7:30 to 5:00 job, you know, not a lot of nights and weekends. And while I was there, what they called VOLAR, Volunteer Army came in, so we didn't even have to work Saturdays anymore. The draft

stopped, they had to depend on recruiting, so they were looking at ways to make it more attractive and recruit, recruit people is what I'm trying to say.

RV: Yes.

PC: So we didn't have to work Saturdays anymore. They did away with reveille those kinds of things. In that context, it was kind of like an office job if you will.

RV: Right. Tell me about the Advanced Course. What was that about and how did you…was it classroom?

PC: Like I said, it was mostly all classroom. And it was to teach you how to be a Staff Officer and to introduce you to what was called the wholesale system. The Army in the field, everything I had done before and up to higher level was called the retail level of supply. And it's kind of like going out here to Wal-Mart and buying something. Behind that, they had the wholesale system and that's the part of the system that dealt with requirements determination. How many tanks is the Army going to need to buy, how many tank engines is the Army going to need to buy and then actually buying them.

RV: Okay.

PC: And it's the part that's concerned with running the depots in the United States.

RV: Okay.

PC: The whole procurement system is part of that and we did a lot of studying on that kind of thing. We actually had infantry tactics.

RV: First time for you here in a sense.

PC: Well we had a little bit in OCS, but not very much.

RV: Right.

PC: We actually had combat arms officers teaching us battalion level infantry tactics.

RV: How was that for you?

PC: Two up, one back, put the Cav in the swamp. (Laughing) Inside joke.

RV: Explain that, that's interesting, explain that.

PC: The basic model at that time was you put two battalions forward, one rear in Reserve; in the Calvary you're scouts. And of course, the last thing you want to do is put an armored Calvary unit in a swamp.

RV: Sure.

PC: But the combat arms guys were always kidding us that we loggies were going to put the Cav in the swamp. They actually put a question on the test where the answer was: Two up, one back, and you put the Cav in the swamp. That was the actual right answer.

RV: Oh really?

PC: Yeah.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: They had a good sense of humor about it. And so we did a little bit of tactics, but we had a very long exercise, running exercise where we had to contract for the design of something, approve the design and then contract for procurement as a way of going through this, the learning exercise, the learning process. For me of course, wholesale was a totally new concept; I had no clue. You know, I had been in the 2nd Armor Division, I'd been in the 1st Calvary Division, I had no clue what the wholesale level was.

RV: Right.

PC: And so it was all pretty new to me, did pretty well. I was on the Commandant's List halfway through and one off at the end of the course. It was also a time when you got to know some of your peers, guys who would be elsewhere in positions of responsibility as you all advanced forward, helped me a couple of times, helped my guys a couple of times. I could say, "Well, I know John Smith, he's a NCO assignments and I can call him and see if I can help you out."

RV: Right.

PC: That kind of thing, the old boy network.

RV: Right, okay. Was it an effective training for you to move you forward?

PC: In terms of exposing us to new concepts, new systems, that kind of thing, yes. In terms of a lot of real knowledge, not so much. We used to joke that it was six months of instruction crammed into nine months. It totally revamped now, the courses are now are quite demanding. You do flunk out now, you can; I should say you can flunk out now.

RV: And you guys could not?

PC: We could, but boy you really had to work at it.

RV: You had to try hard.

PC: You had to really try hard to flunk out of an Army course at that time.

RV: Okay.

PC: It wasn't a gentleman's course, we had exams and such, but boy you really had to try hard to flunk out.

RV: Was this Pat a reflection of the US Army at the time in the early 70s because this is when notoriously the Army does start to kind of nosedive a bit as far as quality, people have commented over the years. Did you see this happening?

PC: Yeah, yeah. You really could, you could see it in the quality of the soldiers you were getting, you could, you know, I was talking to a guy in the National Guard, the Illinois Army National Guard when I had that assignment and he was saying, "You know," he said, "When we had the Chicago Riots," he said, "We were good." He said, "We had a lot of long terms guys." Of course, they had everybody in the world enlisting to get into the National Guard, to not go in the regular Army.

RV: Right.

PC: And if they didn't measure up in the National Guard, they got booted into the regular Army, so they were trying hard. But he was very sad that they had been so good and then had deteriorated so much so quickly.

RV: What made it so bad, what was it? Was it the leadership or was it the…you said the quality of the recruits?

PC: I think it was all of the above. The Army got into a mode where people were looking out for their own careers. I mean, I mentioned the six-month Battalion Commander tour.

RV: Yes.

PC: Ridiculous. And got into a mode, "Well you know, if I need to stomp on you to make my career, I will."

RV: That's what you saw at the officer level.

PC: That's what I saw at the officer level and I think that translated on down.

RV: Right.

PC: And if you look at the scandals that happened in Vietnam with…I mean, some senior Sergeants, Major, I mean, they didn't even pretend, it was just theft and that kind of thing. I think the Army just kind of got rotten from the inside out. And it was a rough time in the Army. You know, guys who were on duty, officers who were on duty and had to go through the barracks, used to have to wear a weapon. I mean, they would put guys in wall lockers and throw them out of second floor windows. I mean, there were places where officers and NCOs just didn't go, it's like, you know, the cops don't go alone to South Chicago, you know, you didn't go in some of those barracks. It wasn't a good time.

RV: What changed it?

PC: A growing awareness that the Army was indeed in serious trouble. The end of the war and a refocusing on the Soviet threat. Some superior leadership and a very determined effort by a lot of people to change the Army for the better and it did. The Army today is, I mean, you cannot even compare the Army of the '70s to the Army today. We have got an outstanding Army now. The kids that are in the Army now are just damn good, they're just damn good at what they do and they want to get out there and get it done and the standards I think are back, I'm very proud of our Army now. What they did in both Gulf Wars I think chose.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Not that we had a hell of a strong opponent, but I think even if we had, I think our guys would've shown you what they could do now.

RV: Nevertheless, a hundred hour war, I mean, of major actions is impressive.

PC: Pretty impressive.

RV: Across the board.

PC: The guy, the Logistics General that supported the big sweep around to the west…

RV: This is Desert Storm.

PC: Desert Storm, the first one, I'm sorry. Yeah, had been our Deputy Commander when I was a Battalion Commander, 21st Support Command.

RV: Let me ask you one more question about the quality of the Army. Can you give me dates of when you first started to see the decline and then approximate dates and

when you saw it, "Okay, I'm proud again of being in this Army?" Not that were ever not proud, but just when you saw it coming around.

PC: I think '73, '74, it started to really decline. And what amazed me in retrospect was the steepness of that curve. I mean, it was like driving off a cliff.

RV: It went fast.

PC: God, it was just one day we're good and one day we're not, it seemed like. I'm sure it wasn't, but it seemed like and it was a long battle back. It wasn't until, god I want to say the late seventies, maybe even early eighties before I think we really started to come back. But you got guys like Powell in there and we'll take fifty more of him, thank you very much.

RV: And you're referring to Colin Powell.

PC: Colin Powell.

RV: Yes.

PC: One of my personal heroes. Another guy who almost got out of the Army during Vietnam because he was so disgusted, but we really did come back. One of the interesting things, not fun, but interesting things when I was a Battalion Commander was many of the senior NCOs were the guys who had come in the Army in the early seventies. And then after we kind of got our feet back under us, we started getting some real sharp bright kids in. And I mean, the Spec 4s were a lot smarter than a lot of the NCOs and knew a lot more than a lot of the NCOs. Dealing with that was really difficult and I mean, you couldn't let the young kids bad mouth the senior NCOs, even though a lot of times they were right.

RV: And I know that provided a nice challenge of management.

PC: Boy, it was a very difficult leadership challenge.

RV: Were you Captain or Major at this point?

PC: Well, by this time I was Lieutenant Colonel.

RV: Okay.

PC: No, and I had had a stretch of staff assignments in there. To give you a little chronology, I went to Germany the first time. I was there four years. My first two years, I was in a staff logistics job. My last two years, I was a Maintenance Operations Officer and a Battalion Executive Officer. I came back to the States in '81 and I went to the

Logistics Executive Development Course, which is the Army senior course devoted specifically to logistics, not when it was all wholesale and national level logistics. Then I stayed at Aberdeen, I'm sorry, not at Aberdeen, at Ft. Lee, which is the home of the Quarter Master Corps. I stayed on there and I worked in Automated Logistics Systems Development for a while and then I worked in Force Development. And in fact, we had a new concept called the light division, which is paying big dividends for us. Interesting, interesting time; I got to see some fascinating stuff. Some Generals just did not believe in this new concept. The Soviets were still a threat at that time. A light division just was not going to work. Well, it wasn't going to work against the Soviets and their tanks, but that wasn't what it was designed for. We had Generals resign and retire because they couldn't…and the Chief-of-Staff of the Army told them, "If you can't get behind this, goodbye." A couple of them did. But we got to do a lot of force development work on this new division, work for another very charismatic guy, Wild Bill Flynn who wound up as a three star and deservedly so. Crazy man.

RV: Well, we'll talk about that.

PC: He was a crazy man.

RV: We'll talk about him and his concept.

PC: Anyway, so I was at Aberdeen, I mean, I'm sorry, Ft. Lee. By this time, the guy that had been my Battalion Commander when I was an XO, Maintenance Operations Officer, an XO, was at MILPERCEN. He sent me to the Pentagon, one of the two worst assignments of my career.

RV: The other being?

PC: God, I'd have to think.

RV: Okay.

PC: (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: Probably the Readiness Group assignment.

RV: Okay.

PC: But I did not fit in well in the Pentagon. I didn't do poorly. (Intercom Interruption) (Laughing)

RV: Okay Pat, sorry.

PC: I didn't do poorly, I didn't do great, but I just didn't fit in well. I'm relatively proud to say, really interesting, really interesting, learned a lot.

RV: We'll talk about that too.

PC: After that, I was…well while I was there, I was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, selected for Battalion Command, went off to the pre-command course, which was six weeks of German language; rough, rough tour. Six weeks at the Presidio in Monterey, California learning German. The CINCEUR, Commanding General in the United States Army Europe wanted all his Battalion Commanders to speak a little German. And the unit I was going to command had about eight hundred Germans in it. So I went off and took Diana with me. The Army didn't pay for her, we paid her expenses, but she could sit in on my language instruction.

RV: And then help you.

PC: And then help me, which she did. Diana's mother didn't speak anything but German until she was twelve years old.

RV: Really?

PC: Yup.

RV: Oh wow.

PC: Her family history, Esther's family history is really interesting; I mean, it's history-history. Anyway, then a couple of weeks at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas and then back to Germany in Kaiserslautern near the French border.

RV: How do you spell that?

PC: K-a-i-s-e-r-s-l-a-u-t-e-r-n.

RV: Okay, all one word?

PC: All one word.

RV: Okay.

PC: And which is, as the United States Army Europe goes is the rear-rear. All the stuff that's there used to be in France before De Gol booted us out. From there, I commanded for two years, from there I went to Berlin. This was in '88. I was the Maintenance Division Chief there and then became the G-force/Director of Logistics for the United States Army Berlin, which means I was the senior logistics officer for the United States Army in Berlin.

RV: Wow.

PC: And at that time, it was still an occupied city technically.

RV: Yes it was.

PC: We had our French and British counterparts with the Soviets on the other side of the wall. One of the more interesting 4th's of July that I ever had was a party with the Soviet Army in East Berlin.

RV: Okay. We'll make sure to talk about that.

PC: Yeah.

RV: Get your reflection on that.

PC: Interesting. God, there are people dressed like we are, how about that. From there, I got passed over for full Colonel, came back to the States in '91, went to Ft. Hood, I'm sorry, came back to the States in '90, 1990. Was in Berlin when the wall came down, another interesting time. I think I mentioned I got about two hundred pounds of the Berlin Wall in my barn. I'll bring some of that in.

RV: Okay.

PC: Came back to Ft. Hood, was the Corps Maintenance Officer. If you look up staff puke in the dictionary, there's a picture of the Corps G-4 and retired in '91, Texas Tech offered me a job and here I am, so that's kind of a short synopsis.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: I had a tremendously interesting military career. I had the opportunity to do some incredibly interesting things. You stand there and watch them chipping with sledge chambers on the Berlin Wall, you don't get to do that everyday.

RV: No.

PC: Next time I come, I've got a couple of pictures hanging in my office of that time; I'll bring them with me.

RV: Okay, very good. Pat, why don't we go head and stop for today?

PC: Okay.

RV: And thank you for your time and we'll take up here next time.

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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Patrick Curry
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
August 4, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I'm continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Pat Curry. We are again in Lubbock, Texas in the interview room in the Vietnam Archive on the campus of Texas Tech and it's August 4, 2005 and it's about 9:15am Central Standard Time. And Pat, we ended our last session with talking a little bit about the rest of your career and where you went with your Army career up to 1991 when you retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. I'd like to back up and have you discuss in a little more detail your…when you came home and went to college that you're kind of interesting into this atmosphere where the war is winding down, Vietnamization's going on, we are withdrawing troops from South Vietnam, everybody knows the war is ending, we're not sure at this point in 1972 how it's going to end, what's going to happen, but we do know that it's happening and in January or the Spring of 1973, we signed the Paris Peace Accords and we're done. So tell me what the atmosphere was like for you personally when you came back and you got back into school, what was it like on campus? Did you, I mean, you're still in, but I assume you dressed as a civilian and I mean, did people know you were in the Army, did you tell them you were in Vietnam, what happened in the classrooms, what was that atmosphere like?

Patrick Curry: Well, there was not a lot of, at least on our campus; there was not a lot of antiwar activity, not a lot of war related activity either way. By then, by '72, it had wound down somewhat at least where I went to school at Cal State, Long Beach. At that time, you didn't hide it, but you didn't advertise the fact that you were in the Army either. I mean you didn't, you know, wear a nametag that said "I'm in the Army."

RV: Well did you have your haircut short still or…?

PC: No, no, I let it grow out a little bit.

RV: Okay.

PC: It was like being a civilian. I mean, I think I mentioned before, the only contact I had with the Army was to draw my paycheck and send in my request for reimbursement. And I wasn't the only one there, there were several other Army guys going to school there as well.

RV: How did you identify them?

PC: Well, one of them I met on a beach in Ensenada. We had gone down to Ensenada during a break at school, had gone down to Ensenada for a vacation and got to talking to this other couple who were down there camping like we were, found out he was also in the military. He was an aviator.

RV: Had he been in Vietnam?

PC: Yes he had, but we didn't talk about it at all and we just talked about school and that kind of stuff. You know, we were, and we did talk about, we were a little older than the average student and a lot older in terms of experiences and places we've been, things we'd done, that kind of stuff. So in terms of a lot of interface with the average nineteen-year-old student, no I just wasn't, we just had nothing in common.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean absolutely nothing in common, so there wasn't a lot of communication.

RV: Right. What about talk about Vietnam? Did you, if you didn't advertise you're in the Army, I can assume you probably didn't advertise you had been in Vietnam.

PC: No, if it didn't come up, I didn't bring it up. Like I said, I didn't hide it.

RV: Right.

PC: But I didn't bring it up either, it just wasn't, I mean, you've got to figure; this is a time when guys working at the Pentagon were told to wear civilian clothes to and from work so they maintained a low profile. So it wasn't something that you spread around a lot. And it just didn't come up a lot frankly.

RV: Yeah. What about in the classroom, what kind of courses were you taking and did social science, history, Vietnam, any of that stuff, current affairs, did it come up in class and what did you do?

PC: Most of my courses of course were Business courses.

RV: Yes.

PC: That was my major. But I took; probably the most interesting course I took was the History of Europe since 1914. And had an excellent professor, he was really good and he didn't look at history in terms of a series of political events, he looked at the whole context. I mean, he played *The Threepenny Opera* in class and the whole works. And I was really kind of hoping we'd get up to, at that time, current events, but we never did make it quite that far. We kind of got to about 1935 or so and then the semester ended.

RV: Okay. So it didn't really come up so much in the classroom?

PC: Not really, I don't remember it coming up very much at all.

RV: Okay.

PC: Really don't. It just wasn't, on the campus, it just wasn't a big hot topic. It was obvious everything was winding down; it was obvious we were pulling out. There were a lot of somewhat older students at this school and they were a little more focused on school than they were on politics and that kind of thing. So it just didn't come up an awful lot.

RV: What did you think about at the time the whole Nixon/Kissinger, you know, public image, the negotiating going on, you know, peace with honor, statements, you know, going '72 and into '73, what were your feelings about it?

PC: Well, it was I think intuitively obvious to the casual observer that what we were trying to do was get our butts out of Vietnam as quickly as humanly possible with the minimum amount of embarrassment that we could. But clearly the priority was getting out and I think the political posturing that was going on about peace with honor and that kind of thing was just that. And Nixon didn't want to just cut and run, but clearly he was getting out. And so I think the peace with honor thing was just rhetoric. I never met anybody that really thought Vietnamization was going to work. Bare in mind, I didn't, you know, have coffee with Generals everyday.

RV: Sure.

PC: But you know, among the guys that I knew, I never knew anybody that thought that was going to work.

RV: Did you guys talk about it?

PC: Yeah.

RV: Like the people within your circle?

PC: Yeah we did and the military guys that I knew, you know, before I went to school and I was at the Advanced Course and afterwards and like I say, I don't know of anybody that ever thought that was going to work. The desire to fight just wasn't there.

RV: What did you think at the time? Did you think it was a good idea for us to leave or did you think that we needed to do something different and stay?

PC: Well, I thought that we needed to do something different and stay, but I also didn't think that we could stay given the environment in the United States. It was obvious to me or appeared to me I guess I should say that there was just no way that the pressure to leave was going to get out. Or I'm sorry, the pressure to leave was going to decrease, that it was only going to grow, that I mentioned before, you know, it had become a very popular, a very trendy thing to oppose the war. There was more and more of that going on. I did not think it was the right thing to do, but clearly it was going to have to happen.

RV: Right. What do you think the United States, this is again a counterfactual question, but at the time, what did you think the United States should be doing versus withdrawing? Do you remember having thoughts, like, you know, we really need to step up the air raids, we need to take troops from this region and put them here?

PC: Yeah, and bearing in mind that I was pretty unsophisticated. I still am, but even more so at that time. You know, the obvious answer was step up the bombing raids, go into Cambodia, expand the kinds of things that Nixon was doing to take the war to the enemy. I think one of the major problems with Vietnam was we in essence sat there in South Vietnam and waited for the enemy to come to us. You cannot win a war that way. A defensive war cannot be won. And I think that history shows that the kinds of things that Nixon did in terms of going into Cambodia and wiping out the huge depots that were there, the bombing campaigns in North Vietnam, those kinds of things had an effect and they had a very strong negative effect on the NVA (North Vietnamese Army). I mean, we destroyed a lot of their logistics tail and inevitably that has an effect. Even when you

could live on a handful of rice a day, you know, the old cliché about those guys, if you don't have that handful of rice, and if you don't have bullets, you're in trouble.

RV: Why did we wait so long do you think?

PC: I think the political aspects of it, just the idea of going into a sovereign nation that technically was not involved in the war, theoretically was not involved and clearly was, and that was a source of great frustration to a lot of people. I mean, this imaginary line of the ground, they could cross it at will, we couldn't.

RV: Right.

PC: But yeah, if we seriously wanted to win that war, we needed to do those kinds of things. I think that the question was China, there were I believe Chinese and North Korea's advisors and that kind of thing. Periodically we would find evidence of Soviet and Chinese advisors in South Vietnam.

RV: You mean in North Vietnam, you said North Korea?

PC: I'm sorry, North Vietnam, yes, I'm sorry. I think about my dad.

RV: Yes.

PC: (Laughing) But yeah, periodically we'd find evidence of Soviet and Chinese advisors in South Vietnam where they'd been accompanying NVA and that kind of thing. So, you know, Macarthur significantly miscalculated in Korea and I think that people were being extraordinarily cautious about that in Vietnam. The other side is that there was a military contingent that wanted to use nuclear weapons.

RV: Yes.

PC: And I think that was horrendous, that just was not acceptable to me, not that anybody ever asked I mean.

RV: At the time?

PC: At the time, ever since and now. I think those guys were nuts, wanting to use nuclear weapons in a place like Vietnam. I mean, as important as I believe Vietnam was, the short-term survival of the United States was not at risk. I mean, the North Vietnamese were not going to invade Long Beach.

RV: Right.

PC: And there was just absolutely no justification for using nuclear weapons. We did not want to open that box. And boy, I think all those guys should've been retired immediately. But I have pretty strong feelings on that.

RV: Yes.

PC: I've already said, I think using the nuclear weapons in Japan in World War II was fully justified and certainly the way to go. You know, as a guy who probably wouldn't be here if they hadn't done that, I obviously have strong feelings. My brother and I talked about that when he came up to visit. He feels more strongly than I do.

RV: Oh yeah?

PC: He's about three years younger; he certainly wouldn't have been here.

RV: (Laughing) That's true.

PC: But anyway, I get pretty rabid when I start talking about using nuclear weapons in Vietnam.

RV: So nuclear weapons according to what you're saying should be used when our national survival is literally at stake?

PC: Yes.

RV: And in Vietnam?

PC: It clearly was not. I think our long-term, well at that time. I mean, who knew what was going to happen to the Soviet Union?

RV: Sure.

PC: Nobody knew that. I mean, they seemed like this huge monolithic block that was just going to be around forever. Obviously the wrong answer, but anyway, that's what it seemed like at the time.

RV: Well they almost had; policy makers almost had to assume that.

PC: Yes. And you know, with thousands of nuclear warheads on both sides and that kind of thing had to be reasonably careful about that. And we certainly didn't want to, like I said, open that box in Vietnam.

RV: Tell me what your reaction was to seeing Vietnam Veterans protest against the war, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, the VVAW, folks like that who were, you know, right there in the national law in Washington D.C. throw their medals on the Capitol steps and at the Whitehouse?

PC: I had two; I was of two minds about that. One was they had every constitutional right to do that, that's freedom of speech, that's why we have an Army and they absolutely had the right to do that. The other side was boy; it really pissed me off. I mean, they were degrading and denigrating the thing that I had chosen to spend my life doing and although I probably didn't even know that at the time, but I was still in the military and it really, it upset me considerably.

RV: So you thought that they were not only insulting you all of that generation personally, they were kind of insulting the military establishment?

PC: The military, the Army as a whole. And you know, to a lot of us who were in Vietnam, those medals meant something and to a lot of us, they still do. I mean, I think I mentioned, I'm not by any stretch of the imagination a Kerry fan, and that puts it rather mildly, but boy it made me mad when they started insulting his Silver Star. I mean, to me, based on my experience, if you got a Silver Star you earned it. You did not get that for some little minor picky thing. And I'm not saying it never happened, but I'm saying I never saw it happen, that somebody got a Silver Star for political reasons or something like that.

RV: Right, right.

PC: And it made me mad when they started that kind of crap about his Silver Star.

RV: There were veterans who threw their Silver Stars back.

PC: Yeah. Yeah, I don't understand that, maybe that's the best way to put it; I just don't understand it. You know, they were recognized for something heroic that they did, something very courageous and brave that they did and to me that should've meant something to them. And maybe it did and maybe that's why they threw the medal is because they were giving up something that was important to them to make a statement.

RV: So you can see that side of it?

PC: I can see that side of it, but I sure disagree with it, I don't think it was a right thing to do.

RV: Yeah, okay. Let me ask you about some of the big events that happened there in the early seventies and just kind of get your reaction based on just coming out of the war and the war's still going on and then the United States pulling out and watching

the war continue. Tell me first about Kent State. How did you react to that? I mean, that's 70 and then '71, '72, '73, you know, it's got the fallout for a couple of years there and today even when you mention that university's name, people, one of the first things they think about is that incident of antiwar protestors.

PC: Certainly what I think about and it took me years to understand that. And you know, you mentioned reflecting back on things and thinking about things and that's one of the things that I've reflected back on and thought about a lot.

RV: Why? I mean, maybe the answer's obvious, but tell me why that you have thought so much about that?

PC: You know, it was such a huge event; we killed our own citizens. And yeah, I didn't agree with what they were doing and I thought they were doing the wrong thing, but you know, it wasn't a capitol punishment kind of crime.

RV: Right.

PC: It was clearly a panic/training issue with the National Guard guys that were there and it clearly should never have happened. At the time when it happened, I was mostly just confused. I didn't understand truly what had happened and I certainly didn't understand why it had happened. And it took me years to kind of sort through that and you know, there was a group of people that said, "Well you know, they got what they deserved." And I mean, my god, no nineteen year old deserves to get killed for expressing their opinion, even if they were running rampant and you know, running around on campus, it's still an eighteen or nineteen year old and it just shouldn't have happened.

RV: It wasn't one person; it was four people that were killed.

PC: Yes, yeah, yeah.

