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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Gregory Patrick Dillon  
Conducted by Richard Verrone  
Date 10 November 2005  
Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

**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.

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2 Endowment for the Humanities.

3 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone conducting an oral history interview  
4 with Gregory Patrick Dillon. Today is November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Col. Dillon, thank you for  
5 doing this with us this morning. I would like to talk to you a little bit about November  
6 1969. (Inaudible). You were in the battalion S3. Can you tell me a little bit about what  
7 your duties were? In general, and what Colonel Moore wanted of you?

8 Richard Patrick Dillon: Primarily, my duties were to keep him out of trouble  
9 (Chuckles). An S3 is responsible for writing operations plans, for keeping the log of the  
10 operation which was something then Colonel Moore thought was very important and  
11 turned out later to be extremely important. It's like a bible. It's like a cane chiseled in  
12 stone off the mountain. When it's in the log and you go back to reference it, that's  
13 absolute proof or evidence that a certain event occurred at exactly the right time. My  
14 assistant S3 would set up an operation center, somewhere close to the area that we were  
15 going to go into and they would monitor every radio transmission and put it in a log. The  
16 value of that is that later when you're writing after action reports, it's amazing that four  
17 or five people who had been involved in the same event will have different concepts of  
18 what day it occurred on. As an example, in the Ia Drang we had the first day, the second  
19 day and the third day. If we hadn't had the log, there's some things we will never resolve  
20 on when it actually occurred. So it's really important. But the important thing is that we

1 got good people keeping the notes and who are writing them down. So the operation  
2 center initially started off at Plei Me Special Forces Camp and then after we we're in X-  
3 Ray, they were moved to Falcon. They set up the operation center at Falcon which was  
4 only a few miles away, so they could monitor the radio traffic without any difficulty and  
5 keep the logs.

6 RV: How did Colonel Moore choose you for the S3? How did that come about?

7 RPD: Actually, he didn't choose me as much as he retained me. I had been in that  
8 battalion, which would been far the second division, for about two years before he came  
9 and the system three for thirty or forty days. Then took over a company, had that  
10 company for a year and then became the S3 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> which was the battalion  
11 which later made the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>. Little history on that, that battalion was designated to  
12 go to Germany on a rotor plan, where you for six months without your families and the  
13 unit was brought up to a hundred and ten percent strength for that. That made us very—it  
14 made us a unit everybody wanted later on. So when they were looking for a battalion to  
15 go into the air assault division and they told the 2<sup>nd</sup> division they had to provide a  
16 battalion, the one that made the most sense was the one that had over a hundred percent  
17 in personnel. That was the reasons why we were selected to do that. Colonel Moore  
18 came—we had already been participating in some of the air assault activities when I got a  
19 phone call on a Friday afternoon from Colonel Brown saying that, "The new battalion  
20 commander is going to be Lieutenant Colonel Harold Moore and he's coming from the  
21 Naval war college and he'll probably call you this weekend." Because that Monday we  
22 had a field exercise scheduled. He was—there was a Lieutenant Colonel named Jones  
23 who was scheduled to be the battalion commander, who was at the infantry center and I  
24 was lucky enough to have to call him and tell him he wasn't going to get the battalion.  
25 (Laughs) You know about shooting the messenger? I think he did! So anyway, Colonel  
26 Moore called me at home, and he said, "You know, if we're going on exercise on  
27 Monday, I need to at least see the area." So we got a helicopter, one of the old H23s that  
28 seats three people across. So he and I flew around the operations area all on a Saturday or  
29 Sunday before this. We had a parade Monday morning and a change of command  
30 ceremony and we went from there that was air assault activities. But we still had the  
31 second division missions. We had all our tracks, you know, it was a mechanized division.

1 We had all our tracks and everything that were in the motor pool that we still had to keep  
2 up maintenance on while we were doing this air assault configuration, which made it kind  
3 of interesting. We wore 2<sup>nd</sup> division patches and a 11<sup>th</sup> air assault division patch on our  
4 chest. If you've seen the movie, initially when we thought, "Oh he's got a 2<sup>nd</sup> division  
5 patch."