RV: Now you've had direct involvement with the National Guard right there in 1974. What did you see as the state of the National Guard because they're the ones who were on the campus that day?

PC: It was in sad shape. I mean, and the National Guard officer senior NCOs who had been around a while would tell you that. They were in bad shape.

RV: What way?

PC: Very low motivation, not trained at all. There had been a tremendous turnover, been a tremendous influx of people who didn't want to go to Vietnam and low morale and just very difficult to kind of try to pull that together. For the leadership to kind of resolve those kinds of problems, those kinds of issues, you know, antiwar guys would go into the National Guard so that they didn't have to go to Vietnam. They weren't going to get in there and work hard for the National Guard to make that a better place.

RV: Right.

PC: And they didn't. And don't get me wrong; there were some very good, very dedicated people there.

RV: Sure.

PC: But I think they were the minority and I think they were pretty frustrated. A lot of them got out just out of shear frustration. You know, I remember talking to one Major in the Illinois National Guard, good guy, real sharp guy. And he was pretty upset and he was talking about when they'd had the riots in Chicago when Martin Luther King was assassinated and he said, "You know, we were good." He said, "We were sharp, we were disciplined, we knew what we were doing." And he said, "Boy, we've just gone to hell." And so he was pretty upset about it.

RV: That's what, six years later, seven.

PC: Six years and it just went down that fast, like the rest of the Army.

RV: Yeah.

PC: You know, it just crashed that fast.

RV: Was that because of Vietnam and what had happened or was it because of the leadership within the Army and Vietnam? I mean, why do you think that happened so quickly?

PC: Well you know, the Army is a reflection of society at large in many ways. In many ways, it's kind of a little insulated society, but in many ways, you know, it's a reflection of society at large. And with everything that went on in the sixties, you know, sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll and the antiwar movement, I mean, those were the kinds of things that were happening and those kinds of thing inevitably affected the Army. A lot of the old values had not broken down; they had vanished. And you know, I had, have,

not had, he's my longest oldest friend, we've been friends since, I mean for almost forty years, actually, for forty years. And he came from a very stable middleclass family. He's father had been a MD (Medical Doctor) and an Air Force Colonel and they'd been very much upper-middle class and he just dropped out completely.

RV: Dropped out of…?

PC: Society. I mean, you know, remember the old cliché, "Tune in, turn on and drop out;" well he did that.

RV: He was of that mindset?

PC: Yeah, he wasn't real a hippie, but boy he was pretty close. And he wasn't living on the streets, but pretty close. And I bring him up because you know, he's such a symbol of the times that you know, things were changing. You would've expected Jay to have this fairly ordinary middle-class kind of life, you know, three-bedroom, two-bath in the suburbs and that kind of thing. And here he just went way, way out. And I mean, you talk about two opposite ends of the spectrum, but we stayed friends.

RV: You did continue to communicate?

PC: We did, absolutely, we were always friends, you know. And we each respected what the other was doing and we were friends first and all the other stuff came later.

RV: Right.

PC: And despite the fact that he's probably as far left as I am right, neither one of us are at the way far out ends of the spectrum. I mean just, we're a lot closer to the center than that, but we're probably equal distances from the center if that makes any sense.

RV: Yes.

PC: And we're still good friends. And I just talked with him on the phone the other day in fact.

RV: Did you meet him in…?

PC: In college, we were fraternity brothers.

RV: Okay.

PC: The first time around.

RV: Okay.

PC: He's probably the reason I didn't graduate. But… (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) I'm sure he'll appreciate that.

PC: Not true. Nah, he'd probably take credit for it. But anyway, and I bring him up because he's such a symbol of what happened with things changing so fast. You know, if you didn't live through that time and I was pretty well insulated in the military. I lived on base and that kind of thing.

RV: Right.

PC: But you know, I mean, VW buses all over the place, just full of kids who had left home and gone.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And the old values vanished so quickly and were replaced with kind of a vacuum; and in Vietnam, very much of a morale vacuum. And you know, that's when we started talking about situational ethics and those kinds of things. And so there was just nothing to fill that vacuum. And structures crumbled without anything to replace them. And in many ways, it was just chaos. I mean, when you saw bankers wearing flowered shirts (Laughing), I mean, you know, you just had to figure things were weird.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And things were weird too.

RV: Yeah, yeah. Tell me…go head.

PC: Did all that make any sense?

RV: Absolutely, absolutely.

PC: Did that answer your question?

RV: Yes, absolutely.

PC: Okay, it was a strange, strange time.

RV: And I think that's what you're conveying that things kind of flipped upside down for a while.

PC: They did.

RV: And you know, with what was happening in Vietnam, we were faced with our top officials saying, "We have achieved peace with honor. South Vietnam is an independent state, we have achieved these goals and we are able to bring our boys home." And you're saying, you saw that as rhetoric, do you still think…?

PC: Oh yeah, I don't know of anybody that believed that.

RV: Okay.

PC: And regardless of whether they were right or left, I don't know of anybody that believed that. I think it was just very cynical politics.

RV: What'd you think of Kissinger?

PC: Oh, he was a brilliant guy, just brilliant guy. And a little too, perhaps a little too pragmatic, a little too willing to do whatever was necessary to achieve his goals, but certainly a brilliant man.

RV: What did you think about the United States leaving in 1973? I mean, we're out, there are no ground troops there, there's some unofficial folks still hanging out assisting the locals, but we're essentially out of the war. Did you feel a sense of relief; did you feel like, "Boy, we didn't do this well?" What were your feeling there in 1973?

PC: Very much we didn't do this well; very much we lost the war.

RV: Why did you think that?

PC: Well I mean, let's face it; we tucked our tail between our legs and hoofed it on out of there. You know, we didn't achieve peace with honor; we didn't even achieve peace. We were not fighting, but boy the South Vietnamese that had depended on us sure were. Boy, I was upset, I just did not think it was the right thing to do, I didn't think it was the right thing to do ethically and morally; I didn't think it was the right thing to do politically. Just in every aspect that you could think of, I thought it was wrong.

RV: What about your feelings in April 1975? You know, eighteen months later, you've got the fall of the entire country.

PC: God I was heartbroken.

RV: Did you watch it on TV?

PC: Yeah I did and it was very, very difficult for me to watch. I was just heartbroken. You know, I mean, I thought we already lost the war and I was not surprised that South Vietnam collapsed; I was a little surprised it happened that fast. And in retrospect, I probably shouldn't have been surprised, but god I was just heartbroken. That picture of that helicopter is just etched in my mind. Of course, it's been replayed so many times since then, movies and everything else, but you know, if you've seen *Miss Saigon*. But yeah, I was heartbroken.

RV: What did Diana think; do you remember talking to her about it?

PC: No, I really don't. And incidentally, she's going to call you to schedule an appointment.

RV: Excellent.

PC: Because we talked about it last night and she filled out her forms and all that.

RV: Excellent.

PC: But I don't think she was quite as emotionally involved in it as I was.

RV: Sure. Did you tell her how you were feeling? Did you say, "I'm heartbroken; I just can't believe this." I feel this and this and this or…

PC: Yeah, you know, I really don't remember, but I probably did.

RV: Okay. You weren't keeping all that inside?

PC: No, I don't keep much inside. You know, pretty much if I feel it, I say it. But to this day, I just think we gave them such a bad deal. And we didn't even try, you know. I mean, when it was obvious what was going to happen, we didn't even try to get our friends out. You know, we just…I guess it's real politic, but yeah, I mean, we just abandoned them. And you know, that's not our country's values, we're supposed to stand by our friends, you know. And you know, the leadership might not have been the best guys in the world, but you know, there were a lot of guys at lower levels that were our friends and that staked their whole future on us and their families futures on us and wound up as Bo People or worse in the camps and that kind of thing.

RV: When you see Vietnamese today, do you think about that here in the United States?

PC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But mostly what I think about is, "My god, look what they've done." You know, I mean, if you go, we've got relatives in LA or if you go out there and the honor graduates or valedictorians and salutatorians are always Vietnamese names. I mean, they just work so hard, you know.

RV: Well let me ask about another subject that occurred and was very much in the public eye in 1971 forward was the My Lai Massacre and that, first, what was your reaction to hearing about this as someone in the US Army? And then also, this is attached to Vietnam, it's one of these incidents where when people think of the war, if they listed ten or fifteen things, knowledgeable people think about the war, they might

say, you know, “My Lai.” Tell me what your feelings are about My Lai as an Army officer and then, in general, about its attachment to Vietnam.

PC: At the time, I didn’t believe it. I just said “No!” In fact, Jay Gammel, my friend that I mentioned, his mom, Jane, was a real sweetheart and I was kind of like a second son to her and she asked me about it and I said, “No, it didn’t happen, I don’t believe it.” And when it started coming out that obviously it had happened and that obviously some very senior people had tried to cover it up. I mean, I was alternately disgusted to the point of being nauseated and furious in that an Army officer would do something like that. You know, what happened to duty, honor, country, you know? We’re Army officers, we’re not supposed to do that kind of thing and we’re sure as hell not supposed to cover it up.

RV: And this is the person who was the one who shouldered the, majority of the blame was a Lieutenant, same rank as you when you were over there.

PC: Yup, yup. And he deserved a hundred times what he got.

RV: He was eventually pardoned out and set free.

PC: Yeah, and he should’ve been, I wont say he should’ve been shot, but he certainly should’ve gone to Leavenworth for the rest of his life, as should Medina. And I mean, these guys were no better than common murderers walking out on the street here. And it just, to this day, to this day, I guess I better calm down, to this day, it just makes me furious. And the General lost one star and that kind of thing and it’s just obscene. And then Medina gets this big high paying job from some right-winged nut. And I mean these guys were murderers. They disgraced their nation, they disgraced their Army and they were rewarded for it. And you know, and that’s what was crazy about the time. I mentioned that things were just so upside down, you know. I supported the Army, I supported the war effort, I did not and do not support mass murder.

RV: Of course.

PC: And I just, you know, I wasn’t a grunt and maybe I just can’t understand the mindset, Calley’s mindset, Medina’s mindset. I mean, they were out there facing it everyday, but you know, the Brigade Commander and the Division Commander, those guys had covered it up, you know. I can never understand that.

RV: To play Devil's advocate for a moment, don't atrocities happen in every war?

PC: They do and they're not justified in any war. You know, they certainly happened in Korea, they certainly happened in World War II. I mean, watch *Band of Brothers*, you know, they had some fairly frank incidents in there, but that doesn't make it right in any war. It's no less wrong in Vietnam than it was in World War II.

RV: Calley's still alive and well in Georgia right now as we speak in 2005. What would you say to him?

PC: I'd say, "You're scum," that's exactly what I would say.

RV: That's from one Army officer to a former.

PC: From one Army officer to a former Army officer, "You're scum and you got away with something you shouldn't have gotten away with." I mean, how do you ever justify automatic weapons fire on a ditch full of women and children? I mean, these weren't combatants, you know, these were terrified human beings and you just can't ever, I don't care what you say about combat fatigue and that kind of thing, you just can't ever justify that.

RV: How do you think then on the heels of that conversation and that exchange with us, tell me about the role the media played in the war? Going back, you know, kind of before you were there, what did you see and hear and then obviously you know that media played a larger and larger role, especially, Tet Offensive and post-Tet and with the war in Iraq, we have reporters right there on the frontlines, the embedded reports, different policy that they, the people who are orchestrating this said was a direct reflection of what went wrong in Vietnam, that that media coverage was uncontrolled to an extent and this one was going to be, allow them to see it, but you also can control that because they're right there with you. So tell me overall, media coverage of the Vietnam War and what role that played for you personally and for the country.

PC: Well first of all, I'm sorry I got so emotional about My Lai; it's a very emotional subject with me even now.

RV: Well Pat, you're not alone in that.

PC: I feel sure. And one of these days, I'll find out how most other people feel about it. And the other side of it was on a little more calculating or cold side was it

certainly gave the antiwar forces a tool, a lever, another lever. You know, there were some real pivotal events, Tet being one of them, the picture of the little girl who'd been burned by napalm: another one, and My Lai: another one.

RV: My Lai was on the cover of *Time Magazine* or *Life Magazine*.

PC: Yup. And the media I think did the right thing there on My Lai in exposing it. Because clearly the Army wasn't going to. But anyway, as far as media coverage goes, you know, the reason we lost Tet, we won Tet, the big Tet; we won the big Tet militarily. It was a huge defeat for the Vietnamese, North Vietnamese. The North Vietnamese could not compete with us in set peace battles. They didn't have the weapons, they didn't have the numbers, they just couldn't do it. I mean, we can sit up and puff and blow machine gun fire and 105 artillery fire down on them forever and they can't even hope to reach the gun platform. But thanks to the media coverage, we certainly lost Tet politically.

RV: What do you mean by that?

PC: The media looked past the military side of it and I think put their own interpretation on it. They chose to say the fact that the Vietnamese could, North Vietnamese could mount such an offensive, just the fact that they could mount such an offensive was a major defeat. To this day, I don't understand that perspective. It's a war; any sensible armed force is going to try to get on the offensive. I mean, that's how you win a war; you go on the offensive. And clearly that's what they were trying to do. Smart little beggars realized that even if they were beat militarily, they were going to win politically and they were right, thanks to the media coverage. Another pivotal event was the picture of the Vietnamese policeman executing with a pistol the NVA guy. And the right-winged tried to justify that by saying, "Well, the guy who was killed had just killed half a dozen of these guys." Well you know, we're supposed to be above that.

RV: Right.

PC: Rule of law, that kind of thing. But anyway, I think the media chose to cover it as a defeat, made a conscious decision to do that and did so and succeeded in changing the political perspective on the war, the mainstream perspective on the war to one that was negative and to one that Tet was a major defeat when in fact it was not.

RV: Right there at this pivotal time in 1968, I can kind of see you taking that as the…the media coverage was there before, but it really shifted things post-Tet or during Tet and post-Tet. And then Johnson said in 1968 or shortly thereafter, talking about Walter Cronkite's statements on television, the leading newsman, newsperson of the day. He said, "Above all else, Conkrite, I have lost the average American citizen," and that's paraphrasing him. But what did you think of Conkrite's statements and kind of that idea, that he had…a newsman is saying that on national television?

PC: Well, I thought it was wrong of Conkrite to do that. You know, the news, at least the news media at least pretends to be unbiased. You know, my brother I mentioned was visiting a couple of weeks ago and he asked me why I was watching Fox. He's a Kerry guy; I'm a Bush guy, you know, so it gets interesting. He asked me why I was watching Fox. And I said, "Well you know, I watch Fox half the time, I watch CNN half the time, so I come out somewhere in the middle." And I think that's a true statement. But you know, I think it was wrong of Conkrite to do that. The news is supposed to be unbiased, they're supposed to present events and facts and if it's interpretation, they're supposed to say that so that people will know they're hearing opinions, not facts. They pretend to be unbiased; I don't think they are. And Jay Gammel incidentally, my friend works in the media, we don't discuss this. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And I do, I think it was wrong of Conkrite to say that, but I agree with what Johnson said, that clearly showed he'd lost the mainstream and that the silent majority wasn't there anymore or at least was dwindling rapidly. And so I think was an inaccurate observation.

RV: Do you think that Vietnam being the first TV war that here's the war, you can watch it on the evening news as you eat, you know, supper with your family. What kind of effect does that have on a country, what did you see then?

PC: Well I think it had a real major effect. I think that seeing what happens is bound to make anyone think about it twice and certainly if you are uncertain, it's going to effect you, it's got to, you know, seeing those kinds of things happen. And I don't think it was so much of the fact that the coverage was there, and I don't mean to sound like a right-winged nut here ranting on about the media. But I think, you know, when the most

respected newsmen in America comes on and starts and makes a blatantly antiwar statement, you know, you just have to look at whether the media as a whole is biased or not. And I think they were and I think it was not so much the fact of the coverage as it was the way the coverage was kind of skewed. And I think, you know, focusing as they're doing now in Iraq totally on the casualties, the setbacks, those kinds of things is bound to skew public opinion. I mean if that's all you hear day after day, week after week, month after month, no matter how strong your feelings are, you're going to start to wonder. And I think people did start to wonder and I think they're starting to wonder now. And all we hear out of Iraq, not all, that's not a true statement, but certainly the majority of what we hear out of Iraq right now is you know, we had x number of casualties today, there were x number of bombs, y number of Iraqis were killed, the minister was killed, etc. But you know, I know guys over there and we're doing a lot of stuff over there; you know, we're putting in sewer systems. They had big coverage I guess a couple of months, two or three months ago about this family that didn't have a sewer and that out in front of their house was this cesspool of sewage and etc.

RV: Right.

PC: And that played two or three days. Well you know, you don't build the infrastructure of an entire country in a year, you know. And there was zero coverage of the water plants, the water purification plants, the electric. We heard a lot about when there wasn't electric.

RV: Right.

PC: When they got electric, we didn't hear anything. I guess I am sounding like a right-winged nut here, but it really frustrates me. There's a lot of really good things going on over there and when we were getting the reports from the frontlines from the guys who really were embedded, you know, we saw a lot of good things. The soldier singing that song from the back of a track with all the Iraqi kids down there and that kind of thing. You know, there's a lot of that kind of thing going on and we just never hear about it. And it's very frustrating, there's no balance I guess is what I'm trying to say.

RV: Right, right.

PC: They have an obligation to report the casualties and the bad things.

RV: Sure.

PC: Clearly.

RV: Sure.

PC: But I think they also have an equal obligation to report some of the good things and they just don't do that. Afghanistan got essentially zero coverage. Okay, one percent coverage until they started having attacks again. All of a sudden Afghanistan's in the news, you know, after months of hearing essentially nothing. Now it's a big deal because there's attacks going on again and that's a little frustrating.

RV: What kind of exposure did you have in Vietnam to reporters and the media? Did they ever visit your area?

PC: Well I don't think I ever saw one.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah, I don't think I ever saw one.

RV: What was your attitude toward them at the time? Were you told, you know, "Here's you can treat the media if you ever cross them?"

PC: I don't know that it ever came up.

RV: Okay.

PC: I don't remember it ever coming up.

RV: Colonel Hawlk never…

PC: No. They weren't going to visit a logistics unit.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, I mean, they were going to go see the grunts, which is as it should be. You know, they were fighting the war. So no, and I don't remember seeing any in the 1st of the 5th Cav either. One time, I wasn't there, but a couple of congressmen came out to visit LZ Dolly on top of My Long.

RV: Right.

PC: And so reporters came with them. But that was the only time I even remember hearing about them.

RV: If you don't mind, let me ask some personal questions about your own reflections from your experience there and how you see yourself today, when you look back at Vietnam today. And this again might be kind of an obvious question, but how do

you feel about your service in Vietnam? You were there a year, but what do you feel about it today?

PC: I'm proud of it, I'm glad I did it and I'm glad I did it for a couple of reasons. I think I mentioned before, I thought that us being in Vietnam was the right thing to do, which is different from saying we handled it well, but being there was the right thing to do. You know, communism was a threat to the United States and I was doing my little part in helping stop communism from spreading. And I thought that the South Vietnamese did not want to be taken over by the North Vietnamese. It turns out, I was right. But yeah, I'm proud I was there and I'm very pleased that it's something now that the country seems to realize that they treated the Vietnam vets poorly and the country seems to be sorry for that, they seem to regret that.

RV: What are the signs that lead you to that conclusion?

PC: Well, the Desert Storm vets are being treated so much better. I mean, they're looked on as heroes and really treated well. And even my buddies in the media have said that, you know, the soldiers coming back from Vietnam were treated poorly and it shouldn't have happened.

RV: So a legacy you're saying of the war is don't treat veterans like we did.

PC: Exactly.

RV: Treat them like you're doing now.

PC: Differentiate between the vet who's doing his job, the soldier who's doing his job and the policy makers whose policies you may disagree with.

RV: Okay.

PC: You know, they're two different things totally and they deserve to be treated separately. And as a Vietnam Vet, I am very much benefiting from what's happening because of Desert Storm and what's going on in Iraq. You know, there have been some major legislative changes lately that have really benefited me personally.

RV: Yes.

PC: And I'm very pleased to see that and very pleased that the current vets, Desert Storm and Iraq are being treated so well both by, well, as by the nation as a whole and by the government, I think that's just fantastic.

RV: You said earlier that you didn't receive any undo treatment when you came home personally, that you really haven't suffered from any kind of PTSD (Post traumatic Stress Disorder), except for the few dreams or the incidents right when you came back. Do you suffer any other or any kind of disabilities from your service in Vietnam? And I know you went around the world with your Army service in general, but what, and you don't have to comment on that at all.

PC: Oh that's fine. I have fifty percent disability. Some of it is just, you know, blood pressure and that kind of stuff, but the major portion of it is my back. I mentioned one time that we had a TACE, a Tactical Emergency for the 11th Armored Cav.

RV: Yes.

PC: And we had everybody down there humping eighty-pound boxes of 50-Caliber ammunition.

RV: Right, right.

PC: And I screwed my back up that day and have paid for it ever since. And so that is the major portion of my disability. It was not a wound and I don't want anybody to think I'm trying to portray it as a wound; I just lifted something wrong and screwed up my back.

RV: And it's been with you ever since.

PC: And it's been with me ever since. So I remember clearly after I got back, I leaned over and picked up a photograph record, an LP and I could feel my back just "Crack!" Side to side it hurt and it still hurts, but you know, it's one of those things.

RV: Yeah. Pat, is there anything that you would change about your Vietnam service, if you could go back and redo something, what would you do?

PC: Oh golly.

RV: Or if there's, I mean, if there's nothing you would change…

PC: You know, I can't think anything really that I would change. I really kind of had, you know, you asked me about how I felt about going to Vietnam and I was glad I went and I'm glad I went to this day. You know, it was a truly unique experience. And it's one of those experiences that as an Army brat, as a soldier at the time that I wanted to have and I'm glad that I had it. And as I mentioned several times, I'm thankful I had the kind of tour that I had. I actually got to see some of the war, the real war instead of

sitting back at Long Binh Depot or you know, somewhere in Bien Hoa for my entire twelve months and essentially having an eight to five job.

RV: Right. You said you weren't in the rear-rear, but in the rear.

PC: I was not in the rear, yeah. And you know, I got to spend some time on firebases and see what that was like. And so no, I can't say that really there's anything about my tour that I would change.

RV: Personally, how do you think your service there in Vietnam and you've commented on this kind of extraneously throughout this whole process, but what do you think was the most significant thing that you took from your experience?

PC: I really think that the most significant thing that I took from my experience in Vietnam was learning from Colonel Hawlk how to be a leader. From watching him, seeing the kinds of things that he did with me that he did with the soldiers, that he did with his other officers and saying, "Boy, that's how you become a leader, that's how you do that." And beyond that, to say, "That's how you become a good human being." And I'm not going to say that Colonel Hawlk didn't look out for his career, you had to, but I don't think that he sacrificed his principles for the sake of his career like some others may have done. And in terms of significant things that followed me through years and years, I think that was the most significant thing. And I guess the reverse of that is I saw some people that I learned, "Aha, okay, I don't want to do that and I sure don't want to be that way," and I remembered those things too. And I think that that follows me to this day. You know, I've been in supervisory positions my whole life, except for a couple of minor staff jobs and I've been a supervisor since I retired and I kind of do the same kinds of things now that I did in the military.

RV: Except you can't write Article 15s.

PC: Except I can't do Article 15s now.

RV: (Laughing) Well, this is a similar question, but how has the war most affected you? Is it through your leadership, your learning of the leadership skills or is it something more personal within yourself, in your personal life?

PC: You know, I really think it's a very personal thing and I think being part of that and part of those times, it just affects you at the deepest levels. And you know, it's funny that the older I get, the more I think about it, the more deeply I think about it, and

the more I think that I realized how much it has affected me. And the older I get, the more proud I become of what I did I think maybe because I understand it a little better. And you know, it's funny; you really tend to feel a sense of kinship, to use an old cliché, a sense of brotherhood with the other guys. You know, I was in the Dallas Airport a little while ago and there was a guy in there, he had a Vietnam hat on. And I looked at him and he looked at me and the conversation always starts out, "When were you there?" Always! And it turns out, we were there overlapping and you know, it was just instant, just a connection. And we talked for a while, you know, about where we were and what we did and everything, what we're doing now, what we were doing at the airport. And when we left, you know, we shook hands and kind of clenched, you know, and it was a real, it was kind of an emotional moment, you know. And it wasn't just the war experience, but at the antiwar experience as well that kind of makes you bond like that and it was just a real neat, real neat experience, just a real good experience, that kind of a connection with another guy, you know. So I think it has (Clears Throat) excuse me, has effected me on a real personal level and it's just a tremendous relief to have that perception. You know, for years after Vietnam, the bad guy in a TV show was always a Vietnam vet, always a drugee, always a homeless guy, a criminal who couldn't get a job and hold a job, you know, that kind of thing. And if you look at *Platoon* and those movies like that, you know, that was the perception of Vietnam Vets. And I have had people ask me, you know, "Did you have horrible times when you got back from Vietnam?" And no I didn't. And I'm just so glad that that kind of perception seems to have gone away, you know. And I don't see the media now saying you know, this Iraqi vet, drug Iraq vet, drug addict homeless person robbed a bank. I'm not seeing that. Instead, I'm seeing this guy on the news last night that hoped to become the first Desert Storm Vet to go to congress. You know, good coverage of the veterans as opposed to what we got after Vietnam.

RV: When I've talked to veterans over the years, I've heard this statement and I'd like for you to reflect upon it, comment upon it if you care to. Many of them say that their year in Vietnam was the most significant thing that's ever happened do them, more than the birth of their children, more than getting married, more than anything. And I am

sure that depends on personality, it depends on their experience in country, what they did, but why do you think that's something that is said and it's been said quite often?

PC: It is not the most significant thing in my life and it's not even close. It clearly was a significant thing in my life. But it is, you know, I mentioned, it's hour after hour of boredom interspersed with moments of stark terror.

RV: Right.

PC: And those moments are so intense and they touch you at such a deep level that it is a tremendously significant thing. And that's not unique to Vietnam. If you read the books about the vets who came back from World War II, many of them feel that way to this day. And I personally think it's a damn shame that a twenty year old has already happened, had the most significant thing in his life that's ever going to happen, that's really unfortunate because I don't think you should ever spend your whole life looking backwards. You clearly should look backwards, but it should not be your whole life. But you know, it can be, especially to the grunts, you know, not so much us guys who were REMFs, but to the grunts, you know, it is so intense that it clearly, it changes you at such a basic level that I can see how people would feel that way.

RV: You're talking about the fighting? The killing?

PC: I'm talking about the fighting guys. The killing, the almost being killed, you know…

RV: The nasty side of it.

PC: The nasty side of it. Well, there's no good side to war, there just isn't. But you know, was it the ultimate failure of politicians? But you know, that seeing, you know, even in my position in the rear, you know, seeing a body laying there just torn apart, those kinds of things have to affect you at a very deep level and it's not part of ordinary life in the United States and it's bound to be significant. I don't agree that it's the most significant. Having my family was far more significant to me than my war experience. Having my daughters and Diana and having my grandkids. I mean, man, if I would've known grandkids were this much fun, I would've had them first.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And my daughters don't even complain now anymore when I spoil the grandkids, they know it's not going to do any good. But those kinds of things are far

more significant to me than my year in Vietnam was. It was a big part of my life, Vietnam was and is and just as Korea was a big part of my dad's life until the day he died.

RV: Sure.

PC: But it certainly is not the most significant thing in my life. And I can tell you that I spend a lot more time thinking about my grandkids and my girls than I do about Vietnam.

RV: Sure. Let's take a break for a minute.

PC: Sure.

RV: Okay Pat. We took a bit of a break there and you had mentioned something else about My Lai and I wanted to get you to repeat that and make some comments on one of the other legacies of My Lai.

PC: Well, My Lai came about because some people wrote letters to their congressman reporting what had happened and obviously congress took action on it and there was a lot of consequences. But as a result of that writing letters, reporting your commander got to be a very trendy thing in the Army. The investigative arm of the Army is the IG, the Inspector General and they just got dozens of letters from congressmen forwarded by congressmen from various people reporting their Commander for, reporting Commanders for a variety of infractions, real and imagined. And so it got to be a time of being pretty careful about the things that you did.

RV: What was the timeframe here when this was…?

PC: Oh, '69, '70, '71. I was investigated.

RV: Were you really?

PC: I really was. I had, you know, as a young officer at the time, I had faked some paperwork for an inspection and was really a fairly minor incident, but nevertheless, one of my less sterling guys wrote his congressman who sent it to the IG and they came down and interviewed me for several hours and everything. The CG (Commanding General) called me to his office and I really thought it was absolutely the end of my career. I just was making plans to get out and go home and find a job and do those kinds of things. And the CG, General Ostrum, Brigadier General, called me in his office and advised me that you know, careers are not ordinarily broken over, made or

broken over minor administrative matters during an inspection and it probably was not a desirable way to go and kind of chewed my butt. But fortunately, he saw it as a minor administrative matter and let me go with a verbal reprimand and didn't give me an Article 15, which for an officer is absolutely the kiss of death. I mean, you cannot survive an Article 15.

RV: Right.

PC: And sent me on my way. And I learned something from that. And when I commanded, I talked about integrity and I tried to maintain my integrity as well.

RV: That's interesting. Did this kind of letter writing legacy of My Lai, did it continue through the seventies?

PC: No, I went for a while and then kind of died out. You know, one of the things was, was when they wrote those letters, they might get a letter back from the congressman saying that it has been investigated and action has been taken, but there was not a whole lot of feedback. You know, they didn't get a letter saying well this Captain had been flayed and boiled in oil. And so there wasn't a lot of feedback. So it kind of died out. But things did happen, but they were private things and they weren't reported.

RV: Right. The guy who wrote you up or wrote the letter, did he ever, he didn't find out what happened to you?

PC: I doubt it.

RV: Okay.

PC: I sincerely doubt it.

RV: Returning to kind of some general questions about Vietnam. A lot of books have been written about the war, lots of books and you still though go into a bookstore and it occupies just a few shelves, not like World War I or World War II or other more popular wars. But tell me your thoughts about, if you have any, about your experiences with books you've read on Vietnam or if you haven't, why you have not read, just comment on what's been written.

PC: Well, I read *Fire in the Lake* and most of the books that…and that's really about the only one that I can remember right off the top of my head. Reading those books kind of made me uncomfortable. I love reading World War II history maybe

because I'm a little more dissociated from it, a lot more dissociated from it. But reading the Vietnam books really kind of made me uncomfortable.

RV: Do you know why?

PC: Maybe because the perspective was always that you know, the United States screwed it up and should have done much better, which I can't disagree with, but which I don't necessarily want to see rehashed over and over and over again. So I have not done a lot of reading about it. I love to read, I read a lot, but it's just not something that I was comfortable reading and so I kind of tended to stay away from it.

RV: Has that continued?

PC: That has basically continued. I've been carrying this book around by some guy named Verrone.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But have not started that one either and I've got it and I look at it everyday, but I just have not picked it up and started reading it. And I'm not sure I can really tell you why. Like I said, it's just a sense of unease, a sense of discomfort as I read these. It just reminds me of the media coverage that was so negative for so many years that it's just not something I'm comfortable with. And I think the movies that came out about Vietnam until just recently here kind of exacerbate that feeling situation.

RV: Tell me about seeing movies on Vietnam. Did you see them; did you not see them, why did you avoid this entirely?

PC: I did see them. I saw *Platoon*, I saw, oh *Napalm in the Morning*.

RV: *Apocalypse Now*?

PC: *Apocalypse Now*. I thought they were both ridiculous movies.

RV: Why?

PC: Well, I mean, they just…I'm not going to say those events did not happen, I think they did happen, I mean, the war related ones, not the stupid ones. But they just carried it to such a tremendous extreme, just to a ridiculous extreme. And unfortunately, a lot of people who had not had that experience didn't realize that it was being carried to an extreme and kind of you know, kind of took it as reality when in fact it definitely was not reality. The one that came out recently, *We Were Soldiers Once*, you know, I saw that movie and at our next staff meeting, we got a bunch of relatively younger people,

thirties and forties and I told them, "If you really want to see a movie about what it was really like in Vietnam, go see *We Were Soldiers Once*."

RV: Why did you tell them that?

PC: Because I think that's a much more accurate perception, a much more accurate portrayal of what went on in Vietnam and the way things were. You know, the Battalion Commander refusing to go back and brief Westmoreland because he was not going to leave his troops in the field. And now this, you know, the earlier days of the war. And the Sergeant Major, you know, I knew a guy like him. Grenda, Sergeant Major Grenda, you know, and I just, based on my experiences, that was a much more realistic portrayal of the way things were. And certainly it exaggerated some points as well and in the other direction, but not nearly to the extreme that *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now* and those kinds of movies did.

RV: Obviously movies made on subjects affect the historical memory of the United States population. What do you think about the Rambos, you know, a Vietnam Veteran who's, you know, holed up in the mountains and misunderstood and hunted and then, you know, comes back to guerilla warfare to defend himself? What do you think about these kinds of things about the stereotypes of the Vietnam Veteran?

PC: Well I think they're silly. And you know, Rambo's not any different than the homeless guy, drug addict who commits a crime, you know, they're both victims. You know, and they're both portrayed as victims who were just because of their Vietnam service, just horrible damaged and can't do anything and it's just ridiculous. You know, I mean, people suffer from PTSD, it's a very real thing, but very few of them become homeless drug addicts or actually become engaged in guerilla warfare against police. You know, it's actually a fairly small minority and those are the ones that get the coverage.

RV: What have been your experiences with Vietnam veterans, how would you describe Vietnam veterans that you've witnessed, that you've seen?

PC: Pretty much normal guys. I mean, most of the Vietnam veterans I've been around were career military obviously and might be a little bit better equipped to deal with it, pre and post service and so that's kind of what we trained to do. But I mean,

pretty much ordinary normal guys. You know, I never knew a single guy who became a mass murderer because he was in Vietnam.

RV: Tell me about overall for the United States, what lessons do you think our country took away from that experience in Southeast Asia?

PC: Well you know, I think the guy that best personifies that is Collin Powell and the Powell Doctrine. Powell is just a brilliant man and an amazing leader. And you know, have a clear mission when you go into a war. What is the mission, how do you define victory, how do you know when you've won? Have an exit strategy. We never had an exit strategy for Vietnam. The strategy was keep sending more troops. You know, instead of throwing money at it, which in essence we were doing, throw troops at it. And don't do it smart, just overwhelm it with force and you cannot overcome guerillas with force. And I think we learned some smart things. I think we learned that you cannot, as an Army or as a nation exist in a moral vacuum and I think that we are paying a price for what happened in the sixties and early seventies; I think we're paying that today in terms of lost time and time out of lives and those kinds of things. But I think the biggest thing as a nation that we've learned is that loss of values. It wasn't that our values changed, it's that we didn't have any values. We didn't have a compass, we were just kind of wandering I think as a nation and Vietnam was the symptom of that. But what was going in Hade Ashbury and a lot of other places was also a symptom of that. It certainly wasn't the whole country, I don't think it was even a majority of the country, but it was a lot of people. And even the people that weren't doing it were certainly affected by it, things that were not accepted, not the norm a few years before became acceptable or at least tolerated. And I think maybe the biggest thing we learned is that, you know, we cannot survive like that. You see a lot of talk about values today and a lot of it's political BS, but a lot of what I think is very valid, what are our values? And the Army had a big program for a long time about values, you know, what are the Army's values and how do we inculcate those values? I was a Battalion Commander at the time, how we do inculcate those values in our subordinates and that kind of thing. And I think it's a very valid question and a very valid concern and I think maybe that's one of the things that came out of Vietnam. And I mentioned before, this idea of dealing with the

soldiers who fight the war differently than the people who make the policy. I think that's a very valid lesson and probably the one I'm happiest to see come about personally.

RV: Do you think Vietnam is still with us today as far as our government and country is concerned?

PC: Oh very much so. And I think just the frequent comparisons between Vietnam and Iraq show that it's clearly still with us. We're I think trying very hard not to make the same kinds of mistakes in Iraq that we made in Vietnam. And I think to some extent we're succeeding. I believe that Iraq will have its own government, I think it's very favorable that their government is asking us to leave as soon as we can rather than asking us to stay and prop them up for years and years. I don't know what's going to happen when we do leave, but I think it's a favorable sign for the United States and the way we're dealing with Iraq as opposed to the way we dealt with Vietnam, which was to make them very dependent on us.

RV: Today's leaders, military leaders, do you think that they get it when it comes to fighting wars around the world? And when I say get it, I mean, as far as strategy. Can they differentiate between a guerilla type action like the VC were waging against the Americans versus a full conventional war such as we saw in Desert Storm, with some guerilla elements thrown in? I mean, do you think that they have learned, military officers, the general officers who make these large decisions?

PC: Well you know, I'm so out of touch that it's really, that's a difficult judgment for me to make. I watch with interest the friction between Rumsfeld and the senior military officers where the military wants the heavy weapons, the new artillery, new state of the art fighter aircraft, those kinds of things kind of to the exclusion of much else, at least that's what I'm reading. And I'm not sure that that's necessarily the way to go. Of course, now the word is is that the next big adversary will be the Chinese and that certainly wouldn't be a guerilla war, so maybe they're on the right track. You know, and I talked about before the resistance to the light division concept, and that some general officers actually retire because, with you know, strong encouragement because they were not able to accept and support that concept. And I think maybe we do have a little bit too much of heavy armor mindset. There certainly is a place for heavy forces and I think

they're essential and we have to keep heavy forces. Desert Storm and the Chinese I think clearly show that.

RV: Yes.

PC: But there's also, has to be space for lighter forces. You know, trying to use tanks to do what we're doing in Iraq. Much of it just doesn't work. And you know, we started off with a huge advantage in Iraq by deposing Saddam. You know, we made so many friends in Iraq that we started off with a huge advantage. And even though we're dealing with such a different culture with the Islamic Culture that in many ways is so insular that it's very difficult. I think we have done much better there than we did in Vietnam and I think largely that's because of a lot of the things that we learned in Vietnam. The senior leadership of the Army today are very bright, very intelligent articulate guys who have a clear vision of where they want to take the Army and I guess the question is is does that vision coincide with reality and I think to a large extent it does.

RV: Right. So the lessons have been incorporated…?

PC: I really think so, I really think that as a nation and as a military, we've learned those lessons to a very large extend and I think we're acting on those lessons. You know, clearly when Powell was chairman of the Joint Chiefs, we had one of those lessons. And you know, everybody knew the Powell Doctrine, you know, and the Schwarzkopf's, who was a guy I'm glad I didn't work for.

RV: Why do you say that?

PC: He's a tough guy to work for. Man, he's hard. And I mean, he'll burn the Staff Officers out just by working them so hard. And you only get one mistake and he's a tough guy to work for and he can be tough because he's so damn good. And when you are going to command in the Army, you go to a school called the Pre-Command Course, and Schwarzkopf was a Division Commander at that time when he came and gave us a speech and just probably the best speaker I've ever heard.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah. A friend of mine was a Battalion XO in the 24th when he commanded and he said that Schwarzkopf as a Two Star had a sunrise division formation. Had the whole division out there and we're talking twenty thousand guys with all their

equipments; equipment tanks and PCs and all of that kind of stuff. And he gave them a speech at sunrise.

RV: Everyday?

PC: No, no, just one special occasion. And old Jim Haskey told me that by the time Schwarzkopf was done speaking, he said these guys were jumping up and down and foaming at the mouth, they just wanted to go kill somebody, you know. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: He was such a charismatic leader and speaker that he could just, I mean, get people fired up.

RV: Okay.

PC: And of course, you know, they're both retired now, but just typical I think of the kind of leaders that we have. And you know, in the Army, the system works, you know, the cream rises to the top. I mean, the guys who were good and who were smart and who know how to manage their careers, you know, they rise to the top. And you don't get to be a General in the Army by being a dummy. And you know, I have a lot of respect for anybody who makes General Officer.

RV: Okay. How do you think the United States government has treated its Vietnam veterans?

PC: Until recently, pretty poorly.

RV: What have you seen?

PC: I'll give you a personal example. They used to have a thing called dual compensation. I'm fifty percent disabled and that was determined by the Veterans Administration when I retired. So I got veterans disability pay to compensate me for that. My military retired pay was reduced dollar for dollar by the amount of my Veterans' Disability Compensation. So, my net benefit for being fifty percent disabled due to my military service as determined by the VA was the tax benefit because VA compensation is non-taxable whereas retirement pay is taxable. Now that, when I mentioned that the government has treated us quite well lately, that's one of the things they've changed. They're phasing in over ten years, dual compensation is no longer around, they're phasing in over ten years where you will be able to get both. So every year, I get a little

bit more retired pay until we come up to the amount that had been deducted. I still don't get it all…

RV: That's a lot of money lost.

PC: It is a lot of money lost. And so that's, I think that was…

RV: It's a good example.

PC: That was kind of poor.

RV: Yeah, yeah.

PC: And so that's kind of an example of how things went.

RV: Tell me about your opinion of Vietnam today, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Do you have desire to go back and see it?

PC: You know, I really don't. I just have no desire. I read about the guys, I watch the TV documentaries about the guys that go back and I guess I understand that. And if you would offer me a trip today, I'd take it, but more out of vital curiosity than anything else. I just don't really have any big emotional attachment to the country of Vietnam as it is today. You know, the Vietnam that I knew is gone; I have no love for the current government of Vietnam. When I look at John McCain, I remember and I don't like what they did and I don't like them because they did it. And yeah, they can dislike me because I fought them in a war, but I never tortured or me personally, I never tortured their people as a government policy. You know, obviously we tortured Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese that we captured. I mean, that's pretty common knowledge, but it wasn't government policy.

RV: Right.

PC: And that was their government policy. So no, I don't have any desire to go back at all.

RV: You don't want to see Tay Ninh or Quan Loi, any of that?

PC: No, no. I'd be very surprised if any fragment of what I knew there is still there. So no, I just don't have any desire to go back. You know, like we were talking about before, it's not one of the most significant events in my life and obviously it's an important event or I wouldn't be here. But no, I don't have any desire to go back.

RV: Okay.

PC: I'm not curious about that.

RV: Okay. When you finished with the Illinois National Guard, you're embedded now in your career, you have decided this is your life.

PC: Yeah.

RV: This is going to be your formal career.

PC: By now I've got enough time in where I'm past that point of no return, in terms of retirement benefits. I couldn't retire in reasonable, I mean, not retire, I couldn't leave the Army and reasonably expect to make up the benefits I'd already earned.

RV: Right.

PC: So financially, it was not a good decision and personally, I really liked the Army and I was having a good time. I was enjoying what I was doing and I was enjoying the moving around and seeing different places. I got orders for Europe and I really wanted to go to Europe.

RV: Yeah. That was right after Illinois, that was…?

PC: Right after Illinois, yeah.

RV: How did you get that?

PC: It just came up my turn. I had called my Assignments Officer Branch and told him, "Hey, you know, when I'm done here, I'd like to go to Europe." And you know, when they can, when they reasonably can, they'll meet your desires. You know, the buzzword is the needs of the Army, but you know, they needed a Logistics Officer, a Logistics Captain in Germany and I wanted to go, so they sent me.

RV: And how long were you there in Germany?

PC: Four years.

RV: What was that like?

PC: Oh it was great; it was great. That was the assignment that made my career.

RV: In what way?

PC: In terms of my performance appraisals, my OERs.

RV: What years was this, this is…?

PC: This was '77 to '81. And I went over there as a Logistics Officer, I went to Frankfurt, was assigned to the Material Management Center for 5th Corps in the support command there, 3rd Support Command. And our CG was a One Star; I worked for a

couple of very fine Lieutenant Colonels. Jerry Lindsey was just a great guy and Bill Foy; I didn't call him that at the time.

RV: Right.

PC: I called them by their first name, Sir, but great guys, good leaders, good logisticians, good managers. And Colonel Lindsey when I got there was an ordnance officer and he put me in a supply position and I said, "Yes sir." And boy, I didn't speak the language or anything, but I learned pretty quickly and had some good NCOs that were real patient with me and taught me the system and I'm just one of those people, I understand how pieces of a system fit together. I can just see that. There's other things I don't do well, but I can see that. And so I was able to understand the logistic system.

RV: Right.

PC: And we were kind of at the halfway point between the wholesale system and retail system.

RV: Right.

PC: And so I did very well, did very well there and it was really kind of ideal. I mean, we didn't work real late a lot of times, we didn't work a lot of weekends, so I had a lot of family time and we traveled a lot, saw a lot. Went to France several times, went to England, went to Whales, so we got to travel. Learned a lot, real learning experience on the technical side of it and that's where I got into automation. The Army was automating very heavily and I was having a discussion with one of our IT guys and I knew nothing about it at the time and we had about an hour-long argument before we discovered we were violently agreeing.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: We were both saying the same thing. I was talking logistics; he was talking IT and neither one of us understood the other one. So I figured, okay, to survive I am going to have to learn IT. And so I started getting into it and found out I was pretty good at it. Like I say, I can see pieces of the system. I'm probably one the few guys around that you're going to talk to that knows what a 360-50 is, which is one of the first big IBM mainframes.

RV: Tell me about that. How did you work with the 360-50?

PC: Well, the Army had its own dedicated IT support. The 3rd Support Command had a big section that was computer support, was all mounted in van so we could take it to the field god forbid.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And at that time, everything was big blue; everything was IBM.

RV: Right.

PC: And we had all IBM hardware. The 360-50 was a real breakthrough in information technology.

RV: Why?

PC: Because it was kind of a modular system. You could get a 360-20, you could get a 360-30, you could get a 360-70. You could add components on to make it as big or small as you wanted without having to have…big or smalls means as powerful or not as you wanted.

RV: Right.

PC: Without having to have one specific mainframe that couldn't be upgraded except at very great expense. And so it was a real breakthrough in the marketplace and really gave IBM dominance worldwide and they were all blue, which is why you called it Big Blue and they had a couple of 360-50s and that was our main computer support.

RV: How large was it physically?

PC: Oh it was huge. It was probably five feet long by three feet wide by four feet high and had maybe one percent of the capacity that your desktop does, maybe one percent.

RV: But you're right there on the early stages of computers.

PC: This was cutting edge. I mean, I'll tell you how far back this goes was we had punch cards, we had card readers, interpreters, the whole works. In fact, one of our guys went and picked up a pallet load of punch cards and lifted out in the rain. Well, when punch cards get, especially when they get wet, but even when they get damp, they swell just a little bit and when they hit that high speed card reader, they don't go through and you wind up with cards all over the place because they hit, jam, and spew cards all over, well that's data, that's information you're losing there.

RV: Wow.

PC: Especially since usually the operator, what he'll do to avoid another jam is reach in that deck of data cards and take out about that many and just throw them away so you don't jam his machine.

RV: And you're holding your hand, your fingers about an inch…

PC: Oh, about an inch apart.

RV: Okay.

PC: And he'll just throw those in the trash can so they don't jam his machine. Well that might be a requisition for a tanking or a rifle or anything and now it's gone.

RV: Right.

PC: And so it was pretty interesting, I really enjoyed it. And we were linked to the system at headquarters, United States Army Europe, USAEUR and they were linked to the States. And while I was there, we changed so we had a direct link to the system in the States and that kind of stuff. And I did very well and my name got known a little bit.

RV: Because of your work with logistics and computers or just…?

PC: Yes, with logistics.

RV: Okay.

PC: Yeah. Well, and my understanding of the automation side of it helped me do my job much, much better.

RV: Right.

PC: And so I was able to get another desirable job. I was selected for promotion to Major, the only one in the MMC (Material Management Center) that was. And you know, it seemed like I had been a Captain for a hundred years. But during Vietnam, you spent, I think I mentioned this; you spent twelve months as a 2nd Lieutenant and made 1st and it was basically automatic.

RV: Right.

PC: You spent twelve months as a 1st Lieutenant, made Captain.

RV: Right.

PC: Well, then you were a Captain, the war ended.

RV: Right.

PC: The need for Majors dropped off drastically and then went a couple of years, didn't even have a Promotion Selection Board, so you waited.

RV: So how long did you wait?

PC: Golly, I made Captain in ’69 and I made major in ’78, nine years.

RV: Wow.

PC: Eight and a half years.

RV: Wow. Did you leave Germany when you made Major?

PC: No, I stayed in the job. I was in a Major’s position. It’s very common to be in a position, as an officer, to be in a position one grade senior. I was in a Major’s job, so I just…and I was getting paid for the job I had.

RV: (Laughing) Isn’t that nice how that works?

PC: Yeah. (Laughing) Well, you know, the Army is smart; they get ahead charging you on Captain and put them in a Major’s position.

RV: Knowing that you want to get that pay grade, that promotion.

PC: Absolutely, yeah. And well you know, it was good, I’m filling a Major’s position.

RV: Sure, sure.

PC: But anyway, there were certain positions, job that you want to get if you want to get promoted and get selected for more good jobs in the future. So I was able to get on as a Maintenance Operations Officer in one of our maintenance battalions, the 8th Maintenance Battalion. I worked for a guy named Colonel Sidwell, good guy. And then our Battalion Executive Officer left and I asked and became the Battalion Executive Officer, did very well in both positions and felt like I did a good job. I sure worked hard and had a good staff; just had some real good Warrant Officers and NCOs, young Captains working for me. And I could call them young Captains because man, I had been an old Captain and did very well in terms of performance appraisals and came back to the States and went to the Logistics Executive Development Course and kind of had to yell and holler to get selected for that. All of them or most of my assignments, most of my experience had been at what we call the retail level, the lower levels.