6 RV: How would you describe the then Colonel Moore?

7 RPD: Very detailed, very personnel oriented but he had—I'll give you an  
8 example, at a meeting he told all the company commanders, "I don't like the idea that we  
9 have soldiers being picked up downtown in Columbus that are intoxicated." And then  
10 turned over to the MPs (Military Police) and, "I want you to stop that." All of the—he  
11 would have a meeting with the company commanders and immediately after the meeting,  
12 they would all come back into my office and "What did he mean by that?" (Laughing)

13 RV: You were the interpreter?

14 RPD: Yeah. Well, you know, I can tell them he feels strongly about this particular  
15 item, you need—this is something you need to prioritize. You know whether it was that  
16 particular thing or others. I said, "I'm not sure what his solution is, but I can tell you, that  
17 you will not like that solution. So you better get with this program." Well, we had a few  
18 more guys picked up. Then he said, "Okay here it is, here is my solution. When you get  
19 called and there's a man at the MP (Military Police) station, every member in the chain of  
20 command in his class A uniform will go to the MP station to pick him up. Company  
21 commander, first sergeant, platoon leader, platoon sergeant, squad leader and you will not  
22 come back until everyone is there and then you bring them back into the unit. Soldiers  
23 have to learn how to take care of each other because later on that will be important." He  
24 relied a lot on his experiences in the Korean War. So that was one. Another thing he said,  
25 another item was, "Okay, there's no reason for anybody to pass out at a parade." We had  
26 a parade Monday morning and Friday afternoon. He said, "It ruins the parade and there's  
27 no excuse for it. Anyone who passes out at a parade will come with the chain of  
28 command to see me the next day and will tell me what he did in the previous forty-eight  
29 hours to prevent himself from being an embarrassment to this unit. If I don't think that's  
30 justified, then he will get disciplinary action." We know how people pass out at a parade,  
31 we have a division parade and they're going down everywhere also, and we don't how—

1 you know it's a state of mind so very detail in that. He believed strongly in winning. If  
2 we played in a basketball tournament and we come in second, we graciously accept the  
3 second-place trophy, but we will never display it in the unit. We only display first place  
4 trophies because in war only first place wins. (Inaudible)

5 RV: When you were on the ground with X-Ray, did these characteristics—these  
6 things that they described about him, how much did they come into play? What did you  
7 see happen with his character?

8 RPD: Well, we never—he talked to me about everything. I mean, I never made a  
9 decision without us talking about it first. For everything we did. After X-Ray, he got  
10 promoted to Colonel, he was on the list the whole time. He got promoted to Colonel,  
11 became the brigade commander and I became the brigade S3. He would always have me  
12 give the instructions out. Very rarely did he give instruction to the company commanders  
13 or later on to the battalion commanders because he felt like if something happened to  
14 him, and all of the sudden I'm giving instructions out, that people would immediately  
15 know that something has happened to him or he's out of touch or whatever. He gave me  
16 great latitude, unbelievable latitude to give instructions out in his name when he wasn't  
17 there, or whatever I thought was the best thing to do at the time and it occurred a  
18 number—any number of times where I can see a situation develop and I'd tell somebody  
19 to do something and later on he'd come back and I'd say, "I did this, and this." "Okay  
20 great." But when people are used to that, then they don't question—they don't come back  
21 and say, "Well why are we doing this? Well, why didn't Colonel Moore tell me to do  
22 this?" So that was something he and I had between us. So on the ground, we never talked  
23 about if we started getting overrun, what's the E&E (Evasion and Escape) plan. We never  
24 talked about that. I mean, we always knew that we were going to prevail in that battle.  
25 There was never a doubt that we weren't going to prevail.

26 RV: Even on the second day?

27 RPD: Even on the second morning when the big attack came and everything. We  
28 were very calm about it. We didn't—Bob Moore called me and said, "We need to  
29 reinforce." I said, "No, we only have a small reserve, we will wait to see how this thing  
30 develops before we start committing people all over the field." There was so much low-  
31 grazing fire that if you got people up and started moving them you were going to take a

1 lot casualties. So the best thing was to just keep putting fire power on it and it worked  
2 out. You know, we had no one on the backside of X-Ray.