RV: Right.

PC: And this was a school for the wholesale level.

RV: Right.

PC: It was totally oriented on the wholesale level. And I needed to know the wholesale level and I knew a little bit just from being with them.

RV: Sure.

PC: But I needed to know a lot more about it and so I was selected for that school and it was a six-month course. I did well; I was on the Commandant's List.

RV: Where was this?

PC: This was at Ft. Lee, Virginia.

RV: Okay. So you're officially transferred back over?

PC: Officially, I came back from Germany in '81, we spent two years in Frankfurt and then we spent two years at a small town outside of Frankfurt called Hanau on Grossauheim Kaserne. But we came back, went to Ft. Lee, Virginia to go to this school, spent six months there, very interesting school and big block on IT. I did very well on that one since I was teaching it in junior college at the time. And anyway, then I stayed at Ft. Lee. We were living on post at a nice little set of quarters and I stayed at Ft. Lee and went to the United States Army Logistics Center. I mentioned several times how I was fortunate and luck struck again. What the Logistics Center did was design logistic systems for the Army, both the automated kind and just the system as a whole. It had become kind of a backwater.

RV: What do you mean?

PC: It was kind of an undesirable assignment. It had kind of stagnated, was not known for producing a lot of good stuff and for making a lot of breakthroughs that were accepted Army wide, it was just kind of there, just kind of idling along if you will.

RV: Right. This is at Ft. Lee as well?

PC: At Ft. Lee, yes. Yeah, after LEDC, Logistics Executive Development Course, we stayed on at Ft. Lee and went to LOG Center. I got there and I went in, I was assigned as a military, I was still in the military assigned as a systems analyst on automated logistic systems. And the Army had been working on an automated maintenance management system for years and years, had never managed to get it out to the field.

RV: Right.

PC: And so I was working on this. And I didn't realize that it really was kind of an undesirable assignment. Well, the Army looked at the LOG Center and said, "We need to do something," and they took probably the most hard charging logistics Three Star in the Army at that time and I cannot remember his name, god I should remember it. But anyway, and put him down there to revitalize the Logistic Center, made it a very high priority assignment and he was able to handpick his key staff and bring in any officer that he wanted and that kind of thing. And he got there and the first thing he did was clean house. A whole lot of guys came to work one morning to find out they were being reassigned out of the LOG Center.

RV: Were you there, already there when he was coming in?

PC: Already there when he came in. And so, I mean, there was a guy you were sitting there working with one day, the next day, there was an empty desk literally as they were reassigned out somewhere. And he couldn't do that with the civilians, but he certainly tried and a bunch of them left, he really cleaned house and brought in a bunch of new guys.

RV: Why were you allowed to stay?

PC: Uh, I guess they…well, the guys they thought were doing well enough, you know, were meeting the standards or had some potential were allowed to stay. He didn't get rid of everybody.

RV: Right.

PC: Just those whose supervisors identified as not up to snuff, not up to par.

RV: You're still getting good OERs?

PC: Well, I hadn't had one yet, I got a very good academic OER, they're not worth much, but for what it was worth, it was good.

RV: Sure.

PC: I hadn't really had one yet. And I got sent off on a couple of special studies and that kind of stuff. But anyway, he came in, like I say, he cleaned house, completely restructured the thing and brought in his own guys, his key staff. Well, the guys in our office were concerned that our system was [indiscernible at this time session 7.wav 1:44:17]. It was kind of dying on the vine. We were really afraid that it was going to get cancelled. We thought it was going to be a good thing for the Army. We thought the

Army was going to say, "You know, you guys have been working on this for twelve years and it's not out to the field yet and so we're just going to cancel it." And what we did was put together a briefing and that we were going to give to key people to try and raise the visibility and try to get some more resources and kind of get our system moving forward and revitalized.

RV: Right.

PC: And one of the guys that came in when the new General did was Wild Bill Flynn.

RV: This is another one of your lucky stories about how this worked out for you?

PC: Oh yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I mean you talk about dumb luck. First of all, I was there when the new General came in and was going to revitalize the place.

RV: Right.

PC: You know, the Chief-of-Staff made this decision, raised the priority, became a very high priority assignment for LOG, logistics officers; that was number one. Number two was one of the guys that we gave this briefing to was Bill Flynn and/or Sir, and at that time, Colonel Flynn. And he was a New Englander, very outgoing, charismatic, extroverted kind of guy. His favorite saying was, "Up yours!" (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: He said that to everybody. And so anyway, he was one of the guys as one of the Deputy Commanders at the LOG Center that we briefed. Well, they had cleaned out one of the departments upstairs in this two-story building, another department and he remembered me from this briefing and reached out and touched me and was going to put me in this job upstairs and I really didn't want to go, it was in concepts and doctrine, which is pretty much what you thought; logistics concepts and then developing logistics doctrine. And so I went and talked to my boss who was a full Colonel and he said that he had talked to the Chief-of-Staff about it and the Chief-of-Staff had asked him, "Is Curry worth your career?" In other words, if he was going to fight to keep me in there, it was going to cost him.

RV: Right, wow.

PC: And he told how I wasn't worth his career and I agreed with him. So, off to concepts and doctrine I went and worked for Bill Flynn. And the guy I replaced had been

the head of the section up there that was developing the High Technology Test Bed. And the 9th Infantry Division out at Ft. Lewis, Washington was the high technology test site and we had the HTTB, High Technology Test Bed or as one guy liked to say, "Here, try this bullshit." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But anyway, they would test new equipment; they would test new logistics concepts, that kind of thing.

RV: So you got to see all of this?

PC: So I got to see all of this. Got a new Chief-of-Staff, we just kind of got this office up and rolling and at this point, I was basically bypassing my boss, who was another full Colonel and going directly to Flynn because Flynn would just call you directly, he wouldn't go to your boss, he'd call you directly and say, "Do this."

RV: That puts you in a difficult position.

PC: Very difficult, had a great guy who really understood what Flynn was doing and never gave me a bit of grief about it.

RV: Why was his nickname Wild Bill, because of his…?

PC: Because of his personality, he was just so outward. He'd work you to death. But new Chief-of-Staff came up with a light division and we were tasked to develop the logistics doctrine for the light division, do the force development on the logistics side.

RV: Explain what the light division concept was.

PC: The light division was, is a very mobile force. The idea is that you would be able to get the division in on the ground combat ready in ninety-six hours or so, as opposed to the weeks it takes to move a division with tanks and heavy artillery and Armored Personnel Carriers and those kinds of things. Like when we went to Desert Storm, I was at III Corps, we'd take all our stuff down to Houston, put it on the ships and they would sail it over to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

RV: Right.

PC: That took weeks.

RV: Right.

PC: But the idea here was you load a whole bunch of guys and their very light equipment. Like a company would have one truck, that's it. And they could be on the ground combat ready in a matter of hours.

RV: Why were people so opposed to this, because it, was it too scary for them, they thought it wouldn't meet Cold War expectations?

PC: Well, it was very scary. You know, there's an old cliché that says we're always fighting the last war. In this case, the last war that won. We weren't still fighting Vietnam, but the Army was based on heavy divisions.

RV: Right.

PC: Mechanized infantry and armor divisions and the only difference is a slightly different mix of Mec. infantry and armor battalions. And that was, you know, that was all the doctrine was written around that, the combat tactics were based on that. I mean, we were going to fight the Soviet Union.

RV: Right.

PC: That's all there was to it.

RV: Right, they're going to come pouring through the folded gap and you're going to have it out conventional warfare.

PC: And we had to have enough tanks and artillery to fight the Soviet Union. The Chief-of-Staff, the Chief said "No." You know, he came up with a spectrum of intensity of warfare and probability.

RV: A spectrum of intensity?

PC: Spectrum of intensity that ranged from a guerilla war on one end, maybe in Central America was the hot spot at that time, up the spectrum to all out nuclear war at the top end of the spectrum. So you went from low intensity conflict or LIC to high intensity conflict. And then you assigned probabilities to the conflict based on intensity.

RV: Who was this person's name, do you remember?

PC: Golly, he was the Chief-of-Staff of the Army, we called him The Chief. I should remember his name, but I sure don't. I could probably find it.

RV: What year was this approximately?

PC: This was '83, '84. '82, '83, '84.

RV: Okay.

PC: And his analysis found that a low intensity conflict, a guerilla type war against lightly armed forces was going to be much, much more probable than a high intensity exchange with the Soviet Union.

RV: Based on basically the MAD scenario, Mutually Assured Destruction?

PC: Exactly.

RV: Not going to go there, but if something happens, it'd probably be down the scale.

PC: Yes. And we were probably going to be fighting guerilla forces, indigenant, indigenous, puh, indigenous guerilla forces. And like I say, it was based on Central America was kind of the scenario at that time; Honduras, Nicaragua, those places. And what he said was, "We have no forward structure in place to meet this kind of threat, we have nobody trained to meet this kind of threat. If that happens, we're going to be in Vietnam all over again trying to fight a peasant with an AK-47 with an M-1 tank."

RV: Right.

PC: Which is great if you can find him.

RV: Right.

PC: But since he could hear you coming from three miles away and you can't hear him at all, the probability of finding him is not very great. He also found that the earlier you can get military force on the ground and intervene in a guerilla type war, the better your chances, the better your chances of rapid success are. And it just seems intuitive now that the time this was all breakthrough stuff, when all you were thinking about was the forward gap.

RV: Right. Was there someone of the kind of civilian, or not civilian, but the more cultural side saying, "We have that we can develop this light division concept and have the military arm ready, but we also need to understand the society into which we would put this light division?"

PC: Well, we've always had civil affairs units but that; we figured that was mostly State Department business.

RV: They'd take care of that, they tell you…

PC: Yeah, that was their job.

RV: Okay.

PC: You know, our job was the military force.

RV: Okay, okay. Was there any interaction, communication between the two?

PC: There was at the higher levels, but not down at mine, not down at my level. Mine was a Major as a Staff Officer and so you know, they didn't consult me on those things.

RV: Right, okay.

PC: And that became the number one priority in the Army was developing this light division force structure. And we had the 9th Infantry at Ft. Louis and we had a division at Ft. Ord and I'm trying to remember which division that was at the time, but I don't remember. But anyway, god this was a long time ago, but anyway, so we just, I mean we crashed and burned. Eighteen-hour days were not unusual at all.

RV: Doing what?

PC: Trying to get this force structure pulled together.

RV: And how to supply it and get it to where it needs to be.

PC: Exactly.

RV: In ninety-six hours.

PC: Exactly. And what we had to do was find out from the combat arms guys and they have the Combined Arms Center at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, they were doing the combat arms side of this, we were the Logistic Center. We and our component schools, which were all the logistic schools were doing the logistic side of it. What we had to do was find out, okay, what's the combat arms doctrine, what are their plans? And then how do we support that? And you know, how do we get…what forces and what materials do we need to support the combat arms guys when?

RV: Could you make requests of any piece of equipment, we need these kind of transport planes, we need, they say they need this many trucks, so we need to get these trucks that fit on these planes and was that what you were doing or was it…?

PC: They gave us to set up parameters. They, the Chief-of-Staff, his office gave us a set of parameters. It had to be one hundred percent mobile in C5A Aircraft, which of course is a big mama. And we had to be able to put, they gave us a time phasing, we had to be able to put forces on the ground in twenty-four hours, forty-eight, ninety-six, etc. and be fully deployed in x number of hours.

RV: Right.

PC: Using C5A Aircraft.

RV: And this is coming from the United States?

PC: This is coming from the United States.

RV: Yes, assuming that the base would be here, you'd be moving this light division from the U.S. or from Ft. Ord or from…

PC: Ft. Louis.

RV: Ft. Louis to the hotspot.

PC: Exactly. You know, maybe it's Honduras. So we would have to and we worked with the Air Force, they would have to bring in C5As and CRAF, the Civilian Reserve Air Fleet, bring those aircraft in, pick up the equipment and move it to wherever the hotspot was within this number of hours.

RV: Were they considering basing a light division somewhere in the world because, you know, it'll just help you out logistically so much to have one light division say in Germany or have one of the light divisions in Turkey?

PC: Not at that time.

RV: Okay.

PC: No, there was really no discussion of that and there are still no light divisions overseas. We have one now at Ft. Drum, the 10th Mountain. And I think, like I say, I'm kind of really out of touch, I think the 25th in Hawaii is also a light division.

RV: I know the 10th Mountain is actually in Afghanistan.

PC: Yes.

RV: I've been there.

PC: In fact Mike Ellicott, my boss, his son is an Engineer Corps Major and he's getting ready to go to Afghanistan.

RV: How did Pat Curry take this concept then? Did you say, "Oh my god, this is ridiculous," or "Wow, lets hit it, let's see what happens?"

PC: I thought, "Man, this makes so much sense." And you could read what was going on in the paper. Guerillas were doing this; guerillas were doing that. I mean, you could just see it in the newspaper and I just thought, "Man, this makes so much sense." Nobody ever proposed getting rid of all the heavy divisions; that was never a thought.

RV: Right, this is in addition to.

PC: This is in addition to. And you know, the patrons saint that the Army, Ronald Reagan, was giving us the resources we needed to get the job done.

RV: I'm glad you brought that up; I would've asked you how you thought Reagan treated the military and how his vision fit into this new concept of the light division.

PC: If you ask me who has made the biggest impact on the United States and on history in the last hundred years, Reagan would be very close to the top of my list. I mean, let's face it; he won the Cold War. The man won the Cold War. He's a personal hero. When he was giving his State of the Union Speech and had that Buck Sergeant there, Sergeant E5 sitting there in uniform in the audience, I mean, I cried, I mean my eyes were wet. That was just an amazing thing to do. And if you look at the guy who brought soldiers back and who brought the Army back, it's Ronald Reagan.

RV: How do you feel about his comment about Vietnam, that it was a worthy cause?

PC: Oh, I agree with him.

RV: He is credited for kind of closing the chapter on the Vietnam War and the war part. Clinton is the one who came in and normalized relations after, you know, people had built some framework for him to do that. But Reagan is credited by many historians, you know, he's the guy who kind of closed the coffin if you will, but in a positive light.

PC: Yeah, I absolutely think that's true. He made being a soldier a respectable profession again and then gave us the resources to rebuild the Army.

RV: Was what you just said become, he made the soldier respectable again from the Vietnam experience?

PC: Yeah.

RV: Rehabilitated?

PC: And the aftermath.

RV: Right, the decline of the quality.

PC: Of the military, yeah. He rehabilitated the image, but more importantly, he rehabilitated the Army. You know, I mean, look at the budgets we had been getting.

You know, people ask me about Jimmy Carter and I just spit on the ground, you know. When I was in Germany, we had to turn off our coffee pots at nine o'clock in the morning because we didn't have money to pay our utility bills. My wife had no hot water to wash our clothes in; this was in government quarters now.

RV: And you obviously requested hot water.

PC: But they turned it off, they turned off hot water in all the barracks. I mean not barracks, well in barracks too, but in the laundry rooms of all the government quarters. They would not turn the heat on in the buildings until it had been below sixty degrees for three consecutive days and we had two small kids; those kinds of things. We did not have enough fuel to take the unit to the field to train.

RV: This is because of the Carter Administration budget cuts.

PC: Budget cuts after post-Vietnam. It wasn't all the Carter Administration, but I saw it firsthand in Germany. Had the Soviets come through at that time, we would've been in real trouble.

RV: Why didn't they?

PC: I'm not sure they were anymore capable of it than we were to be honest. They had their own problems.

RV: Yeah.

PC: You know, we tend to see them as this monolithic block of super soldiers and they weren't.

RV: Yeah, you're talking thirteen; fourteen years later they're gone.

PC: They're gone. They had a lot of maintenance problems, a lot of equipment problems, that kind of thing. And I think they knew that our only option would've been to use nuclear weapons and they weren't ready to pull that trigger and we would've had to. We would've had to use nuclear weapons because we couldn't have survived otherwise.

RV: So when Reagan came in, everything started to turn around.

PC: Oh man did it ever. I mean, you know, there was so much excitement in the Army about Reagan coming in and I was still in Germany when he came in, but there was so much excitement in the Army about him coming in. And you could just see the impact almost immediately. Our facilities were so run down and beat up and we started getting

money to…I mean, our guys, they had to wear gloves while they were working in the shops because we had no heat in the shops and we had no money to put heat in.

RV: That's incredible.

PC: It was sad.

RV: That's difficult to…

PC: It was just sad.

RV: I imagine it was very difficult to command in situations like that.

PC: Oh very. I mean, how do you train your guys if you can't take them in the field? We'd save up fuel, but I mean, I'll tell you how bad it was. We'd get fuel cuts and as a Battalion Executive Officer, as a Field Grade Officer, I would have to approve the dispatch of a vehicle off post because you know, on a run of some kind because we just didn't have the fuel. And I would make them get together and consolidate runs and that kind of thing.

RV: Wow.

PC: To save fuel because we just didn't have any money to buy fuel. Well Carter's Secretary of the Army, people were saying, you know, the Army's really underpaid and it wasn't as bad as when I first came in before Mendel Rivers came along, but it was still pretty bad. And the Secretary of the Army said, "If they don't like it, they can vote with their feet, let them vote with their feet." And of course, the good guys did.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And I thought that was a pretty telling statement about the Carter Administration's attitude towards the military. But anyway, yeah Reagan came in and like I said, you could just see the difference in attitude immediately and in resources very, very quickly. So we had a lot of support, a lot of funding. So it was a good time to be working on this. So we had the support from the National Command Authority, which is the President, and we had the support from the National Command Authority to do this kind of innovative force development and we had the funding to do it with.

RV: And you obviously succeeded with it.

PC: Yes. And it was not easy; it was a little bit like giving…well, it was a lot like giving birth to a bathtub. I mean, we were, at one point in order to meet the combat

arms requirements, the Division Support Command, which is the logistics element in a division had to be the first troops on the ground. (Laughing) Bad, bad idea!

RV: (Laughing) Right.

PC: Bad idea!

RV: Right.

PC: And so we were able to fix that and we did the medical support structure, we did the maintenance and supply, we did all that kind of stuff.

RV: So you were one of those who were actually sitting down and coming up with how this would happen?

PC: Exactly, exactly. We would just sit down and say, "Okay, we do not have space for eight mechanics; we have space for three mechanics." So we take five and take them out. And we can't move three trucks; you get one. And we came up with some really new concepts; we essentially eliminated the retail level. You know, if they needed a rifle, we wouldn't repair it; we'd give them a new one. You know, we just give them a new one, so we didn't have to carry repair parts and that kind of thing.

RV: Right. Older one would come back to the States, you repaired and then…

PC: Put back in the system.

RV: Put back in the system.

PC: Yeah, exactly.

RV: Was this fun?

PC: It was so hard, so much hard work, but it was fun. You could really see what you were doing. You know, you looked at the Chief-of-Staff of the Army's map for the Army and you thought, "Man, I'm participating here, I'm helping." And old Flynn just worked our butts off. Oh my god, I'll never forget it, at the office Christmas party, everybody was out partying for Christmas and I was working my butt off.

RV: Were you really?

PC: I really was.

RV: And Diana's opinion of this?

PC: Not high. (Laughing)

RV: Yeah. (Laughing)

PC: But actually, Diana was, you know, if you look up perfect Army wife in the dictionary, there's Diana's picture, she never gave me a hard time about working long hours, she never gave me a hard time about going to the field and being gone for weeks on end, she just understood and she took care of things. I mean, just, you know, soldier on. And I don't remember Diana ever saying, you know, "If you come home, if you don't come home at five o'clock, I'm leaving," or you know, "I want you to come home at five o'clock, I'm mad." I just don't remember her, I remember her bringing me clean uniforms when I had to work all night, never anything but maximum support from Diana and not all the wives were like that. I mean, more than a few good guys who got out because their wife couldn't handle it. She didn't like the long hours, but…

RV: Right.

PC: She didn't complain either.

RV: How does it feel now looking back and you were right there at kind of ground zero with this very, very interesting concept, new concept and it's still today and it's successful, it works?

PC: Oh it's great, yeah. See, this was one of the first times in my career, actually the first time in my career when I'd been able to see the big picture, the strategic picture and how it ties to, you know, that mechanic in the field or that supply guy in the field. Before, it had always been an operational kind of job, you know, long range planning is this afternoon. And now I'm at a job, well we're talking five, ten, fifteen years out.

RV: Right.

PC: And it really was a cultural change for me and really interesting. And really, excuse me, the first time I've been able to say, you know, "I'm really working on something that's going to impact the entire future of the Army." And that was a good feeling. And Flynn just took such good care of you.

RV: He worked you, but he did take care of you.

PC: He worked your butt off, but he took really good care of you.

RV: Were you still a Major or…?

PC: Still a Major and I was selected for Lieutenant Colonel towards the end of my tour.

RV: Okay.

PC: I was still a Major.

RV: And this is still at Ft. Lee?

PC: Still at Ft. Lee.

RV: And how long were you there?

PC: I was there three years.

RV: Okay, to 1984.

PC: Yeah.

RV: We need to wrap up for your timeframe this morning.

PC: Okay.

RV: But a couple of other quick questions. I guess this is obvious, but now I see how easily you fit into a university, kind of strategic planning, looking at the big picture of what a giant university is doing and your current position where there you just described this hugely important brand new concept and you grasped this kind of downward looking. I can see the whole tree of logistics for this incredibly; maybe one of the most important functions of a government is to have a functional military that can meet any enemy.

PC: Exactly.

RV: And so you helped design this and then you take that obviously into your civilian life after the Army when you get out in '91 and you can take it to the bank and really use that stuff on a practical level.

PC: Absolutely, it is, it's a real practical kind of thing. You know, and some jobs and you know, in my current position, we're looking at the future of the university and there's a lot of parallels. You know, in the Army, you do every periodically, the Department of Defense does a threat analysis.

RV: Right.

PC: What's the threat going to be? And here we do an academic analysis, you know, where do we need to focus our resources in the future, research and education and those kind of things? So there's a lot of parallels. The process is very similar between the military and a university or a big business or anything else, you know, I mean that strategic planning process is kind of the same.

RV: So these four years go by, you're successful obviously, you're promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and your next post is going to be where?

PC: The Pentagon.

RV: And didn't you say that this was not a very good experience?

PC: Was not a good experience for me.

RV: Okay.

PC: It was interesting, I saw a lot, I learned a lot, I did a lot, I did not fit in well. I was really more operationally oriented; the Pentagon is based to a huge extent on money, as it should be. I did not adapt well, worked for a great guy, Colonel Guest, who later made Brigadier General, worked for a civilian who I did not get along with named Mary Ellen Harvey. She was an SES, Senior Executive Service, which is a very senior person in the Civil Service, very bright lady. But we did not…well we used to call her Atilla the Honey. And very bright, very knowledgeable, but boy, hard to work for, hard to work with. And so I didn't do terrible; but I didn't do great either.

RV: Okay.

PC: But fortunately my background in Germany and in the LOG Center, Flynn maxed me out, gave me a special OER, which means out of cycle and my boss, the one I said understood, they treated me very, very well. And so I was selected for Battalion Commander.

RV: Okay. Why don't we stop here this week at this point?

PC: Okay.

RV: We can pick up next time.

PC: All right.

RV: Thank you Pat.

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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Patrick Curry
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
August 5, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I'm continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Pat Curry. Today is August 5, 2005; it's 9:05am Central Standard Time and we're again in the same location in Lubbock in the Vietnam Archive interview room. Pat, let's continue with where we are. You were going to go to Washington D.C. and you've made comments about how that was really not your cup of soup or cup of tea, that was not where you felt like you had had your best part of your career. Tell me what your duties and you had mentioned a couple of names and just the people you worked for good and bad, but tell me a little bit about your duties and what you did and why you felt that way.

Patrick Curry: Well, I was in the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for logistics for the Army and I was an Action Officer and that the job title and that kind of meant you did pretty much whatever came along that needed to be taken care of. And it was very interesting; it was totally different than anything I'd ever done before and anything that I would ever do again.

RV: Right. Tell me about first, just kind of maybe a curiosity, what is it like working at the Pentagon? Isn't that kind of, for a history person like myself, that sounds really cool.

What was it like, I mean this was the Epicenter, this is the Epicenter of the superpower of the world, then two superpowers, now the lone superpower as the Americans would say, this is perhaps the most powerful building outside of the Whitehouse on the planet.