3 RV: I know.

4 RPD: You know, that was a calculated risk. You know, when Colonel Moore told  
5 General Han that, he said his face just kind of got all white and he said, “Well, the  
6 commanders never know everything that’s going on in a battle.” (Laughs)

7 RV: How would you describe Sergeant Major Plumley?

8 RPD: Well, the Sergeant Major and I had a good relationship. I suspect he was  
9 pretty gruff with the NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers). I mean, he made them toe the  
10 line. He had meetings like every week with the First Sergeants, you know, and put up—  
11 he ran classes for the E5s and E6s and he really made the NCOs (Non-Commissioned  
12 Officers) toe the line. But you know, I don’t ever recall there being an incident where he  
13 stepped on the toes of the company commander, as an example. He and I spent a lot of  
14 time together because three of us, were almost welded at the hip. We went everywhere  
15 together. So we had a good relationship. You have guys that has been in every drop in  
16 World War II and Korea, you know? You have a lot of respect for them. Carries a lot of  
17 credentials.

18 RV: You came up with the name X-Ray?

19 RPD: Yeah.

20 RV: Tell me about that.

21 RPD: We made a reconnaissance flight. Way south down, then came back up  
22 along like we were going to Duc Co Special Forces Camp. Went up there, kind of circled  
23 around like we were landing there, then flew back. We picked different LZs (Landing  
24 Zone) and we just named them W-Whiskey, X-Ray, as we were picking them out. X-Ray  
25 was an arbitrary selection of a name. Apparently, the North Vietnamese had named it  
26 that. A lot of things happened, karma you know, in the sky. “Let’s name this X-Ray,  
27 because I bet those guys flying over are making it X-Ray too!”

28 RV: Tell me about—you rode in the first night on a Huey with Joe Galloway and  
29 tell me about it. Tell me about that, coming in at night in X-Ray and that experience. You  
30 saw the candles on the trail—

31 RPD: I think I'm the only one who saw them.

1           RV: Really?

2           RPD: They were—I had read somewhere that the North Vietnamese would put  
3 little lights, little bitty lights on the back of the packs so that people can follow each other  
4 when they were moving through at night. You know, I looked up and saw all these strings  
5 of lights, I mean hundreds coming down there. So my first thought then was, “They’re  
6 not withdrawing, this is going to be an attack in the morning.” Apparently, they were  
7 supposed to attack at two o’clock in the morning, but they got lost in the dark and it  
8 didn’t occur until really the first light. I was telling my wife the other night I said, “You  
9 know it’s kind of interesting because Joe Galloway came up to me and said, ‘Could I go  
10 in with you?’ and you know I thought, well, I don’t want to do this to the old man  
11 without him knowing it, so I’ll call him. But if I had said no, there wouldn’t have been a  
12 book, there wouldn’t have been any movie or everything!” Maybe I must I have been in  
13 gracious mood that night or something, but Joe had been with us before on the ground, I  
14 knew the old man liked him and that he was not like most of the reporters. I mean, he  
15 shaved every day. He looked—most of them look like bums when you saw them, hadn’t  
16 shaved in a week, hadn’t changed their clothes in a week either. So you know I call him  
17 on the radio and said, “How do you feel about Joe Galloway coming in with me?” He  
18 said, “If he’s crazy enough to do it, but make sure he understands what’s going on.” I told  
19 him, “It’s pretty hairy, do you still want to go?” He said, “Yeah, let me get on.” He got on  
20 and we’re—it’s always nice riding in a helicopter that they’re shooting at when you’re  
21 sitting on a box of ammunition and hand grenades and stuff like that.