PC: Yes, and I think you're very much aware of that at a higher level. You know, on an everyday level, you're so overwhelmed with what's going on that you don't really think about that too much, but at a little higher level, yeah, you're kind of aware of that. It's a unique opportunity to be riding into work in the morning reading the paper, The Washington Papers and seeing what you're going to be working on that day. There was the day that Ft. Carson, Colorado ordered an anchor by mistake and the supply system functioned perfectly and they got it.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: (Laughing) And some muckraker found out about that, so we had to explain that.

RV: Interesting. When you say you read the paper what you're going to work on that day, basically world situation, world crises or…?

PC: No, usually some kind of, something like Ft. Carson, Colorado, a thousand miles from the nearest ocean ordered an anchor.

RV: I see.

PC: Usually it's something like that. But if, you know, if there is a flare up somewhere and it looks like we're going to send troops, then yeah, yeah you wind up working on that pretty hard too.

RV: Okay. What kind of security was there?

PC: At that time, there really wasn't a heck of a lot of security. You know, this was before all the terrorism really got started. You had to have a badge and you had to show the badge to get in or you had to have somebody sign you in, something like that, but there really was not a heck of a lot of security. There was, well still is, a big subway station right under the Pentagon, it's a major bus terminal for downtown. And I belonged…well I rode the bus for a while and then the commute is just a killer.

RV: Where did you all live?

PC: We lived in Springfield, Virginia.

RV: Okay, so…

PC: And it was thirteen miles from my front door to the door of the Pentagon. The record was four and a half hours.

RV: What was the average?

PC: Oh, the average was probably, going to work in the morning, the average was probably an hour and a quarter and coming home probably hour and a half to two hours.

RV: Wow.

PC: And that's in the HOV Lane.

RV: Wow, wow.

PC: Because we were in a van pool because we could get in the HOV Lane (High Occupancy Vehicle) and only take an hour and a half. And it was just, I mean, you spent so much of your life on the freeway that, I still have friends that are still there and I just don't know how they do it.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But you know, when I tell them that where I live, a traffic jam is when it takes you two tries to get through the light, they get a little jealous.

RV: Right, right.

PC: But the Pentagon was very interesting and it just, oh, I'm trying to remember some of the things that we worked on. I walked in as a Major and was immediately handed a half a billion-dollar program to manage for the entire Army.

RV: Wow.

PC: And you know, it was interesting, during my orientation, I met the General who was in charge and he said, "Don't forget that while you're here, you can't say," well the Army Regulation, excuse me, we called them ARs. "The Army Regulation, you can't hide behind those, you can't say, I have to do that, that's what the AR says. What you have to do here is decide if the AR is right and if it's not, rewrite it."

RV: So you're literally at the top looking down?

PC: At the top looking down, yeah.

RV: Well, your budget covered what specifically?

PC: Well, mine was a spares program and the idea was is that we would figure out what the parts that were most likely to fail in combat were for tanks and Armored Personnel Carriers and all this kind of stuff and preposition them with actually with the units so that if, as you said, if the Soviets come pouring through the folded gap, which at that time seemed like a very real possibility, then we would have the repair parts that we

needed on hand rather than having to wait for them to come from the States or something like that.

RV: Right.

PC: So it was a readiness issue.

RV: How different was this from what you did in Vietnam? I know it was a giant difference as far as size and responsibilities, but the logistic system, had it evolved from your time in country or what were the differences?

PC: Well, the basic structure of having a wholesale on a retail system was still there.

RV: Okay.

PC: And there had been a lot of changes to it in terms of how information flowed and how material flowed and those kinds of things. And we worked on some fairly major changes to those kinds of systems while I was there. And so in that sense, it was pretty interesting.

RV: Yeah.

PC: It was also a time when the Vice Chief of Staff who was kind of the operator for the Army was increasing the importance of the National Guard in the Army Reserve.

RV: Right.

PC: And so we were dealing with them quite a bit. General Thurman was the Vice Chief of Staff for the Army. So one of the things that we worked on a lot of course was the budget. Most of our effort was money based, financial based. We also wrote a lot of policy, not a lot of procedures. The people, the operators did more of that, but we wrote the policy for it. Now if it got to be something real hot…by hot, I mean we actually had to send in troops, then we would get involved; and trying to martial material and get it shipped and etc.

RV: Do you have any examples of when you actually kind of had to go into action and…?

PC: You know, it was actually a fairly calm time.

RV: It was, this is the mid-eighties.

PC: Yeah, there wasn't a lot going on. Now a good friend of mine, a guy named Bob Henry and Bob and I had known each other for years. We worked together at the

LOG Center working on the light division. And he went a couple of years after I did, he's a little bit younger than I am and that's when it was all blowing up in South America. He wound up spending a lot of time in Columbia helping the Columbians. We were shipping a lot of equipment to the Columbians to fight the rebels and the drug lords at that time.

RV: You knew exactly what was going down there as far as, you know, parts and just the things that were going on?

PC: Yeah, that office made up the lists.

RV: And you saw these lists?

PC: Oh yeah.

RV: You obviously had to have a security clearance to…?

PC: I had a top-secret clearance, yeah.

RV: And can you comment on what we were sending down to Columbia?

PC: Well no, bearing in mind, I wasn't there; it was Bob Henry.

RV: Of course.

PC: It was a friend of mine who was doing this. But yeah, it was a lot of individual weapons, M16s, 45s, that kind of thing. A lot of personal protective equipment, we call it, helmets, flak jackets, that kind of stuff and then just some basic stuff, uniforms, boots, just the kinds of things that you would need to equip, kind of a paramilitary kind of force if you will. It was apparently pretty tense down there. Bob told me he rode to and from work everyday in an Armored Personnel Carrier provided by the Columbian government.

RV: Can you give people listening to this in the future a sense of this scale of American involvement with logistics, with supply during the Cold War, during the latter years of the Cold War? I mean, I'm not sure people understand the scale of how much the United States assists militarily like you said with Columbia as one example just around the world. What can you say about that?

PC: Billions of dollars. Mostly, and this did not come out of our office there was another office that handled foreign military sales, but it was literally billions and billions of dollars. The scale of logistics for the United States Army is hard to imagine. It is everything at that time from a mainline armored division in Europe to one of the things

that I dealt with was an Army National Guard unit on a small island in the Pacific. And of course everything in between.

RV: Right.

PC: And so the scale is just almost unimaginable. I mean, it's just global, just worldwide. And tens of thousands of tons of equipment and material that has to be purchased and distributed and paid for, those kinds of things. It's just really kind of hard to imagine, hard to describe. You know, there's a lot of changes now. The Army now, a lot of things that the Army used to do for itself we now contract out. There's a lot of stuff in Iraq that the Army used to do that we now hire contractors to do. And I'm not talking about the big U.S. companies; I'm talking about local Iraqi companies.

RV: Right.

PC: That will hire them to come in and do construction or you know, put in phone lines or something like that. And that reduces what's called the logistical tail and that's an old term and it just means that how much does it take to keep a soldier, an infantry soldier fighting, how much of that stuff is behind him? And you can think of it in terms of the pyramid with the infantry soldier at the point and this big broad tail behind him because you have not only the logistics that you have to consider the supply, the maintenance, those kinds of things. The ammunition, you have medical care, you have personnel, you have to keep other guys personnel records up, you have finance, everybody has to get paid, all those kinds of things. And you know, all things considered, the Army just does a heck of a good job.

RV: What can you say about waste? Were things efficient or was there a lot of waste that you saw?

PC: I wouldn't say a lot, there certainly was some. I think in an operation that size, I think there's going to be. And you know, I worked for a General one time, this guy was kind of interesting, he had actually been in a concentration camp in Germany in World War II as a child.

RV: Wow.

PC: Yeah. And he wouldn't talk about it, but understandably…

RV: I bet so.

PC: Anyway, he said, you know, he said, "I want my logisticians to be efficient." He said, "I want my fighters to be effective." And there's a real difference in the two. And of course, what we tried to be as loggies, if you will, logisticians was to do both. But you know, our whole focus was to make the fighters effective. And you know, being efficient was not the first priority. You know, if you're looking at preparing for a major ground war, you know, it's not efficient to have millions of dollars worth of repair parts sitting on the ground not being used. But if you're looking at preparing for a major ground war, that is an effective way to operate if you see the distinction that I'm drawing.

RV: Absolutely.

PC: And yeah, there was just some waste. You know, when you've got a million of one particular piece of equipment and it's spread all over the entire world, it's a little difficult to keep up with it.

RV: How do you keep up with it?

PC: With great difficulty. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) This is all computerized?

PC: Well, it's computerized now. At that time it was computerized at the higher levels, but the guys in the field had what was called property book, which was a hardback book with pages, paper pages in it and that's what you used to keep your inventory. And it was all pretty much a manual thing. A lot of emphasis on what we call property accountability. Careers were broken over property accountability.

RV: I bet so.

PC: And you know, when we went to the Command Course that I told you about, they said, "Well there's two things that'll get you relieved. One is zipper problems." Which means the Battalion Commander fooling around with younger women, younger Lieutenants. "And the other is losing property." And so there was quite a bit of emphasis on it and of course, there were several major scandals about the Army not knowing how many of particular pieces of equipment they had. But it was usually people on the outside just kind of taking potshots in my opinion. I thought we did a pretty good job all things considered.

RV: Tell me how you worked with civilians, civilian contractors, how did the Pentagon and logistics of the Army deal with that venue?

PC: You know, it's really kind of an interesting setup and kind of a good setup. And I'll divide the world into two parts. One was we had the Department of the Army Civilians who worked in there with us. And they were the continuity. They were there, they stayed there...

RV: Inside the Pentagon?

PC: Inside the Pentagon. They actually worked in our office; they were action officers just like the military guys. But they were the continuity, they had the institutional memory and they knew what had happened five years ago. They were the guys that could come in and say, "Well you know, we tried that same idea five years ago and it didn't work."

RV: I see.

PC: And then the military would come in for one or two or three-year tour and we brought the knowledge, the experience in the field, the operating experience in the field. And a lot of enthusiasm, it wasn't just a regular job to us.

RV: Right.

PC: And so between the two, it was actually a pretty good mix. You hear a lot about Civil Service and you know, they're kind of dead on their feet and etc., but we had some really talented people in that office and really knowledgeable, really expert people in that office that knew what they were…we had our ten percent.

RV: Sure.

PC: We had some people that you know, that just kind of basically showed up most of the time. But the majority of them were pretty good dedicated people. And working it, we called it The Building, capitalized and we never called it the Pentagon, it was The Building. And it was a good experience, it's not something I'd ever do again, but it's funny, a lot of guys avoid that their whole career. It has a bad name among the Active Duty military.

RV: Why?

PC: Well you know, it's called the Puzzle Palace and that kind off thing and it is very difficult to sit down and write a policy that applies to an armored division in Europe and a National Guard unit on an island in the Pacific. And that island in the Pacific, that's a real thing, that happened to me.

RV: Really?

PC: Yes really, that's why I use that as an example.

RV: Tell me about that.

PC: Well, I was trying to write an Army policy on a particular part that was recoverable and in this instance, what we found was we were getting rid of a lot of them, that the unit maintenance, unit level maintenance was trying to repair them and fix them and they weren't able to really to do it. So what we were trying to do was move the maintenance level for this particular item up one level to a support level maintenance where we had more expertise. And so I was trying to write a policy for that. Well, for an armored division in Europe, that's pretty easy because you're direct support maintenance is right down the road. (Laughing) This guy sent me a message that his direct support maintenance was on another island a thousand miles away and "Could he please have an exception to policy?" And (Laughing)

RV: It's a legitimate concern.

PC: It is a very legitimate concern and certainly one I never thought of. And so we kind of laughed about that one, but we certainly gave him the exception and let him continue to do his own.

RV: Right.

PC: And so that's a real life example kind of thing.

RV: Interesting.

PC: And so anyway, if you're trying to write those kinds of policies and the guy says, "Well you know, we can't possibly do this." So it kind of gives the Pentagon a bad name.

RV: Right.

PC: So like Mike Ellicott, my boss, he retired as a full Colonel and he told me, boy he said he never wanted to go to the Pentagon. I thought it would be a good experience and I thought it would be career enhancing. It was an interesting experience, I won't say it was a good experience, but certainly was interesting.

RV: Why do you say it was, you know, before today's conversation, you were saying that it was really not something you enjoyed?

PC: It was not; I did not enjoy it. And as I mentioned, I certainly, if I was to go back, I wouldn't do it again.

RV: Why?

PC: I just didn't enjoy it; I didn't like it.

RV: Even with the increased responsibility and working inside the Pentagon?

PC: Yeah, even with that. Like I said, it was interesting.

RV: Sure.

PC: I won't say it was ever boring. I worked a lot of twenty-four hour days. But it's not something that I'm particularly good at. You know, I'm good at the shorter range, more operational kinds of things and although I did very well in the LOG Center (Logistical), but like I say, it wasn't something that I was good at; I did not enjoy the politics. You know, I had to laugh, my boss, Colonel Guest, he had been there I guess about a week, found himself in the DES LOG's limo riding to Capitol Hill to meet with the congressman and he thought that was kind of interesting.

RV: How did politics enter into your job?

PC: Oh well, a lot of office kinds of politics. You know, you had the Army Material Command over on the other side of town, you had the Pentagon here and you had various activities in town and there was a lot of machinations going on and maneuvering and who's going to look good for the DES LOG and the Chief and those kinds of things. And I'm not smart enough to do those kinds of things, I didn't care about those kinds of things and I'm not good at those kinds of things and that was just one part of it. And I just got kind of a little bit overwhelmed, you know. I mean, it's like trying to sip out of a fire hose; there was just so much of it and I really had not learned to pick out the half a dozen most important and work on those.

RV: So you eventually are going to move out of that position? You were there for two years, is that correct?

PC: Well actually, yeah, I was there actually for about two and a half, but what happened was I started going off to the various pre-command courses. I was selected for Battalion Command while I was there.

RV: Which is the next natural progression, is that correct?

PC: Well no. Battalion Command is a competitive thing. They actually have a selection board that meets and reviews performance appraisals, OERs, and selects Battalion Commanders. And so I was fortunate enough to be selected. I mentioned earlier that I had been a Battalion Maintenance Operations Officer and an XO, that really helped me. The experience, you know, they figured if you'd been an XO, you'd been pretty close to command. So that's a good experience to have and those kinds of things.

RV: Did Vietnam play in any of this at all?

PC: No, by then Vietnam was so long ago.

RV: But it was only, what, twelve, thirteen years before?

PC: Yeah, but that was a long time. I mean, in a twenty-year career…

RV: Sure, sure.

PC: You know, that's a long time ago.

RV: So long time for you or long time for the U.S. Army to kind of back…?

PC: Both, both.

RV: Was there talk about what we did "wrong" in Vietnam and let's not make that mistake again?

PC: Not by that point.

RV: Nothing like that?

PC: No. By then, we were back focused on Europe. Our focus was beginning to, I'm trying to think of a good word, fray a little bit.

RV: Right.

PC: Trying to convey that we were started to look at other areas, South America, Central America, those kinds of places. The smart guys were looking at the Mid-East, those kinds of things. But no, we didn't think about Vietnam very much at all or at least we didn't talk about it.

RV: Did you think about it much?

PC: No not really. You know, it's one of those things I kind of tucked away and didn't bring up much.

RV: Even as the movies were coming out, the books were coming out still and you just kind of put it away?

PC: Yeah, by then there was not a lot of coverage of Vietnam. The big thing then was the Vietnam Wall.

RV: Yes.

PC: And I did go there several times.

RV: You have very strong feelings about the wall?

PC: Yes I do.

RV: Tell me about it. You weren't there for the opening ceremonies and all that?

PC: No, no.

RV: But you arrived in Washington just, I think two years after it was erected. Tell me about your first visit and your experience there.

PC: I went and the first thing, I'm looking for it.

RV: Were you by yourself; was it night, day?

PC: No, it was during the day, Diana was with me and the kids were with us and we were, you know, kind of sightseeing like you do in Washington. I wanted to go see the Vietnam Memorial and I couldn't find it. I wandered around, where the heck is it?

RV: You know generally…?

PC: Generally where it was, you know, and I expected a monument. And finally we went down below ground level and there's this black wall and you know, there's nothing that displays the heroism, there's nothing that displays the dedication, you know. There's nothing that says that Chick Chandler was a hero, it's just this wall with the names of all these dead guys on it. And it's hidden and no, I don't like it. And I think they did a much better job with the Women's Vietnam Memorial. You know, it shows what those women did. You know, there were women killed in Vietnam.

RV: Yes.

PC: And this says, their monument says they were heroes and ours just kind of says, "Well they're dead."

RV: That's interesting.

PC: And so no, I don't like it.

RV: Were you verbal about it then? I mean, did you…?

PC: No. You know, I was so, I don't want to say stunned, but I was so shocked and overwhelmed by being there and disappointed, that's the word I'm looking for, I was

so disappointed with it, you know. But I didn't really at the time, didn't really know why, it took me really several years to kind of figure out why am I so disappointed and you know, why do I have such mixed feelings about this? You know, one of the big monuments there is the Marine Memorial. (Coughs) Excuse me; the guys raising the flag on Iwo Jima.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: And you drive by that, no matter how many times you drive by that, you know, it just kind of, your heart kind of swells a little bit and you kind of think, "Man, there's the heroes."

RV: And it's very visible, it's right there off the road just across the Potomac in Arlington and I mean, it's quite visible.

PC: Very visible and the Marines are good at that. And you know, they put it right out there and thousands and thousands of people see it everyday, you know, it's a constant reminder of what those guys did. And the Wall is just, it's just not there, you got to really look for it for one thing and you know, it was a real disappointment and it is a disappointment to me to this day.

RV: How many times have you been back to see it?

PC: Oh, half a dozen and I've seen the Visiting Wall, the Traveling Wall several, several times. And it remains a disappointment to me to this day.

RV: Did you find Chick's name the first time you were there?

PC: Oh yes, oh yeah, I've find that every time I've go. I go look at that every time I…never made a rubbing of it, but yeah, I found him every time I go.

RV: Anybody else that you look up?

PC: No, just him, just him.

RV: Your interpretation of that Wall and your response is very different from a lot of veterans; they see it as a great monument to the fallen heroes, but what do you think would've been a more appropriate monument? And I know I'm putting you on the spot with that, but what do you think that the Vietnam War Monument should look like or a general…?

PC: It should look like dirty, sweaty guys in ripped fatigues in a firefight, that's what it should look like. It should look like guys going up Hamburger Hill. You know,

it should look like guys being heroes because that's what they were. You know, they did things they didn't have to do because that was their job and we should celebrate that and we didn't. And I understand the context; don't get me wrong. You know, when that Wall was designed, it wasn't that long after the war and the war was still an open raw bleeding sore for America.

RV: Designed by a young Vietnamese woman.

PC: Yup, yup. And so, you know, it's not something we wanted to put in the forefront of our national thought, you know, we didn't want to have it really visible like the Marine Memorial and those kinds of things. And I think because of that, we really shortchanged the guys that, not just the guys that died, but all the guys that fought over there.

RV: You're talking about millions of men and women who were in Southeast Asia?

PC: Yup, yup.

RV: Well…

PC: And it shortchanged them all, in my opinion.

RV: Right, right.

PC: For what that's worth.

RV: Well, this is what this is about. So tell me about leaving the Pentagon and leaving Washington.

PC: You know, they gave me a little farewell luncheon and I told them, I said, "You know, I've actually had two tours at the Pentagon, first and last." (Laughing)

RV: Did they all understand?

PC: Oh yes, yeah, I was pretty verbal that I was not happy and I wanted to get back to what I considered to be a real Army and they knew that. Plus I was going to a fantastic assignment, Battalion Command.

RV: And that was in Germany?

PC: In Germany.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so they had various sundry pictures and I specifically asked for one that showed the picture of the Pentagon in the rearview mirror. I was glad to be leaving.

RV: Right.

PC: And as I say, I didn't do poorly; I just didn't do well. The General that I worked for, you have two people who write on your performance appraisal, two or three, but two that are important. One is your immediate rater, that for me, that was Colonel Guest and then the next guy up was the general and the Army evaluation system is we've struggled with it for years and years, nobody wants to be responsible for ruining somebody else's career and so there's inflation. You know, if you give a numerical rating, everybody gets a hundred. You know, and it makes it very difficult to look and say, "John is better than Bill, so we're going to promote John; we're not going to promote Bill." So the Army several years ago came up with a new system and you have what's called a Senior Rater Profile and if I start getting into stuff that you don't want to talk about, just tell me.

RV: Oh no, go head, this is interesting.

PC: And what it is is each senior rater and I was one for quite awhile, you have a profile where it shows where you rated people. And in theory, it's going to look like a diamond. You've got very few people at the very tippy-top, you've got very few at the very, very bottom and the vast majority come in the middle, what's called center of mass. And so when you rate somebody, you put them somewhere in this diamond and they monitor your Senior Rater Profile at DA and if you start getting too many people at the top of the pyramid or the top of the diamond, they write you a nasty little letter. And it has turned out to be an extraordinary effective way of managing performance appraisals.

RV: It seems that they can quickly look at someone and say, "Okay, yeah, Pat rates a lot of people at the top, so one; we're going to write him a letter and two…"

PC: His OERs, the ones he write are not going to count as much.

RV: Yes, exactly.

PC: You know.

RV: Is this still in effect today?

PC: Well, I don't know. You know, it's been so many years, I can't imagine they would've changed it, it worked so well.

RV: I'm sorry, that was an unfair question.

PC: Well, you know, when your OER goes to the Department of the Army, the MILPERCEN, the Military Personnel Center, they put on there for that senior rater. You know, I've written an OER on John Smith. That OER gets to DA and on John Smith's OER, they put Pat Curry, his senior rater has rated three people in the top, seven people next, twenty people in the middle what we call center of mass.

RV: Right.

PC: Three, two, one, whatever. So you can tell just by looking at that piece of paper.

RV: That's interesting.

PC: At John Smith's OER exactly where Pat Curry, his senior rater has rated everybody he's ever rated. It's not a totally full proof system. When I wrote the first OER, senior rater OER I ever wrote, you know, I had no profile.

RV: Right.

PC: Well it turned out to be on a real good guy, but how do I show that? Well, you show that in the words.

RV: Right, right.

PC: And there's different sets of words that you use, you know, to convey to the promotion board what you really think about this guy.

RV: How much favoritism is in this process?

PC: At what level? (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) Okay, at the level where you were I guess.

PC: Not a lot. I think most of the guys that I know or knew and myself; we took that responsibility pretty seriously. And I was pretty conscious of my Senior Rater Profile; I didn't want any nasty letters. And so I was pretty conscious of it and I rated most guys center of mass. And of course, that always hurts their feelings, you know, nobody wants to be average and center of mass guy under normal circumstances, he's going to get promoted.

RV: Okay.

PC: Okay. But may or may not get selected for Command & General Staff College, those kinds of things. And so, you know, it always hurt people's feelings, but you know, it was a good system and we felt a real responsibility to make it work.

RV: Was it anonymous in any way, did they know it was…they knew it was you, they knew who would be writing?

PC: Absolutely. You always know and the Army started something that was really good. In the past before they started this system, an officer didn't necessarily see his OER. If the rater didn't sit him or her down and say, "Here's your report." they never saw it unless they went to DA and looked in their file and that was just wrong on so many different levels. You know, the good officers always took the guys they rated, sat them down and said, "Here's your OER, let's talk about it."

RV: Right.

PC: Not all did.

RV: Did you do that?

PC: Yeah, yeah. There was one time when I didn't and I should have. But anyway, what they changed about the system was that when it processed through the local personnel office, they made a copy and sent it to the officer, so they always got to see it, even if the rating officer didn't sit down and show it to them.

RV: Let me ask you this. When you write recommendation letters now or when you did, you know, in your civilian career after the Army, did you let those folks see what you had written?

PC: When I write…?

RV: When you wrote recommendation letters?

PC: Oh absolutely, yeah.

RV: You want them to know what you've said.

PC: Absolutely, yeah. One time I didn't do it and I really regret it each day.

RV: In the Army?

PC: In the Army, yeah.

RV: Okay. But since the Army, when you write the letters, you let them see it?

PC: Yes. And typically the way I do it now is I'll write a letter and I'll give it to the individual and let them pass it on or do what they want with it. Most of the requests you get now for references are on the phone. And you know, the world's kind of divided into two parts. If they're not really somebody I would recommend, I cut and run. I say, "Well I'm sorry, you know, the school rules are I can't really discuss them, I'll I can do is

confirm that they worked here." But if they're somebody good and I really want to try to help them out, then I forget the school rules and give them a good recommendation.

RV: I see.

PC: But to get back to where we were in the Pentagon, the General up there was somebody who was still putting everybody in the top block and the first time he rated me, I was in the top block pretty much along with everybody. Well he went and sat on the promotion board, saw how important the rating system was, came back and gave us all a big speech about how important it was and how he was going to start adhering to the system. And they have a mechanism whereby if you're Senior Rater Profile gets out of whack, you can reset it, which means that you stop history, everything that has gone before is still there, but you start over.

RV: When can you do that, anytime?

PC: Anytime you want, all you got to do is write a letter. So if I look at mine and discover, well you know, I've really put too many people in the top, it's getting skewed, I need to reset it. I can write them a letter and I start all over. And instead of doing that, he just started rating people lower to try and put more people in the center of mass.

RV: And you got…?

PC: I got in the center of mass, lower; I'll put it that way.

RV: So it looked like you had just started to really under perform.

PC: Yes.

RV: And…

PC: And I have not forgiven him and I certainly wasn't the only guy that this happened to. It happened to a lot of guys. And what he should have done, you know, ethically, morally, for the Army was reset his Senior Rater Profile. I might have come out in exactly the same place.

RV: Do you really think you would have?

PC: Probably, yeah.

RV: Well didn't people know that this General was in that situation, that he had not written a letter and started over and all of a sudden now he started rating everybody or was it too soon for them to really…?

PC: No, it was really too soon for them to know. You know, they're looking at, when they're sitting on a promotion board; they're looking at thousands of reports.

RV: Yes.

PC: Thousands and they only have a minute or two with each one to look.

RV: It's got to be really tough, Pat, is this why you were passed over as Colonel do you think?

PC: No, no. Two reasons, one was and frankly I don't want to go into a lot of detail.

RV: Of course.

PC: But I didn't, in one particular area being a Battalion Commander I didn't do particularly well and my OER showed that. But what happened was the wall came down, it was obvious that without the Soviet Union, it was going to be a much smaller Army. They really cut back promotions and before then, if you had commanded a battalion successfully, you were going to get promoted to Colonel, that was just a given. But when they cut the promotions back so much, that stopped. And in fact, the guy, Bob Slidell, the guy I had worked for when I was an XO was at MILPERCEN and he told me a year earlier I would've made it easily.

RV: Huh.

PC: And the only time on my favor would've been too young. And what they do is they come up with an order of merit list. They take everybody who was eligible for promotion and they rank them.

RV: Right.

PC: And that list goes to MILPERCEN. MILPERCEN says, "We need seven hundred and fifty-two colonels next year." They came to count down seven hundred and fifty-two names and they draw a line. If you're above the line, you get promoted, if you're below it, you don't. Well, when that number that they needed got so small, they drew that line much higher. And there were several friends of mines, mines, friends of mine who had also commanded and who did not get promoted, but I was crushed, I was destroyed.

RV: Really?

PC: Oh, it was just, I mean, I can't begin to tell you how horrible that feels. And even to this day, it's something I have never been able to get past. And part of it was self-inflicted wound, but part of it was just history and circumstances, but it just, you know, a friend of mine phrased it as it's like a spear through your chest. And boy, it is too. Because you know, I had every expectation of getting promoted.

RV: Of course, of course. You dedicated your life thus far to the Army and served well it seems, it sounds to me that you've done everything that you've needed to do to put yourself in that position.

PC: And it was a difficult time for me and it's something that to this day, which is ridiculous. I mean, how long ago was that? But I just have not been able to get past it.

RV: I don't think it's ridiculous, I would think that it's probably normal to be regretful and to have some feelings about that. You know, that's a major shift in your life. We kind of skipped over a really important, interesting time period in your Army career is when you did go to Germany the second time. Tell me about where you were stationed, your duties and what you saw.

PC: I went over to be a Battalion Commander, second best assignment I've ever had.

RV: First being the…?

PC: Company Commander in Vietnam.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Yeah, no question. And I had made a personnel mistake. When they asked what kinds of battalion, what battalion did I want to command, I picked the 66th Maintenance Battalion and that wasn't a mistake, it was a damn good unit, the guy before me, Charlie Bush had done a great job. You know, I didn't have to come in and clean up a big mess, Charlie had done a great job. And Charlie was another one incidentally that got caught in the draw down. He had all the jobs to be a General.

RV: I remember the newspapers and the stories and everything about this draw down.

PC: What they called the Peace Bonus.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: But Charlie had all the…I thought he was going to be a General for sure, he'd been a Battalion Commander, he came back to the States, was a Division Support Command Commander, went to Senior Service College, the whole works and retired as a Colonel. I thought for sure he was going to be a General and probably should have been.

RV: When did you get to Germany, this was in '86 or '87?

PC: '86.

RV: '86.

PC: '86.

RV: Okay.

PC: And anyway, got over there…oh, I was talking about made a mistake. What I should have asked for was forward support battalion in a division.

RV: Is this hindsight talking or…?

PC: Hindsight talking, yes, absolutely; 20/20 perfect hindsight. And should have asked for a forward support battalion, don't know that I would've got it because my experience as an XO and an Operations Officer was at the general support level of maintenance, that's where my experience was, probably would've what I got, but I should've fought for a forward support battalion.

RV: Instead you had a rear support battalion.

PC: Yes, and don't get me wrong, great battalion, great people.

RV: Sure.

PC: But wasn't my mindset. But anyway, got over there.

RV: Where in general?

PC: We were in Kaiserslautern, which was in central Germany near the French border.

RV: I think you spelled that once before.

PC: K-a-i-s-e-r-s-l-a-u-t-e-r-n, Kaiserslautern.

RV: Okay.

PC: Very heavily Americanized community.

RV: In whereabouts again?

PC: In central Germany near the French border.

RV: Okay.

PC: And like I say, very heavily Americanized, lots of Americans there, a lot of Americans retired in that area.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah. They'd marry a German woman or decided they liked Germany and they stayed. And so we had great facilities and you know, nice hospital, nice PX.

RV: Did the girls come over with you?

PC: No, actually what happened was they pass on quarters from Battalion Commander to Battalion Commander; I had to give him time to get out. So I went over and Diana and the girls closed the house in Washington and came over just a couple of weeks later, three or four weeks later, so I didn't have to batch it very long. The first time I went over, it was like six or seven weeks before I got quarters and there were guys that had been there six months waiting for quarters. But anyway, so Diana and the girls came over. Fortunately, they got there in time for the change of command, which is a big ceremony.

RV: Yes.

PC: So we had the change of command ceremony. Was a terrific job and I think that I did a pretty damn good job frankly. You know, it was kind of interesting, your Company Commanders, the young Captains, what they're focused on is the mission. They want to get the equipment repaired and get it back into the system. And at our level, well we did really two things. One was we would for some customers; we would repair their equipment and give it back to them, that's called direct support. We also had a general support mission and what that means is we would take equipment that had been taken out of a unit, put back in the supply system, the system would give it to us, we would repair it and refurbish it, put it back in the supply system to be reissued, but we wouldn't issue it directly to a customer.

RV: I see.

PC: Does that make sense?

RV: Yes.

PC: And we had several German units, CSGs, Civilian Support Groups, who did the majority of the general support. But the young Captains were focused on that mission, getting that piece of equipment repaired and getting it back, I was focused on

training. The maintenance mission was secondary; we were really there to be prepared for a war. Now for our units, there were two pieces to that. One was getting the equipment repaired, getting it back in the system so it was there if we needed it for a war, but the primary reason was to train and be ready to go to war.

RV: What kind of war were you training for?

PC: Ground war in Europe, that was our focus.

RV: Okay.

PC: That one of the things that we did was rewrite our war plans and that was our focus. If the Soviets came through the folded gap, what did we go? Now we were so far back, I mean, we were almost in France.

RV: Sure.

PC: You know, I mean, we were behind the rear almost. But that was our focus. So it created some interesting discussions between the Company Commanders and myself with them saying, "You know, I'm spending so much time training, I don't have time to do my mission." And me saying, "Captain, you don't understand. Training is your mission."

RV: And you're supposed to prepare.

PC: And so that was a continuous tug of war and that kind of thing. And the CG, General Louis, his focus was also on training and I agreed with that.

RV: Okay, so what kind of typical duties did you have, just kind overseeing this entire training process?

PC: Well, you know, making sure that they were doing the training when they were supposed to. My S3, the Operations Officer would come up with a training program, making sure that they implemented it, making sure that they were training on the things they were supposed to be training on, you know, chemical training, wearing the MOP suit and the protective mask and that kind of thing. And a training context, going out, observing the training, making sure they were doing what they were supposed to be doing when they were supposed to be doing it, that they weren't just out there playing grab ass, that they were doing something productive.

RV: Right. You were Lieutenant Colonel?

PC: I was a Lieutenant Colonel, yes.

RV: Okay. Training in the sense that these are logisticians training to back up the infantry basically and back up the ground war, is that correct, is that…?

PC: You're a soldier first and a logistician second.

RV: I see.

PC: So during the dedicated training time, what we trained on was basic soldier skills.

RV: I see.

PC: Okay. The stethoscope skills, this inner knowledge that every soldier has to have to be a good soldier. How to set up a Claymore mine, how if a chemical alarm goes off to get your MOP suit, your protective suit, well you probably had that one anyway, but to get your boots and gloves and mask on in a minimum amount of time. You know, basic fire and maneuver. Now we didn't do anything near what the infantry did, real basic fire and maneuver. We would go out to the field and set up and set up a perimeter and defend that just as a basic soldier skill. How to do repairs in the field, not in a shop, those kinds of things.

RV: Tell me, that all makes very, very good sense, but tell me how, this is the midst of the Cold War and at this time, the very end of the Cold War, what was the atmosphere like and people who didn't live through the Cold War and especially post-World War II, not necessarily the first five to ten years, but really kind of after the Vietnam Era ends, you know, say early seventies, that threat of kind of a nuclear blanket hanging over the world that as a child I was practicing in junior high school to prepare for a nuclear attack, a real one. Now what the atmosphere like, amidst all this training in Germany, right there on the frontlines, I mean, right where it's going to happen first most likely, what was this…were you all very conscious? Obviously you are, but are you thinking, "Wow, a nuclear war can happen any time, you know, a hotspot could happen here or there or around the globe and trigger…something happens with the Koreas and it triggers a confrontation here," what was this atmosphere like?

PC: That was always there, that thought was always there. And you know, personal basis.

RV: Sure.

PC: I frankly didn't worry too much about a nuclear war. I figured if there was going to be a nuclear war, we were dead. (Laughing) There wasn't anything we could do about it.

RV: Did you tell Diana this?

PC: Oh Diana knew it. We used to have, and I'm trying to remember what they were called, but we used to periodically have exercises where they would practice getting all the dependents, all the family members together, take them to the airport, load them on an airplane.

RV: In Germany?

PC: In Germany. The plan was when the threat got to a certain level, when the DEFCON (Defense Readiness Condition) got to a certain level, they would evacuate all the dependents.

RV: What does that do psychologically to your children?

PC: (Laughing)

RV: I mean, I know that's a necessity, but are you saying…?

PC: It made them a little tense.

RV: This is what's going to…you know, "Daddy's going to stay here and he's going to glow in the dark eventually." You guys are getting out to live without me.

PC: They weren't nearly as worried about me as they were about the dog. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: Diana was very upset that they weren't going to be able to take the dog. But as a Battalion Commander's wife, she participated and the kids participated in these exercises all the time. And you know, it was just one of those things that came with being in the Army in Germany.

RV: So you're very aware of this?

PC: Oh yeah, it's always there. And one of the things that I did was back in the Reagan days when we had enough money, I would one company at a time, I would get them together, load them on a bus and send them on a border tour.

RV: Border tour of the Germanys?

PC: Of the Germanys, yeah. The 11th ACR, which is one of our crack units, gave border tours.

RV: ACR standing for?

PC: Armored Calvary Regiment, sorry. They were the frontline unit; they were in the folded gap. And come over to my office sometime, Mike Ellicott's got a good picture from the 11th ACR perspective. It's a painting, but it's a good picture of looking across the border, which is a bunch of flat space with barbed wire and everywhere and towers. But I would send them on tours at the 11th ACR of the border.

RV: Why?

PC: Because I wanted them to know that the threat was real. You know, we were way away from it, but you know. I wanted them to know it was real, it was there, we were here for a purpose, we had a real mission. And you know, there were bad guys right across that wire and they could decide at anytime to come through that wire. And I wanted them to know that, I wanted to raise their awareness if you will, heighten their awareness of that and I think it worked. The feedback I got was that, you know, 'Jeez, we had no idea." And so I think that was a reasonably effective thing to do. But that awareness I think was always there. Like I said, I didn't worry about a nuclear war. I mean, like you said, we were all going to glow in the dark, that was going to be it. Excuse me, what I worried about, well I didn't worry about an all out nuclear war, what I worried about was a more conventional war, maybe tactical nuclear weapons, but almost certainly a lot of chemical weapons.

RV: Really?

PC: Soviet Doctrine called for the use of chemical weapons. I mean, that's the way it was. And they certainly were going to use them first; there was never any doubt in my mind about that.

RV: Nerve gas and all of that.

PC: Yeah, and nasty stuff.

RV: Yes.

PC: Nasty stuff. I was always scared to death of that stuff. And we trained a lot on that, a lot.

RV: Were you aware that you got Soviet satellites watching you guys' train and watching all this happen?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. We used to get periodic briefings on what we called SMLM, Soviet Military Liaison Mission. By the terms of the peace agreement, the end of World War II, the Soviets had the right to send observers anywhere in West Germany. Now they had to meet certain, technically had to meet certain requirements. The cars had to be marked and etc. etc. We had the same right in East Germany; the military, the U.S. Military Liaison Missions. But we would get briefings. They were only allowed in certain areas and if we saw them outside these areas, we were supposed to try to stop them. Of course, they didn't want to be stopped.

RV: As in shoot and kill?

PC: Oh no, no, no, no, no.

RV: Okay.

PC: No, no, no. Try to block their vehicle.

RV: I see.

PC: Try to, you know, get them sandwiched in so they couldn't stop and call the Military Police and those kinds of things and it was like a big game.

RV: Did this actually happen?

PC: Oh many times.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah, it was very routine. And we had to report any SMLM that we saw anywhere, even if they were in a legal area and there were several times we had convoys going out to a training area and we'd have SMLM behind us or alongside us or something like that on the autobahn. Yeah, it was common.

RV: What did they look like?

PC: Black car with you know, Soviet hammer and sickle on it and that kind of thing.

RV: What did the agents look like?

PC: Oh just people.

RV: Just regular folks?

PC: Just regular.

RV: Not in uniform?

PC: No, well sometimes, sometimes. They're supposed to be in uniform.

RV: That's very unique.

PC: But you know, they weren't the stereotype of the Russians with the one eyebrow, real thick and black.

RV: Sure, sure.

PC: They're just ordinary people.

RV: Right.

PC: And just doing their job like we were, but they were the bad guys.

RV: What'd you think of the Soviet Union then?

PC: God, I was scared to death of them. I mean, there were so damn many of them.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: You know, and there was a real difference in philosophy between the Soviets and us. Their philosophy was a lot of relatively inexpensive equipment. Their equipment wasn't very sophisticated, but the theory was it would run forever, didn't need much maintenance. We had the opposite theory. We wanted fewer, very capable pieces of equipment, like the M1A2 tank is just an extraordinary piece of combat equipment. And so there was a real difference in philosophy, but we knew if there ever was a ground attack, that man, there was going to be a lot of them and they just had divisions of artillery.

RV: Yes.

PC: I mean, around Berlin, there were five tank armies just circling the city of Berlin, so we knew, man, there's going to be a lot of them.

RV: And you knew that artillery was going to try to take out logistic systems and support units, just as quick as they would try to take out the frontline infantry.

PC: Absolutely. We figured where we were, we figured, well I figured, I'll put it that way, I figured we were going to get a lot of chemical because over time, that would dissipate and they'd have our facilities to use.

RV: True, very true.

PC: And personally chemical is one of the things that scared me, so we trained a lot of chemical. And you know, it paid off, it's funny, it paid off. I got a call after, several years later, I got a call from one of the guys who'd been a Company Commander for me and he had been in touch with one of the NCOs and this NCO had gone to Desert Storm. And the NCO told him, he said, "You know, there were a lot of chemical alarms because we thought Saddam was going to use chemicals during Desert Storm." And this Staff Sergeant told this Captain that, he said, "You know," he said, "When those alarms went off, I was always the first one in my MOP suit." He said, "Lampertheim paid off." Lampertheim was a training area we used to go to.

RV: Okay. How do you spell that?

PC: L-a-m-p-e-r-t-h-e-i-m, Lampertheim, it was a training area. And he said "Lampertheim paid off." And I would make the Battalion Chemical NCO, he loathed me because he was oriented on chemical warfare and I made him do a lot of training, he loathed me. But I would have him set off chemical alarms three or four times a day to make people get in their MOP suit.

RV: Wow.

PC: Just to practice.

RV: Wow.

PC: And it worked, it paid off. And he said, "You know, I was always three times faster than anybody else." We had trained on it a lot. So it paid off, it benefited the guys and you know, that was the point, they have to survive to do their job and I wanted them to survive.

RV: Did you ever handle logistics with nuclear weapons at all?

PC: No, no, that's a very specialized field I frankly wanted nothing to do with it. You know, one comma out of place will end a career and that's a slight exaggeration, but not much.

RV: I understand, that is sensitive and…

PC: Oh is it ever. And so no, I never had anything to do with that and never particularly wanted to. One of the big things that went on while I was there was, I'm trying to remember, I'm kind of getting old, I'm trying to remember the name of the

missile system, but Reagan was moving a new missile system in. Golly, what was the name of that?

RV: In the United States or moving it over to Europe?

PC: Moving it over to Europe and that was a big flap, the Soviets were mad, of course, the French were mad, but they're always mad.

RV: I remember this.

PC: And one of those battalions moved on to our instillation. And you know, you can see your target rating go from a twelve to a two when that happens. (Laughing)

RV: Right. Did you all say, "Hey, why don't you take that about sixty miles that way?"

PC: (Laughing) Yeah, we tried, but it was no go.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And so that was kind of an interesting time.

RV: Yeah. Speaking of Reagan…

PC: My main man.

RV: Yes.

PC: (Laughing)

RV: When he went to Berlin and said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall," what was your reaction? I don't remember exactly what year that was off the top of my head, but I think, were you there?

PC: You know, I really don't remember. I remember my reaction as, "Go Ronny!" You know, we were right with him.

RV: I mean, he's in East Germany saying that. Tell me about your…

PC: And it worked, they tore down the wall.

RV: Yes they did. Tell me about your experience in Berlin and with the end, before that though. I want to hear what the West Germans were like and how they treated you as Americans and did you meet East Germans before the wall comes down?

PC: Okay, when we were in Kaiserslautern, you know, the West Germans really were ambivalent about us. On one hand, they knew that we were protecting them from the Soviets.

RV: Do you think they really understood that?

PC: Uh…

RV: I'm playing Devil's advocate.

PC: I understand and I think they understood, I think they didn't want to if that makes any sense.

RV: It does.

PC: And they knew that we were a major economic factor for them. On the other hand, they really didn't want us there. Can you blame them? You know, if there was a German armored division in Lubbock, I'd probably wouldn't be too thrilled either. But of course, the government, the German government, we were absolutely indispensable. They paid us major bucks every year to help support the United States Army in Europe. A lot of people don't know that the Germans contributed a lot of money.

RV: Billions of dollars.

PC: Billions to the upkeep of American forces in Europe, but the average German on the street, they weren't too crazy about us.

RV: Did you speak German; did you learn it?

PC: I spoke some. I went to a language course before I took command and so I spoke some German. I wasn't real fluent, but I could get along. And the area where we were at that time was so heavily Americanized that it was really kind of difficult to meet Germans socially. Most of the Germans that I knew, in our battalion, we had several German units that we called Civilian Support Groups that I mentioned a few minutes ago.

RV: Right.

PC: These were really interesting piece of history. They were leftovers from the end of World War II. At the end of World War II, there were millions of displaced persons that had no home, nowhere to go, no work. And the allies, not just us, but the Americans as well started the Civilian Support Groups and what they were were civilian units, they wore uniforms, but they were totally civilian. And at the end of the war, these units had been made up; the ones in my area had been made up of Polish DPs, Displaced Persons. And so these had been Polish speaking, their officers were Polish; their workers were Polish. And we put them to work for the United States in non-combat type capacities like preparing equipment and those kinds of things, as a means of giving them

a way to make a living. We built barracks for them; they lived in barracks, military housing facilities.

RV: On the base?

PC: Oh gosh, kind of. Some of them yes, some of them no, I'll put it that way.

RV: Okay.

PC: And so these units had been in existence since the end of World War II. And there were a lot of them in our area because of where we were. As you got further forward, you didn't see them. But back where we were, there were a lot of these units. Over time, they had been open to Germans and it was a good career path for a German. A young man would come in, go into an apprenticeship program and had a place to live, had a Mess Hall to eat in.

RV: Learn a skill?

PC: Learn a skill and have a job. And so there were a lot of Germans in these units by this time.

RV: Were they paid by the U.S. government or paid by the German government?

PC: Gosh, you know, that's a good question, I do not remember and I should know that, but it was so long ago, I just don't remember.

RV: Go head.

PC: But anyway, of course, these guys had been there for years and years and highly skilled, I mean, they were good. And they could fix just almost anything. By this time, most of the Polish guys had retired and the units were, the majority of the units were German.

RV: How did you get along with these folks?

PC: Oh great, they were good guys. They were used to us, you know. The American Commanders come and the American Commanders go and we're still going to be here, you know.

RV: Right.

PC: But while we were there in another unit, up the road from us, there were two Polish guys who were getting ready to retire and one of them in all the years since the end of World War II had not been off the base.

RV: Wow! Why, how?

PC: Just I guess scared. But he had his little niche and he was comfortable and he had never been off that base in all those years. It was in the American Paper, *The Stars and Stripes*; it was in the German papers because everybody was just so amazed. And everybody was kind of wondering what he was going to do when he retired because he couldn't live in the barracks anymore.

RV: Right.

PC: And it turned out to be a non-issue, he found a little place and moved in. But yeah, they were kind of interesting and a lot of the Germans that I knew were the guys in these units.

RV: Right.

PC: And we'd go out to their homes and their clubs, they had a little club in their building and that kind of thing.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: Good guys.

RV: It sounds very interesting where you could really kind of touch the local culture there.

PC: Yeah.

RV: In a very safe environment.

PC: Yeah.

RV: A very safe place.

PC: Well Germany was very safe anyway.

RV: Yeah.

PC: I mean, we never worried about that.

RV: What about East Germans?

PC: You know, we were not encouraged to get in contact with East Germans either by the U.S. or by the East Germans.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: I had one incident and it's funny, the guys that really loved us were the older East Germans.

RV: Why do you say that?

PC: They were very sorry they had been caught on the east side of the wall. But many times when we were in East Germany, East Berlin I should say. We had to go in uniform, so we were always in uniform. I learned very quickly not to wear my hat with the scrambled eggs on the bill.

RV: Why?

PC: Because I attracted lots of company. They figured if you had scrambled eggs, you were in important. Scrambled eggs being the gold braid on the bill of the hat of a Field Grade Officer.

RV: Yes.

PC: It's the ones you always see in the movies.

RV: Yes.

PC: And you always attracted lots of company, people taking your picture and following you around. They weren't at all subtle about it. It was the Stasi, that's what it was.

RV: The East Berliners.

PC: The East Berliners, yeah, this is why you were in East Berlin.

RV: You could go over, do a tour and come back?

PC: By the terms of the agreement at the end of the war, Berlin was divided into four parts. Berlin remained an occupied city up until the time the wall came down. It was officially the only occupied city in the world. And it was divided into four parts; French, British, American, and Soviet. The Soviets had about the eastern half; the western half was divided among the allies. And by the terms of the agreement, we could go over there anytime and we had unrestricted movement in East Berlin and we went over there quite frequently.

RV: Americans in general or American military?

PC: American, American military.

RV: Right.

PC: Now American civilians could go, but it was kind of a hassle.

RV: Yeah, checkpoints.

PC: Visa…well, everybody had the checkpoints.

RV: Right.

PC: But the passport, visa, the whole works. But by the terms of the agreement, we didn't have to have any of that stuff and they couldn't ask us for it, we couldn't ask them for it either.

RV: Right.

PC: But of course the number of East Germans that were allowed to come our way was pretty small.

RV: Yes, yes. Tell me about Berlin and the atmosphere there and what it was like. I mean, this is an incredible, you're right there, you don't know this is getting ready to happen, the wall coming down, but you're right there on the cusp of history once again, right in the middle of it.