22           RV: You got tracer fire coming at you.

23           RPD: Yeah.

24           RV: Tell me about landing there that night at X-Ray and the situation.

25           RPD: The landing wasn’t any problem. That afternoon, they had brought some  
26 pathfinders in and they directed them right in, there wasn’t problem with that. The  
27 helicopters could key in on radio signal, so we came in low level right into the thing.  
28 There wasn’t any problem with the landing, you know, Bruce said “Yeah, it was kind of  
29 hairy.” But as far as I was concerned, it was just like a routine landing we had done at  
30 night a lot.

1           RV: What was the mood after the first day? What was it like down there? What  
2 do you remember about Moore and Plumley, and everything that happened?

3           RPD: Well, they were pretty positive, they were kind of tired from combat all day  
4 long. I'll tell you what, what really tires you out in combat is the noise. The noise is  
5 unbelievable. Somebody asked me one time, "What do you mean by noise?" I said,  
6 "Have you ever been to a police or rifle range to shoot your rifle? You know, hundred  
7 people?" "Yeah, not a hundred people, maybe twenty." "You know a lot of noise? Well,  
8 you ought to just multiple that by couple thousand and drop a few five-hundred, seven-  
9 hundred-fifty-pound bombs and artillery." The noise is really deafening. It makes you  
10 tired. So they were tired but their spirits were up. The troops—Tony had a couple of kids  
11 who were doing their own H&I (Harassment and Interdiction) fire, on shooting M79s out  
12 there and when I called him, I said "Tell those guys to stop that, it's just identifying their  
13 position." (Makes artillery noises) So I called them and said, "Tell them if they don't stop  
14 that, Charlie is going to come up and hit them with a sock full of shit." You know, then  
15 they stopped.

16          RV: What were your duties when you got there? What did you want on the  
17 ground?

18          RPD: I want all the radios. Tell brigade what was going on, listening to reports  
19 from the company commander, how many people had. We never had any trouble with  
20 ammunition. Air assault company brought in ammunition all the time. I don't ever recall  
21 anybody saying, "Oh my god, we're short on ammunition!" We had the XO's (Executive  
22 Officers) coming back with, you know, small parties picking up the stuff we brought in  
23 and redistributed, and they would get ready for the attack. I mean, we told them all about  
24 the lights coming down the mountain, that we were going to get attacked in the morning.  
25 So, they were all preparing for that.

26          RV: What was the morale of the company commanders?

27          RPD: I think it was all good, I mean they were tired, but it was nobody saying,  
28 "We need to get out of here!" or anything like that. You know, worse. The difference  
29 between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> was that we had spent two years with nothing but  
30 field exercises and working together, and working with the helicopters, and with the  
31 helicopter commanders. So everybody knew each other. It was like a football team how it

1 all works together like a team. 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> was thrown together at the last minute and  
2 that happens a lot, they get ready to deploy somebody, “It’s okay, we’re going to deploy  
3 a battalion.” It takes a whole brigade to get a deployable battalion. So they had people  
4 from everywhere heading out to work together. That was the major contributor to the  
5 problem they had, in Albany. I don’t think everybody was doing their job. Like Tony said  
6 in one interview I remember, “It’s easy to be a company commander because you’re so  
7 busy, you’re doing everything. The soldiers have a lot of downtime when they can be  
8 thinking, you know, evil thoughts get into their minds. But he said, “Company  
9 commanders are so busy, they don’t have time to think about the negative. If they got  
10 time it’s to make sure this is getting done and that getting done.” I think that’s really true.

11 RV: On the second day, when the attack came, one of the famous scenes in the  
12 movie and of course—it’s the broken arrow and then the amount of fire coming, and the  
13 napalm canisters and you recall, I know in the book and a few other movies. You see  
14 these canisters coming in two-fold. Tell me about that moment, tell me about what it was  
15 like when the broken arrow call went out and what happened to that?