PC: Just what an amazing place to go. I mean, just…there was a friend of mine, when I was finishing up my Battalion Command tour that was a friend of mine who was in Berlin at the time. Well I had called MILPERCEN in Europe and said, "Okay, I'm getting ready, what assignments are available?" And they said there was one available in Berlin. Well this friend of mine was here and recommended me to the Command, Danny Bransford and recommended me to the Command, so they took me on. They had the right to accept or refuse anybody. The U.S. Army Berlin was really a favored child. And when I say accept or refuse anybody, I'm talking down to the privates. You know, before somebody went to Berlin, the Berlin Command would look at their file. If they had an Article 15 or anything else, they didn't come; everyone of them handpicked. So anyway, they recommended me to the Command, so we went to Berlin. And there were two ways we could get into Berlin. One was to fly. In fact, when I went for an interview, a friend of mine in the Aviation Battalion flew me in. You had to be, as an aviator, you had to be certified to fly the corridor they called it.

RV: Yes.

PC: There was one specific corridor in and out of Berlin and U.S. aircraft had to stay in that corridor and he needed a flight to maintain his certification. He was Battalion Commander of the Aviation Battalion, so he personally flew me in and out of Berlin.

RV: In what kind of airplane?

PC: It was, gosh, a small fixed wing.

RV: Okay.

PC: That's all I remember. But anyway, so when I went, I was by myself, Diana and the kids were still in K-town. Boy, driving that ground root for the first time is an interesting experience. There's a very strict protocol that you follow. We never officially recognized East Germany.

RV: Right.

PC: So the guards on that side were Soviets and there was a very strict protocol. You go out to this point, you stop, you make a right face, you take x number of steps. A Soviet enlisted man will meet you there, you exchange salutes, he looks at your papers, you exchange salutes, you turn around and go back in your car. Or conversely depending on where you were, you go in this little building, you put your papers in a slot, you never see the guy on the other side of the wall and pretty soon they come back out of the slot, then you go outside and go through the exchange of salutes and everything. Periodically a hand, that door will open and a hand will come around the wall and it'll have a Soviet belt with a Soviet buckle on it or something like that.

RV: Really, why?

PC: They want to trade.

RV: Oh okay.

PC: They especially liked *Playboy*.

RV: (Laughing) Really?

PC: So you know, you take the belt, put something in their hand, they would disappear, you never saw a face.

RV: Now this is purely just friendliness?

PC: Just purely friendliness, curiosity.

RV: Yeah.

PC: They were as curious about us as we were about them.

RV: So would you take a *Playboy* magazine and…?

PC: I never did, but I knew a lot of guys that did.

RV: Yeah.

PC: I was always afraid as a Field Grade that you know, if something blew up, it was going to be nasty.

RV: Sure, sure.

PC: But the thing was, if you were coming through, you put a *Playboy* on the dashboard and that meant you wanted to trade.

RV: Really?

PC: And they came to be a little circumspect because there were cameras just everywhere.

RV: Yes.

PC: Ours and there's.

RV: Yes.

PC: But yeah, it was kind of…

RV: Very interesting.

PC: Kind of humorous in a way.

RV: What did you see traded from the American side?

PC: *Playboy*, but you know, a belt. Although, our buckles were just plain, theirs had stars and hammer and sickle and that kind of thing on it.

RV: That's really neat, really neat.

PC: And it was interesting. But the first time I went through, you know, I was pretty nervous.

RV: Oh yeah.

PC: And you're always afraid you get off the autobahn, there's an autobahn that goes through East Germany to Berlin and periodically somebody will make a wrong turn, they give you a, they the U.S. side of the border, will give you a book and had directions that had pictures, it had everything. You had to try pretty hard to get lost. And about once a month, somebody would get off the autobahn, wander around in East Germany until the East Germans or the Soviets picked him up. Most of the time they take them back, put them on the autobahn…

RV: Send them.

PC: Send them on their way. Once in a while, it depended on the political situation, they'd make a fuss or something, but technically, we were not allowed to deal with the East Germans because we'd never recognized them. We had a little card and it said, it translated it in German and they'd had it in German, "I want to see a Soviet

officer." And what you were supposed to do was sit there with your windows rolled up holding this card to the window.

RV: This is if you were stopped for any reason?

PC: If you were stopped for any reason, you were not allowed to deal with the East Germans, "I want to see a Soviet officer."

RV: Did you have to use your card?

PC: Never, never. We drove the corridor many times and never had a bit of problem.

RV: Wow.

PC: And so anyway, you drove this corridor in, but it was really interesting. There was, you know, there was a real sense of fatalism about it. I mean, there were five tank Armies around us, we had a brigade. You know, how long were we going to last?

RV: Right.

PC: We did a lot of joint planning with the State Department about how our big mission was to keep the corridor open and about how we were going to take a unit and go through the corridor in armored unit and go through the corridor and fight our way out and etc., we did a tremendous amount of training in urban warfare. In fact, everything was funded by the German government, everything we did and we lived well let me tell you. That was our showplace and in order to maintain face, if you will, the West Germans and the East Germans both to set our sides of Berlin were real showplaces. I mean, my Sedan, my Army staff car was an Audi, had a five bedroom house. I had turned down a three-story seven-bedroom house.

RV: Wow!

PC: At the end of the war, the Americans took over that part of Berlin. The first thing we did of course was throw all the Nazis out of their houses and we took them over and we still have these houses all these years later.

RV: So you're saying when you went to visit Berlin, you stayed…?

PC: Oh no, no, this is when we moved, when we were living there.

RV: You actually moved into Berlin?

PC: Okay.

RV: I'm sorry; I'm getting lost.

PC: I'm sorry, I'm getting things confused. I was a Battalion Commander in Kaiserslautern…

RV: And then you went?

PC: Yes.

RV: I see.

PC: So when I turned over the battalion, my next assignment was as the G4 and Director of Logistics. G4 is the Senior Logistics Officer and Director of Logistics for the United States Army Berlin. And the first time, when I mentioned flying in, that was for an interview to see if they wanted me. And then when I drove the corridor, that's when I was going to Berlin to take my job as…at that time, I was the Maintenance Division Chief and later got to be the G4 and the Director of Logistics.

RV: Just tremendous responsibility.

PC: Oh yeah, yeah, in a very small microcosm.

RV: Sure, but at the epicenter of, literally the epicenter of the Cold War.

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. And so I'm sorry, I kind of got things confused there. I turned over the battalion, went to Berlin and like I say, there was a real sense of fatalism about it. I mean, we did all the planning; we trained and trained and trained and trained and trained. I mean, the infantry guys, they were probably the best urban combat guys in the world; I mean, they were just good.

RV: Was this all the Americans or were you working with the French and the British as well?

PC: Well, I was referring to the Americans; we worked very closely with the French and the British.

RV: They had their people there as well?

PC: Absolutely.

RV: Their military there. How well did you all get along?

PC: Very well, very well. They'd come to our house; we'd go to their house. My British counterpart was a British Major, real good guy. My French counterpart was a Moroccan French Lieutenant Colonel; the French know how to live. (Laughing) I mean, the…

RV: What do you mean?

PC: Oh man, they had the most beautiful Officers Club, it was right on the edge of a lake and just beautifully appointed and very well done. Their quarters were huge and very well furnished; and of course, excellent wines. We used to love to go to the French PX and the commissary and they didn't come to ours very much for some reason. But I guess Spam and potato chips didn't appeal to them very much.

RV: (Laughing) Right.

PC: But yeah, we got along quite well. In fact, I got an invitation to the Queen's birthday party. You know, they have an official birthday in June, doesn't matter when the Queen's real birthday is, they have an official Queen's birthday party in June.

RV: Queen of England?

PC: Queen of England, yes, I'm sorry, the British counterpart, and we got invited by the Brits to the Queen's birthday party. Fergie was there and it's really interesting, as Americans, we don't see much royalty and it's really interesting seeing how royalty is treated, I mean it's unbelievable. Fergie sat on a dais out in front of everybody else, raised up, shaded and everything else and the British Commanding General was sitting behind her and to her right. She watched the parade go by for the Queen's birthday and everything, just a really interesting experience.

RV: Very interesting experience, very interesting.

PC: Went to a big reception afterwards and a big part of it was all roped off and nobody could get within a hundred feet, that's where the royalty was and the British senior officers. And then they had a corridor roped off and when it was time for her to leave, she walked down that corridor very graciously, as least publicly. And our British counterparts said she was really nice.

RV: She was young then.

PC: Very young. And they offered her a piece of cake, she was touring the British facilities and our British counterpart, his wife who hated Americans was telling us about this.

RV: Really, she hated Americans?

PC: Oh really hated Americans and made no bones about it.

RV: Why?

PC: I don't know, I never did, I'll never know. But he was a real nice guy, but she was telling us they offered her a piece of cake and she said, "You know, I'd love to, but I just can't." You know, they were really giving her hell about her weight.

RV: Yes.

PC: She said, "If they see me with a piece of cake, I'll be in fifteen newspapers tomorrow."

RV: Wow, what a way to live.

PC: Yeah. I mean, under a microscope all the time, but she came across as a very nice lady and very gracious.

RV: Good. Let's take a break for a minute.

PC: Okay.

RV: Okay Pat, continuing. Tell me a little bit about East Berlin.

PC: Very interesting place. You know, the older East Berliners loved us. We had freed them at the end of the war more or less.

RV: The end of World War II?

PC: World War II, yeah. And you know, we were kind of compared to the Soviets and the East Germans; we were kind of the beacon of liberty if you will to use a cliché. But I'd go over into East Berlin and we had unrestricted right of access. We could go anywhere in East Berlin. And we did, but we'd go over and walk around and the older East Germans were always very warm, very welcoming. One time I stepped in a mud puddle, of course, in uniform, I stepped in a mud puddle and an older German man came rushing over. I thought he was going to get down and clean my shoe, I really did. Now the younger folks, different story.

RV: What did he do?

PC: He just came over and was very upset that I had stepped in this mud puddle and grabbed my arm to steady me and my elbow to steady me and the whole works.

RV: Wow.

PC: Yeah, it was a good experience; it was a very good experience. And we had several of those with the older folks, the older folks would always smile and you know, doff their hat or say hello or something like that, so it was pretty interesting.

RV: What about the younger generation?

PC: Not so much, but they had grown up under that system, that's all they knew.

RV: Sure.

PC: They had no basis of contrast and it was the same in West Berlin.

RV: Yes.

PC: The older West Berliners loved us.

RV: Yes.

PC: But the younger West Berliners, Berlin was an interesting place in many, many ways, but one of the things was they started many years before having a real outflow of people from Berlin. The population of West Berlin started to decline very sharply and the West German government was very concerned about that. So they put in some real incentives to live in West Berlin. Among them was a free university, a completely free university, Freie Universitat and if you lived in West Berlin, you were not subject to the German draft.

RV: That's big.

PC: That was huge. There were many taxes that West Berliners did not have to pay that West Germans did and a couple of other things. And that was very successful in getting the population of West Berlin, to put West Berlin back up. But look at the kind of people that it would attract, people who didn't want to be drafted.

RV: Yeah.

PC: You know, the free university, so it was a very pacifist, I'm talking about the younger generation now.

RV: Sure.

PC: Very pacifist society, very antiwar and to some extent, anti-U.S. Military. And so...

RV: Despite the fact that looking back at history, they were freed from or "freed" from Nazism and Fascism and…?

PC: Well the big thing was that keeping the Soviets out and keeping the East Germans out and that's what the older folks who could see how the East Germans were living and they knew what we had done, they appreciated it. The younger folks didn't have that basis of comparison.

RV: Right. This is, I mean, you were a young boy during the Berlin Airlift and those elderly Germans when you finally, you know, were there in your career, they lived through that.

PC: They lived it.

RV: Yeah.

PC: And in fact, the pilot, one of the pilots who flew in the Berlin Airlift, they had a big celebration every year and he would come back and he was a real hero in Berlin.

RV: Yeah.

PC: I mean, understandably.

RV: Sure.

PC: He was the candy pilot; he was the guy that would throw candy out the window to the kids.

RV: Ah yes.

PC: And every year he'd fly over and throw candy out, but he was a real, to this day, he was a real hero in the way of Berlin.

RV: How was Harry Truman played in Berlin?

PC: Nah, I never heard really much about him, the big guy was John F. Kennedy.

RV: Yeah.

PC: JFK.

RV: "I am a Berliner."

PC: Exactly. And he was the hero, statues, pictures, everything. But East Berlin, they tried to make it a showplace, but it was all external. And by that I mean…

RV: The Soviets tried, not…

PC: The Soviets tried very hard to make East Berlin the showplace of communism.

RV: Did the East Berliners try or was that pretty much imposed upon them, according to what you saw?

PC: Well you know, you figure that the younger guys up to what, thirty, thirty-five had lived under that their whole life, it's all they knew.

RV: Yes.

PC: And so you know, it was their town, their city; they tried to participate in it. There was an East German doctor who was…and in East German doctors made good money just like ours did. He had all this money in his bank account, he was very frustrated, there was nothing for him to buy. I mean, there was a real shortage of goods on the East German side. We were instructed never to buy food, not a restaurant meal, but at a grocery store on the east side because it was so scarce, we'd literally be taking it out of the mouth of East Berliners. Many times we'd walk down the street and we'd see something nice, some piece of leather goods or something like that in a store window and go in only to find out we couldn't buy it, it wasn't for sale, it was just to put in the window on display.

RV: Wow.

PC: They had one and it was the display item and it was not for sale and that was not unusual at all; many, many empty store windows. Now right downtown in the very center of town, there was a huge department store and they had pretty good selection of stuff. And of course, the prices of the exchange rate was such with Oast-Marks, East Marks and exchange rate was such that stuff was really cheap and inexpensive, and so we used to go over there and buy the consumer goods. And there was a lot of stuff that they made specifically to sell to tourists, Christmas kind of things; although no religious symbols obviously.

RV: Right, right.

PC: But you know, the traditional symbols; reindeer, and Santa Claus or St. Nick and that kind of stuff. But we could go over there and there was a restaurant we used to go to and it had survived the war, so it was a very old building. It had the very ornate and I remember this so clearly, very ornate sculpted plaster ceilings. And like I say, an old building and there was no money to renovate it, but it was not in bad shape. But we could get a full six-course dinner with Russian champagne, wine and dessert for about four and a half dollars.

RV: Wow.

PC: And that's with live music.

RV: Wow. You and Diana would go over?

PC: Oh yeah, frequently. And if we had visitors and when you live in Berlin, you get lots of visitors.

RV: Yeah, I bet so.

PC: And if we had visitors, we'd take them there for dinner because it was a neat place. But I mean, they weren't even subtle about it. In the light sconce, there was a big opening, big hole that was clearly a microphone and a camera. (Laughing) I mean, they weren't even subtle.

RV: Wow. Where was this camera, in the restaurant?

PC: In the restaurant, yeah, yeah. You'd be sitting in a booth and this light sconce would be mounted on the wall.

RV: Would you wave to it?

PC: Oh yeah, all the time, yeah.

RV: Would you make any other gestures too? (Laughing)

PC: No, no, no. And oh yeah, when you were on the phone when you were in West Berlin and you were on the phone in your quarters. All the phone lines ran through East Germany of course.

RV: Yes.

PC: And you'd hear clicking and buzzing and that kind of stuff. And we'd say, "Hello Ivan," and that kind of thing.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: We had some secure lines in the office.

RV: Yes.

PC: But at home, you just assumed you were being listened to and were real careful with what you said. But it was intensely interesting. Then when the wall started to come down, it was just madness, just chaos.

RV: Tell me about that time period.

PC: Well we were on alert; the U.S. forces were just on alert because we had no idea what was going to happen. This was when Gorbachev essentially came on and said, you know, "The war's over, we're done, we're finished now." And of course, he'd been building up to it with Glasnost and Perestroika but now it was happening.

RV: This is 1989?

PC: ’89 and ’90, yes.

RV: So this is kind of a slower procedure that you guys are on alert for a longer time before the wall or was it an emergency type?

PC: No, it was really, you know, it’s funny, it moved very, very slowly, like cold molasses for a long time. And then all of a sudden, it just fell of a cliff. And when it started, it just happened like that in a matter of days. We could see things happening on the east side. We noticed a lot of the border guards were gone, we noticed when we went over to the east, things were very different. And what we ultimately found out was the Soviets had essentially said, “You’re on your own to the East Germans.” And I’m trying to remember the East German Premier’s name and I can picture his face, I can’t remember his name, he was a little weasel.

RV: Not involved, huh?

PC: He was a UN guy, but gosh, what was his…I just can’t remember his name. But you know, the Soviets told him, “Sorry, you’re on your own now.” And the Soviet military forces all pulled into their garrisons; they were not out and visible anymore. Shortly thereafter, they started pulling back to Russia. So it got pretty tense because the East Germans, you know, the Soviets had kind of a vested interest in stability, but the East Germans were really kind of a lose cannon and we really didn’t know what they were going to do. I mean, without the Soviet military behind them, we weren’t too worried, but nevertheless, we didn’t know what they were going to do.

RV: They could cause an incident or maybe yeah, move into the west or do something.

PC: Yeah, a big bloody one.

RV: West Berlin I mean.

PC: Or you know, use armed forces to keep their folks in and us out, that kind of thing.

RV: Right, right.

PC: But then the East Germans got in on the act and I’ve got a tape I should bring in for you to play, it was made by a Berliner right after the wall came down. The East Germans got in on the act and they started getting pretty active. In fact, there was one big night where they had congregated on their side of the Brandenburg Gate and were

coming up to the wall and a bunch of East German soldiers were there to keep them, and did, keep them from crossing the wall, climbing up on it and crossing over right at that point.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: And that really started kind of a ground swell and pretty soon the East German soldiers were as much a part of it as the civilians and that's when the wall really started to come down. I'll never forget, the West Berlin police arrested a guy on the West German side who was out there with a sledgehammer beating on the wall. I mean, they were so ready for that wall to come down. And I mean, there were guys out there with jackhammers and everything, trying to tear this thing down.

RV: This thing was very heavily constructed.

PC: Oh it was…yes, yes, very heavily constructed. But of course, on the West Berlin side, you could walk right up to it.

RV: Right.

PC: Now on the East Berlin side, you couldn't do that. There was always a dead zone.

RV: Right.

PC: But on the west side, you could always just walk right up to it; people were hammering on it and chipping it. We went down to Checkpoint Charlie, it sounded like a boiler factory, "Tink, tink, tink, tink, tink, tink." I mean, there were hundreds of people down there chipping on the wall.

RV: And this was night after night or this one intense night?

PC: No, well, all along. There was about a three or four-day period where this was going on.

RV: Where were you doing, did you go down to watch?

PC: We went down once, but we were on alert and the USCOB, the U.S. Commander of Berlin had put out orders that we were not allowed to go down and chip on the wall or anything like that. And so we had to kind of stand back and watch, but we were just kind of waiting to see what happened. Like I said, we had our forces on alert, the infantry guys were in their barracks and we were just kind of waiting to see what was

going to happen because it was very uncertain. And then just all of a sudden, the East German…Honecker.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: That was his name.

RV: Yes, yes.

PC: The East German Premier and he was a real hard line guy.

RV: Yes.

PC: And of course, the Stasi, the East German Secret Police, think Gestapo, worked for him. But all of a sudden, he was trying to hang on, Honecker was just trying to hang on, but all of a sudden it just collapsed. I mean, it was like a house of cards and you pull one card out and it all collapsed. The East German Army disappeared; the Stasi vanished because they knew if they got caught, they were going to get strung up. They broke into the Stasi headquarters, they, the East German crowds, and ransacked the place. All the entrances through the wall opened up, the border guards went away. I mentioned that we drove through Checkpoint Charlie, never got slowed down, there were no guards there. Before, there had been a very rigid protocol to go through. You had to pull up to a certain place and you stopped and you stared straight ahead because we couldn't acknowledge the East Germans and they would walk around the car and inspect, but they couldn't talk to you and you couldn't talk to them, they were not allowed to touch your car and when they waved you through, you drove on through. But this time, after this, you just drove on through; there was nobody there. And the other openings were unmanned as well and I mean, it just came down just like that. And the East Germans came flooding over to the west and you would see them walking back. The West Berliners, the West German government had a policy called, oh I can't remember, but something Geld, which is money, but when a East German or East Berliner came to the west, they could go to any bank and get a hundred West German Marks, just like that, just for being an East German or East Berliner in the west. Huge long lines down the street of people who, East Berliners who had come over and wanted their [bruise geld? Session 8.wav 1:41:23. Bruise geld? (Bruise money)], is that right, I don't remember. But I mean, the lines were so bad that the West Berliners were going out and passing out coffee and cold drinks and that kind of thing. And we were flooded with refugees and

they had these little cars, excuse me, little two stroke cars and I mean, they were built out of fiber board and fiber glass and plastic and god, the air in East Berlin was just horrible. It was god awful, two stroke engines, so they were pouring all this crap into the air and it was brutal. I'll never forget, after the wall, as the wall was coming down, I had to go to take a PT test. Well, we had all these little Trabi's, Trabant cars with their little two stroke engines. They maxed out about forty-five. And they had come over to the west and the air was just so bad and I had to do a two-mile run. My lungs burned for three days, I was a lot thinner then. But we got this huge flood of refugees who wanted to surrender to the Americans. There was this one couple, friends of ours, young enlisted couple and they were sitting there one day and a knock on a door, it was an East German who wanted to surrender to them.

RV: Oh gosh.

PC: And wanted them to adopt him, you know.

RV: Right. But they didn't have to surrender?

PC: No, no, they didn't have to surrender, there was no surrender involved, that was probably a poor choice of words.

RV: Well, kind of turned himself over.

PC: Turned himself over, yeah. Thousands of the East coming to the U.S. forces trying to get under our control and we set up tents and camps for them and all that kind of stuff. One guy tried to surrender; we had one unit that I can't talk a lot about that was a very high security unit and he tried to surrender to them. It turned out, he had been a Lieutenant Colonel of the Stasi and we figured he was appointed to be a mole and so we arrested him, we didn't take him as a refugee, we arrested him.

RV: Right.

PC: But we set up all these camps. I'll never forget, we had to find a Vietnamese interpreter. There was a fairly sizeable group of Vietnamese who had been taken from Vietnam and brought to East Germany as laborers, East Berlin as laborers and were in essence slave labor. I mean, they had no choice in the matter.

RV: Yeah.

PC: As soon as the wall came down, they hoofed it over. Well, this was thirty years later, Vietnamese interpreters were in pretty scarce supply. It took us three or four days to actually bring one in from the west.

RV: Did the refugee camps; did it touch your logistical system at all?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. We were running our butts off trying to find tents and food and all of that kind of stuff; it really stressed the system. Most of it we rented or purchased from West Berlin vendors, contractors, but we also brought some stuff in from the west as well.

RV: Wow.

PC: And like I say, we were just flooded with people. And one thing that they did is when these Vietnamese came over; the Vietnamese government went to the East German government and said, "You cannot allow this." And early on in this process, they still had to come through a checkpoint and the Vietnamese coming from the east after that point were turned away, they were not allowed to come. The first few were until the Vietnamese government got involved.

RV: Interesting.

PC: Then they stopped the Vietnamese from coming through.

RV: Wow.

PC: And we wanted to talk to the East Germans, but we didn't know who to talk to at that point.

RV: Right.

PC: And I'm getting the chronology a little mixed up because I'm just telling kind of, you know, rambling incidents here, but…

RV: What years were you there in Berlin, in '88?

PC: I was in Berlin from '88 to '90.

RV: Okay.

PC: But we were just flooded with refugees. Of course, we still didn't know what was going on, didn't know what was going to happen. Early on in the process, they would let anybody with identification papers through and eventually the checkpoints just went away and it was just unrestrained.

RV: Tell me then, I mean, this is the end of the Cold War…

PC: The end, we won.

RV: Tell me about that, why, why do you think we won?

PC: What a feeling, what a feeling! We won! I mean, you know, the Soviet Union had abandoned its key ally. The East German people were in charge in East Berlin, they had raised the Stasi headquarters. What they wanted to do was get the secret police files. The Stasi had files on many, many, many people. They also made a very, the people, no government, the East German people made a very concentrated effort to find out who the Stasi spies were. You know, one of the basic tenants, the KGB, was you know, tell on your neighbor, well that got passed onto the Stasi.

RV: Yes.

PC: And the East Germans wanted to find out who those people were.

RV: Yes.

PC: And when they found one, it wasn't pretty.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Several of them got beaten to death. So I mean, they were just in chaos. Nobody knew what was going to happen with the Soviet Union, but it was rapidly collapsing, even that early. Countries were declaring their independence. You know, I had one telling, at least to me, a very telling experience. We took a tour and we went to the house where the peace treaty was signed at the end of World War II, which was in East Berlin. And they had English-speaking people there, but this was a Soviet enclave, not an East German, for obvious reasons. And so it was run by the Soviets. Well there was a lady in there who spoke excellent English and she gave us the tour. And at the end, we said, "Sprasibre," you know; "Thank you," and that kind of thing, which is pretty much the extent of my Russian.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And we got to talking to her and we called her Russian. Oh, she got irate.