16 RPD: When Charlie made that call hasting, it was almost like that before the first  
17 aircrafts were there. We had something like two-hundred and twenty airstrikes that day. I  
18 mean it was devastating, I’m sure it was devastating on the enemy. But when I was at  
19 Fort Benning in either the advanced course or the basic course, I remember seeing a  
20 movie about dropping napalm and it shows the canister coming down right at the camera  
21 and everything. When I looked up and saw that thing I thought, “Oh shit, this is going to  
22 be bad.” I remember a guy, somebody talking about fire, napalm he said, “Cover your  
23 eyes because you may be scarred, but you won’t be blinded.” Just before that first  
24 canister hit the ground, Joe Galloway was sitting next to me and I just put my head right  
25 against his arm. I figured if we get burned, we all get burned. A little piece of napalm hit  
26 everybody and just knocked them off. I think Sergeant Major got burned quite a bit, but  
27 probably everybody in the command group got a John Kerry purple heart. (Laughs)

28 RV: Tell me about Galloway down in X-Ray down that second day, he had to  
29 actually pick up the rifle and become a part of the—

30 RPD: I think the Sergeant Major went over to him and said, “You better take one  
31 of these.” I didn’t hear the conversation, but apparently he said something about being

1 non-combatant and the Sergeant Major said, “I don’t they’ll consider you that. You better  
2 be prepared to protect yourself.” A lot of fire coming in. A lot of—you know, you can  
3 hear the bullets ping, there were a lot of them going by and about that time is when (?)  
4 got hit. He stood up and got just whacked and went right flat down. We know he’s dead  
5 and after a while all of the sudden he starts stirring around, he was knocked out. The  
6 bullet hit him in the back of the helmet and knocked him out, but the bullet went around  
7 inside the helmet liner and out the front.

8 RV: Was the fire that close to the movie and described in the book?

9 RPD: I think the movie did it too close. I mean, we weren’t shooting guys with  
10 pistols. Our job is not to shoot people. It’s to coordinate activities everybody is issued  
11 and that’s what we were doing. Sometime in there I remember Colonel Moore said, “I’m  
12 going to go up to the frontline!” I said to him, “If you do that, you become just another  
13 rifleman. You’re not—you can’t take care of the scope of the battle if you’re down there  
14 shooting a rifle.” He said “Well, that’s what I trained you for. You run the battalion if  
15 something happens to me.” I think he really wanted to be seen as being exposed to the  
16 hostility the same as the others, but what seemed to me—to the soldiers, it’s more  
17 important that he be alive than being seen down there shooting a rifle. Them knowing  
18 he’s there giving the orders, gives them great confidence.

19 RV: I can imagine what it would be like hearing his voice over the radio. Was he  
20 on the radio launching like reports?

21 RPD: He was on the radio. The radios were going constantly. He probably was  
22 like on thirty-five or forty percent of the time he would talk. The rest of the time I would  
23 talk. That’s who—I talked to Sergeant Savage all night long. He periodically would talk  
24 and he would call the company commanders, you know, just to reassure them that  
25 everything is going to be good. But I taught them all the time about status, you know how  
26 many casualties you have and so forth.

27 RV: In interest of time, let me ask you a couple of questions. Looking back in  
28 general. One thing you always bring up, the chopper that left with Colonel Moore on the  
29 fixed wing.

30 RPD: I didn’t go back with him.

31 RV: You did not go back with him?

1 RPD: No.

2 RV: Tell me about you and what you did when you left.

3 RPD: I think I went back to brigade headquarters to tell them about what was  
4 going on. We always at the end of every day, Moore and I would take the log and we  
5 would write in a kind of summary of the day as we saw it. To be a part of the official log.  
6 The best I can recall, I went back to plantation where the brigade headquarters were, and  
7 I either went in a Huey or a Chinook. I don't remember which. I went in and tell them  
8 what I saw at the battle while it was still fresh in my mind. Take it and write it down in  
9 their log and talk to Colonel Brown. Then I got on a chopper and went back to Pleiku, to  
10 the airbase there.

11 RV: You were in a briefing brigade with Colonel Moore and various. Tell me  
12 about that briefing.

13 RPD: Well he and I both talked. I brought up the Chinese guy and Westmoreland  
14 really got upset about that. But that may have been a state department type of thing,  
15 "Let's not refer to this, let's not get the press hopped up about the Chinese and  
16 everything." But from the description of the body, it was not a North Vietnamese soldier  
17 and that's really only how— Westmoreland didn't go out of—he just said, "Let's not  
18 bring that up again, let's not talk about that. We don't want to get any of this involved."  
19 And that was that. But you know the night before we went in there, we had a radio  
20 intercept a lieutenant and his team with us. And at about three in the morning, he came to  
21 me and said, "I just got an interesting intercept." He showed me on the map and the line  
22 that went right straight across X-Ray into Chu Pong mountain. So no, it wasn't on the  
23 other side of the mountain, it was somewhere between there and where we were in Plei  
24 Me. It sounded like someone giving a status report because he would say in Chinese  
25 Mandarin, "Line one is". You know, just like we have reports, "Line one is twenty-five."  
26 And you go back and look at it and line one is the number of people in a unit. He would  
27 give number and they would go down this line, and he said, "If there were Chinese  
28 advisors, they usually would be at regimental level, maybe down the battalion level but  
29 not below that. It was a possibility that there could be a force of the regimental size or  
30 above that's somewhere along that line out there. Most likely right on the face of that  
31 mountain. So we were alerted that this could be a target area. Right before—when Moore

1 briefed Colonel Brown on us going, he said, “Hey, you two. Come over here” We walked  
2 over, and he said, “I want you guys to be careful. Keep people together. In this area we  
3 could hit a big unit.”

4 RV: And you did.

5 RPD: Yeah.

6 RV: Forty years after, tell me what you were thinking at the funeral, about that  
7 time in the valley and what’s happening with the mood.

8 RPD: First, it’s hard to believe forty years. There’s some significant things about  
9 it. If you think about that battle, Westmoreland and McNamara kind of used that as a  
10 crutch to support the attrition theory. I kind of wonder, if we’d been wiped out to the  
11 man, overrun and wiped out to the man, they may have just said, “We don’t want to be  
12 involved in a war like this. Let’s start withdrawing out troops now.” Maybe we wouldn’t  
13 have been involved in it ten years later. Maybe the best thing in the long run, for the  
14 country and the number of casualties we had, would’ve been for all of us to have been  
15 wiped out. But that didn’t occur and that’s the way. Now was that strategy, a good  
16 strategy? Maybe. It looked like it at the time, god if you killed them off at a rate of ten to  
17 one, they’ll run out of people. But when General Giap said, “We were willing to lose  
18 another million people for this fight.” Then you look at it and say, “No, it wasn’t.” When  
19 I was fourteen years old, do you think that I ever thought someone would make a movie  
20 in which somebody plays my character? No. (Laughs) You know, it’s been real  
21 interesting, I mean several nice things have happened as a result of that. I went to an  
22 airshow in Peoria and you know probably thousand people asked me for my autograph.  
23 Talked to us, “Thank you for all you’ve done!” It makes you feel good. So a lot of good  
24 has come out of it.

25 RV: How tight are the bonds forty years later?

26 RPD: I think pretty tight. We talk, I talk to General Moore probably once a  
27 month. Talked to Joe probably that much too. I had a really good time with Sergeant  
28 Major at the— Sergeant Major doesn’t give interviews, you know, so the reporters would  
29 all come over there and you know he’d says, “No I don’t give interviews.” “No, but you  
30 know, tell him about how mean you are.” (Laughs) First question is, “Please don’t ask  
31 him about the weather.” He’d laugh and we had a good time. I talked to Tony quite a bit.

1 I see him every year. We have another reunion, it's just the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> guys. It's a little  
2 more intimate than this. I saw the guest list here is up to like nine-hundred and three  
3 people something like that. I think maybe the—not sure why so many people are here,  
4 who were maybe in the Ia Drang five years later. Or flew over in a C141 or something  
5 like that. Maybe it's gotten pass the original intent of having.

6 RV: Well, Colonel Dillon thank you very much for your time this morning, we  
7 appreciate it very much.

8 RPD: Well, thank you!