RV: Was she Ukrainian?

PC: She never did tell us, but she let us know in no uncertain terms that she was not Russian. And she made very sure that we understood that. I mean, she made that crystal clear.

RV: That's very telling.

PC: She was pissed that we had called her Russian. Of course, we had no way of knowing.

RV: Right.

PC: But wow! I mean obviously very strong feelings about making it clear she was not Russian. I thought that was a very interesting, interesting incident.

RV: Absolutely, it's very telling.

PC: But anyway, as time went on, when the wall actually officially came down, they closed downtown Berlin. Berlin was a party town anyway. I mean, it was just a wild place.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And the young guys just loved it. Of course, they bombed that; the terrorists bombed that disco.

RV: Yeah.

PC: A couple of years before and that kind of thing. But they closed the whole downtown to traffic, to automobiles and it was just one big street party. And I mean, everybody was kissing everybody else, everybody was hugging everybody else, it was just an amazing feeling of you know, the two sides of Berlin getting back together, you know, and it was just…it didn't last long, but it was just an amazing feeling. I've never felt anything like it; it was just one big brotherhood if you will.

RV: Yeah, yeah.

PC: Just an amazing sensation.

RV: And then shortly thereafter, eighteen months, two years later, the Soviet Union's gone.

PC: The Soviet Union is gone and it was gone from East Berlin much more rapidly than that. I mean, they started pulling out almost immediately.

RV: Yeah.

PC: Big convoys heading east.

RV: As a veteran of the Cold War, how do you feel about that kind of sense of satisfaction you had?

PC: Oh, it was a real sense of satisfaction. We had really been vindicated. You know, it was really a war of two systems, two cultures, two different kinds of beliefs

about human beings and how they should be treated and our way prevailed. And of course, we like to say freedom won and if you had seen the reaction to the Stasi, you would know how true that is, how enraged the East Berliners were with anything having to do with Stasi and how badly they wanted revenge and to do to the Stasi what the Stasi had done to them all those years. But I mean, it was really a good feeling after the uncertainly kind of settled down.

RV: Right, right.

PC: Of course, a lot of, you know, what's going to happen to the Soviet Union now that this has happened? The writing was kind of on the wall that you know; it was coming down pretty fast. And you know, we had a full Colonel there; he was an MI, Military Intelligence guy. He had been in Berlin as a Second Lieutenant when the wall went up.

RV: Oh wow.

PC: And now he was there as a full Colonel when it came down. So that was a, hearing him speak was kind of an interesting perspective. But it was just an amazing, amazing time.

RV: And you got some souvenirs from the wall didn't you?

PC: Oh, we've got couple of hundred pounds of the wall.

RV: How did you get that?

PC: We went down and chipped it off with hammers.

RV: Wow.

PC: And I mean, it was an interesting sensation. Before it came down, there were observation towers periodically on our side of the wall that were accessible and you could just walk up and climb one of these towers. In the city, the wall was a single wall and there was a dead space on the other side and then there was wire and guards so that the East Germans could not get right up to the wall. There was a lot of effort on their side to stop people from escaping and a lot of monuments on our side of people that had tried, had been killed trying to escape.

RV: Yes, the orders were shoot to kill.

PC: Shoot to kill! But we could climb up on these observation towers and look over. I mentioned in the city, it was one wall. When you got out in the country a little

bit, because this was a big circle around West Berlin, you got out in the country a little bit, it was two walls and there was this big space in between with not a blade of grass, nothing. All there was were, imagine clothesline poles with a wire between them and they would put a dog on a leash, tie it to that wire so he could run back and forth, attack dogs. They came out and raked it every night so that they could see footprints.

RV: Wow.

PC: And this was all of course to keep us out. Yeah, our couple of thousand guys were going to invade their five tank Army.

RV: Right.

PC: They were seriously concerned about that.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: But yeah, after it came down, both of those walls in the country were destroyed, were torn down. You could walk right through the checkpoints. We chipped off some; the prized part was anything with graffiti on it, paint or anything like that. We got a little bit of that, and in my office I've got a big chunk taken right from the wall at Checkpoint Charlie. But we would get in the car and drive out to wherever the wall happened to be and with a hammer, just take chunks out or pick pieces up and etc.

RV: Wow. What role did Vietnam play in the Cold War?

PC: Well, you know, it was kind of like I think very analogous to the Soviets in Afghanistan and it's a cliché that Afghanistan was the Soviets Vietnam and I think there's a lot of truth to that analogy and I think that you know, Vietnam gave the Soviets a chance to kind of poke us in the eye without "being directly involved." Although, I think I mentioned we found ample evidence that there were Soviet advisors in South Vietnam. And of course, we knew they were in North Vietnam and Soviet equipment, Chinese equipment. You know, North Vietnam was in a way their proxy and it was a chance for them to gain some political advantage in the Cold War. Of course, our side of it was that we were trying to stop the advance of communism, not the Soviets per se, but the advance of communism, keep them from taking over a country that didn't want to be taken over, but obviously we did it for our own national interest. So I think it was an advantage for them in the Cold War. Probably the biggest advantage that it gave them was what it did to our society and to our Army. The phrase at the time was hollow Army

and unfortunately, it was probably a true statement. And thanks to Ronald Reagan, we recovered rather well. But I think it gave them a real advantage in the third world in countries that may have been trying to walk the fence between the two super powers; I think it definitely made some of them lean, you know, while we were defeated. We pulled out with our tail between our legs and I think it gave them a real propaganda advantage in that context.

RV: Briefly, let's talk about the end of your military career.

PC: Okay.

RV: We talked about the passing over deal; we'll skip that. Once you had that news, did you try again for the second time?

PC: No. Well, you don't have any choice, you're considered…

RV: Automatically.

PC: Automatically. But I started the retirement process. Your chances of getting picked up a second time are like three percent, something like that.

RV: You're in Berlin when this is going on?

PC: I'm in Berlin, yeah. And so I started the retirement process almost immediately. I had a girl in college and another girl getting ready to go to college, so I couldn't, if I had retired from Berlin, I would've come back as a retiree without a job or anything else. And so if you make a change of station at government expense, you incur a one-year obligation. And so I went ahead, figured, okay, I'm going to need that long to find a job, etc.

RV: Sure.

PC: So we made the decision to come back and…

RV: This is in '91 or '90?

PC: '90.

RV: Okay.

PC: '90. And I asked for and got an assignment to Ft. Hood. I was from Texas, my mother was living in San Antonio at the time and she was getting on and we wanted to retire in Texas anyway. So I came back and went to Ft. Hood. I signed into Ft. Hood the same exact day Saddam signed into Kuwait.

RV: Really?

PC: Yeah, that day.

RV: Wow.

PC: And I became the head of the Maintenance Division at III Corps Headquarters. It is as we delicately phrase it, I was a staff puke, and we immediately started trying to get our units ready; the III Corps heavy units, the armored divisions to go to the Mid-East.

RV: So all of a sudden you've got to start big time war logistics.

PC: Big time war logistics and get these units ready to move. We had to take all the armored vehicles and paint them with what we called CARC, which is Chemical Agent Resistant Coating. It was a paint that would resist chemicals and it would allow chemicals to be washed off and decontaminated more easily than standard paint, which would absorb, absorb the chemicals. So we had to run all them through and we had to paint them in desert colors. I mean, we were fully ready for a war in the forest, so we had to repaint them from camouflage green and black to desert sand camouflage and the chemical agent resistant paint. And so we started running tanks through this one paint facility and they came out pink.

RV: Really?

PC: Really.

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And we, the division was doing it and the insulation maintenance people were doing it. The Division Commander came down and said, "You must be kidding, I am not taking pink tanks to war, repaint them." (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing)

PC: And they mixed up a new batch of paint and repainted them brown instead of pink.

RV: Was that done on purpose do you think?

PC: No, no, no, no. We had no idea how they were going to come out until they actually rolled out the other end. And yeah, pink tanks.

RV: That wouldn't have done well in the desert.

PC: Not well. And so we really kind of crashed and burned. And we were fighting a couple of problems at the time. One was the air filters on the tank engines,

which are big huge things and that they ingested sand and plugged up the air system and we needed a whole bunch of those. We had a problem with…they were all of course diesel fueled and any one A2 tank has two fuel tanks. Well, they would use one tank fairly consistently and the fuel on the other tank would grow algae. And it's called bloom and it would plug the fuel filter so they would only be able to use one tank. Well, an M1 tank gets about four gallons to the mile, fuel is fairly critical, so we were fighting that problem; a couple others that we had to resolve.

RV: Did you overcome all of them?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah. And then shipped all the equipment down to Houston, the port at Houston, loaded that on ships and shipped that over. The troops came back, continued training until the equipment almost was there and then they flew over.

RV: This is Desert Shield?

PC: Desert Shield, yes. And this was before Desert Storm actually started. And you know, it's just an internal amazement to me that Saddam got to the Saudi border and stopped.

RV: Why?

PC: I just cannot imagine what he was thinking. I mean, the Saudis had a brigade, we had sent over the 82nd Airborne and about all they could've done to a Soviet tank was throw rocks, well, the Iraqis had Soviet equipment.

RV: Yes.

PC: One hundred percent Soviet equipment, but all they could've done to an Iraqi tank was throw rocks at it and that's a slight exaggeration, but not much. I mean, he could've rolled across Saudi Arabia very quickly and taken out our major logistical base and he just got to the border and stopped.

RV: Is that at Riyadh?

PC: Riyadh was one of them, yeah.

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: And…

RV: Why do you think he stopped?

PC: I think he thought we weren't going to really take the whole thing very seriously.

RV: And that he could kind of keep Kuwait under the rug and just…?

PC: Yeah, yeah. If he stopped at the Kuwait border and did not invade Saudi Arabia, it wouldn't piss us off too much, we wouldn't do anything.

RV: And he claimed that Kuwait was a lost province, part of original Iraq or Persia and hence it was, but Saudi Arabia was not, so he would lose that part of the argument right there.

PC: And so I was at Hood while all this was going on and it was amazing. You know, as a Vietnam vet who came home from Vietnam, I never personally had any trouble. But any war riots, soldiers reporting being spit on and called baby killers and all this kind of stuff and the support during Desert Shield and Desert Storm was so amazing, I mean, people just could not do enough for us. It was incredible. You know, when we came back from Germany, we had bought what I call an RV and I had bought a travel trailer and we got all wrapped up and getting ready to ship the units over and when you buy an RV, you get about fifty different warranty cards you have to mail in. I never got my shipped in or mailed in and a while later I mailed them in with a letter that said, "I'm sorry they're late, you know, I'm a soldier, we were doing…etc, etc. etc." I got a letter back that said, "God bless you guys, don't worry about your warranty, you are fully one hundred percent covered, we love you guys, be careful."

RV: Wow!

PC: Yeah.

RV: Wow!

PC: Yeah.

RV: And this is, you're not going to be deploying…

PC: And I'm not even deployed. No, I'm at Ft. Hood, Texas.

RV: And you're arriving at the last year here.

PC: Yeah.

RV: It's a huge way to go out though.

PC: And I mean, the support, Lee Greenwood came to Ft. Hood and sang his song. I mean, it was just amazing.

RV: How did that make you feel, a Vietnam veteran?

PC: Oh great, oh just made me feel great.

RV: Not bitter?

PC: Not bitter at all, not bitter at all; that just made me feel great. And we thought we were going to go. III Corps Headquarters, we were told, you know, "You're going in two weeks"

RV: Well what would happen to your enlistment or your time left that you had…?

PC: Oh, retirements were frozen. And they did this a little while ago in Iraq too; it's called stop loss.

RV: Right, right.

PC: Retirements are frozen; people serving out their time, getting out of the Army are frozen, etc. How can you complain?

RV: It's very controversial for people today.

PC: Yeah. How can you complain? You know, I mean, the country needs me, you know, hard to complain and I didn't want an incident about my retirement, you know. It turns out; I retired on time anyway because the war was so short.

RV: Right.

PC: But anyway, but it was just an amazing feeling.

RV: You were watching troops leave and some come back and then just the general support around the base and in the town?

PC: Well, you know, once they all got deployed, man, there wasn't a heck of a lot for us to do.

RV: Right.

PC: I mean, everybody was gone; the base was a ghost town.

RV: What did you do?

PC: Not much.

RV: When actual Desert Storm started in January '91, what were you doing? You're at Ft. Hood…

PC: I'm at Ft. Hood and had been there several months.

RV: Did you all know the shooting war was getting ready to start?

PC: No. Well, I'm sure the CG did, but down at my level, we didn't.

RV: Okay.

PC: No, we had no idea. I got most of what I knew from CNN. And like I say, we were just standing on one leg waiting to be deployed and wound up sending 7th Corps out of Europe instead. And we had a real, real problem in III Corps. The CG told the Chief-of-Staff that our aviation brigade was ready to deploy, "Let's go." And come to find out, that wasn't true, they weren't ready.

RV: Really?

PC: And their equipment status was such that they really couldn't deploy. So the CG had to call the Chief-of-Staff of the Army and say, "Never mind." Not a pleasant call, I'm glad I wasn't near.

RV: Who was responsible for that aviation, oh you don't have to name a name, but…?

PC: Well you know, it was a combination of the Aviation Brigade Commander and the G4, my boss and you know, the Corps Commander. And certainly the Corps Commander should have known it and the Aviation Brigade Commander should have been telling him. If you looked at their readiness reports, they were ready, you know, but the reports were wrong and when push came to shove, they just weren't ready.

RV: You would've gone over, is that correct?

PC: No, no, they would've sent the brigade separately

RV: Okay, okay.

PC: But I believe and this is purely personal opinion, had that not happened, they would've sent us instead of 7th Corps Headquarters, but I think that left such a sour taste about III Corps in their mouths, that DA, that they elected to send 7th Corps instead.

RV: Okay.

PC: Out of Europe. And so anyway, we thought we were going to, we thought we were going to, and I mean, we were fully prepared and we had done the processing and everything. Then they sent 7th Corps and we knew we weren't going to go then. And like I said, I mean, nothing to do.

RV: Did you figure that, okay, now I'm probably going to retire on time?

PC: Well no.

RV: Oh, because it was still frozen.

PC: It was still frozen.

RV: Okay.

PC: But when they had a, you know, a three day hundred hour war and the Iraqis collapsed so quickly and then we made the decision not to go into Iraq and chase Saddam, then I figured okay. And sure enough, just a couple of weeks later, they had ended stop loss; they were encouraging people to retire. They were facing a major rift to try and get the Army officer corps down to the post Cold War size. In fact, my boss, when you're promoted, you are required to serve x number of years after you're promoted. And they waived that for him so he could retire as a full Colonel without serving that amount of time. And some Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels were getting letters that you know, we appreciate your interest in National Defense, but it's time for you to retire.

RV: Did you get one?

PC: No, did not and I wanted to retire before I got one. I mean, it was obvious my career was at an end. You know, I didn't get promoted, I was assigned to a staff puke kind of job and I knew I was never going to have another assignment with troops.

RV: How'd you feel about all this?

PC: Oh, I was pretty upset. I was very depressed, very saddened. I hated to go out that way, but I mean, you know, that's the way life is.

RV: Would you have continued you know, as a full Colonel and then to Brigadier?

PC: Probably not. If I had made full Colonel, that probably would've been it.

RV: What month did you get out in '91?

PC: I retired in…I actually left Ft. Hood in September of '91 using accumulated leave and officially retired in October 1 of '91, that was my official retirement date.

RV: And how soon did you start working for Texas Tech?

PC: Immediately. I had come up while I was still on active duty to interview and gotten and accepted and so I left Ft. Hood, came up here and started work the next day.

RV: Wow.

PC: And Diana and the kids stayed there and closed out the house. When they came up…kids, one girl was away in college.

RV: Where was she going?

PC: She was going to Memphis State, good solid academic reason for going to Memphis State, that's where her boyfriend went.

RV: Oh, I was fixing to say, that's a good school I mean…

PC: (Laughing)

RV: Okay, anyway.

PC: And so anyway, when they came up, Diana and Cathy came up, then I took a couple of weeks off and we took a little vacation, I came back and went to work.

RV: Okay. Let me ask you, lets swing back to Vietnam.

PC: Sure.

RV: And let's talk just briefly about that before we end the interview. You walk into a college classroom right now, what do you tell this generation? The younger generations of Americans today and about the Vietnam War, what're the things that you would want to communicate to them about that conflict?

PC: The biggest thing I'd want to say is we went for the right reasons. It wasn't just an adventure for the United States, it wasn't just an intent to conquer other countries, you know, we really thought that we were going to stop the spread of communism. Communism was our enemy that was a war between us and them. We wanted and needed to stop them everywhere we could and that's why we went to Vietnam, we went for the right reasons. I'm not going to say that we went there to free the South Vietnamese, we went there to stop communism, that's one thing.

RV: Okay.

PC: The second thing I would tell them is, "Don't forget what we learned." We kind of screwed it up, you can't fight a war without popular support and we lost that support. You know, I've talked about what I think are the reasons for that, but the fact is, we lost that support. A big part of the reason we lost that support is we didn't have clear goals; we didn't have a clear exit strategy. How do we know when we won that war?

RV: The Powell Doctrine.

PC: The Powell Doctrine, yeah, those kinds of things.

RV: Coming from a man who did two tours, one of which was, you know, pre-major ground troops as an advisor, Company Commander walking through the jungles of Vietnam and seeing the stuff firsthand articulating what you just did.

PC: Yup. And a brilliant man articulating that. You know, I hope that and I believe that we learned some things from that and we can't forget those things.

RV: Pat, to play Devil's advocate again just to have more discussion about this.

PC: Sure.

RV: Isn't that a no-brainer when you go into war, shouldn't the command authority of the United States be able to say, you know, "Okay, what are our goals, how do we know when we've achieved them and how do we leave?"

PC: Boy, it would seem that way, it would seem to be a no-brainer. But how many consecutive Presidents were not able to do that or at least never did it?

RV: Both parties.

PC: Both parties. How many consecutive…of course, at that time, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs was essentially powerless, but how many consecutive Chiefs-of-Staff of the Army never did that? It seems like a no-brainer, but we certainly did not do it and that was a failure on our part.

RV: Who do you lay the blame of Vietnam at the feet at or can you, not do it at one individual, do you have to do it at several?

PC: Well you know, it's just like Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby, you know? Successive Presidents latched onto it and then couldn't let go, starting with Kennedy. And you know, Kennedy grabbed a little bit and got stuck a little bit. And Johnson grabbed a whole bunch and got stuck a whole bunch. And Nixon grabbed a little and got stuck a little. You know, I can't say that there was anyone person, there was never one President that was smart enough to say, "Okay, here's how we win this war," or "We're not going to put into it what's necessary to win this war, we're going to get out." And just get out, not peace with honor and Vietnamization and that kind of thing. I truly think Nixon had the right idea in bombing North Vietnam and bombing or invading Cambodia. Those were the kinds of things we needed to do to win the war.

RV: In 1965, '66, '67?

PC: Then too, then too. I understand why we never sent ground troops into North Vietnam. You know, we had to be careful of the Chinese; we did not want to get in a war with the Chinese. We do not want to get in a war with the Chinese. I'm not saying we'd lose it, but it'd be messy. But we certainly could have taken the war to them. And by the

time Nixon was ready to do that, it just was politically not feasible politically, he just couldn't do it politically.

RV: What else would you tell a class; you've got, you know, we need to fight wars with popular support, we have to have a backing population in general and that when we go into a conflict, we know what we're doing and you know, that Vietnam, we didn't, here's what we should do, Vietnam, we didn't do, right?

PC: Exactly. And look at Iraq, you know. There's a government forming a constitution. Once that constitution is written and adopted and they have a government in place and they have a security structure in place, we leave. They want us out; we want to get out. You know, I really think if the insurgents were smart, and they're not, but if they were, they would just stop. They would lay low, they'd let the government form, they'd let us go home and bam! Then they'd come out. But if they were smart, they wouldn't be doing what they're doing.

RV: Yeah, yeah.

PC: But I would also tell any class today, be careful how you treat your soldiers. You know, they have a choice about being in the Army; they don't have a choice about where they're fighting. They're defending their country, you know, and I think we've learned that lesson.

RV: Is that from Vietnam?

PC: From Vietnam. And boy, the pendulum really swung during Desert Shield and Desert Storm I'm happy to say.

RV: Were you surprised that it swung that heavily?

PC: I really was, I really was. I didn't really know what to expect, but I did not expect it to go that far.

RV: Okay. I wanted to always put this question out there to everyone who's interviewed for the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project is, are there any other things that you would like to comment upon that we have not commented upon, any other thoughts? And I have a couple of very short follow up questions after this, but just in general, do you have anything else that you want to add to your story?

PC: The only thing I want to say is what I've said before and that is, "Don't forget, don't forget the lessons." They're bitter lessons, they're hard lessons. They were

immensely hard on the country and the people of the country and on the Army, well the military as a whole. You know, those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. Don't forget that history.

RV: Right.

PC: Don't let the bitterness of it push it down and let it be forgotten.

RV: Do you belong to any veteran associations?

PC: I'm a lifetime member of the 1st Calvary Division Association.

RV: Okay. Do you attend reunions?

PC: No, I really haven't. Probably for the same reason I don't read the books. Probably for the same reason I really had no interest in going back to Vietnam. I had what I considered to be a good tour. You know, I didn't get hurt and I didn't have any casualties among my soldiers that directly worked for me. But it's an uncomfortable time for me, because of what happened, not there, but here and it's just not something I particularly want to relive.

RV: Perfect lead into this question and I want you to feel free to speak very, very freely and candidly about this. How has it been to do this interview and talk about your Vietnam experience in detail? Of course, this is one chapter of a very successful military career you had of serving the country, but how has it been conducting an oral history interview with us to talk about Vietnam?

PC: Intensely interesting; very, very interesting. I have thought about things that I have not thought about in thirty-five years. Memories that I have not thought about in thirty-five years have come floating to the top. I've learned some things about myself that I didn't know.

RV: Can you comment on that?

PC: Yeah. You know, I frankly had never realized how much of an influence General Hawlk has had on my life. I mean I knew it, but I never stepped through it like I did here and how much of an influence he had. I knew I'd had an interesting military career, I didn't realize some of the things I've seen and done, that so many, that most people don't get to see and do and how much history I've been able to see, you know. If I can digress for a moment…

RV: Of course.

PC: Driving through France, not talking about Paris.

RV: Right.

PC: Okay. If you take the Parisians out of Paris, it's a great place. But once you get outside of Paris driving through fillets where we had the fillets pocket during World War II, every little French town has a monument to the U.S. soldiers, usually to Patton. Driving through France on a toll road, we got off the toll road. Diana has some old family friends that live near Verdon and what an interesting place!

RV: Wow, yeah, exactly, all the history.

PC: Oh man. We got off the toll road and the French government gives a lot of Civil Service jobs like that to their old soldiers. And there was an old French soldier; he was hearing his ribbons on his suit and "Bonjour Monsieur Soldat, and Madame."

RV: Were you in uniform?

PC: No, but I had a huge American car and American license plate.

RV: Sure, sure, sure.

PC: I mean, it was obvious we were Americans.

RV: Right. And you have your ID?

PC: Yeah. But he could just see us and know, you know, this old man obviously a World War II veteran and a soldier because he had this job and he just greeted us so warmly and so friendly. That was a neat experience; I remember it to this day. And just a neat life, a neat experience, a neat career ever done was interesting and it was an interesting life, you know.

RV: Well, talking about Vietnam, has it settled anything for you?

PC: I don't know that it has. I think it probably has helped, but you know, still mixed feelings. We lost the war, that's hard to accept even in this day and age, even this many years later, you know, as an XO or a soldier or a retired soldier, that's a bitter pill and it's made me think a lot about a lot of things and think about some things in a different way. I don't know that it's really resolved it, yet I think it may have given me some insights with which to solve some things.

RV: Okay. Well Pat, is there anything else you want to add to what we've been talking about?

PC: Just I appreciate more than I can say the opportunity to do this, has been a great opportunity. I look forward to reading more of the interviews, I've looked at some, reading more of the interviews that you have online and I appreciate very much what you guys are doing in preserving this piece of history from an individual soldier's point of view. I think it's a great contribution and I know I'm not the only that appreciates what you're doing; thank you.

RV: Well thank you. And on behalf of the Vietnam Archive staff and all of us with the Oral History Project especially, thank you for your time and your articulation in doing this interview, your willingness to talk about Vietnam, talk about your career and to share that with us now that really speak to the generations coming up years and years into the future, so thank you very much for doing the interview Pat.

PC: Believe me, it was my pleasure.

RV: And on behalf of the Vietnam Archive, as a non-political, apolitical statement, thank you for your service to our country.

PC: Thank you very much.

RV: Okay.