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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Dr. Carl Nelson  
Conducted by Jason Stewart  
4 September 2008; 5 September 2008  
Transcribed by Cecily Darwin**

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

1           Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech  
2 University conducting an oral history interview with Dr. Carl Nelson. Today is  
3 September 4<sup>th</sup> 2008. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Dr. Nelson is joining me from Chula  
4 Vista, California. Is that correct?

5           Carl Nelson: Yes.

6           JS: Okay. Why don't we begin, if you don't mind, telling me a little bit of  
7 biographical information, when and where you were born, what your parents' names  
8 were, what they did for a living, that type of thing?

9           CN: Uh-huh, sure. My—start with my grandmother on my Swedish side. She  
10 came to America in 1889, 1899, and had one son born in New York. She was married  
11 there but then some time shortly divorced and moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My  
12 father's name was Alfred Helge Axel Nelson and he was a first generation Swedish-  
13 American. My mother was Isabel Alice Nelson, Younger, rather, Y-O-U-N-G-E-R,  
14 Younger. She met my father when she was in her late maybe nineteen or twenty, twenty-  
15 one. They fell in love and they had, they gave birth to me in 1930 on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October  
16 during the deep Depression of that period. Four years later they gave birth to, my mother  
17 gave birth, to a brother, Gordon Nelson. Essentially, we weathered the storm of the  
18 Depression in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I lived at one home, 2038 Dartmore Street in  
19 Overbrook suburb of Pittsburgh until I was eighteen and I enlisted in the Navy. I really  
20 had one home that I lived at. I was looking at your list here. My dad was a carpenter and  
21 an all-around handy man, excellent worker, but they separated when I was twelve. My  
22 dad went off and married, remarried sometime later after they divorced and moved to

1 Cleveland so I was without a dad from the time I was about thirteen until I—for the  
2 record, I didn't make up with my dad. My dad and I didn't make up until later in life. But  
3 my childhood was a lot of work because my dad left and he didn't leave us any money so  
4 I worked a lot. I did paperboy things and set pins and did all those, worked in the gas  
5 stations. But graduated from Carrick High School where I played varsity basketball and  
6 was active in school projects somewhat, to the extent that my work allowed. Upon  
7 finishing high school I went to work in downtown Pittsburgh for a company actually  
8 delivering as a delivery boy. Then I was going to night school, Allegheny High School,  
9 and also at Carnegie Tech night school. In the winter—I graduated in 1948 from high  
10 school. In the winter of 1949, on a very snowy, cold day, I found myself very bored and  
11 working and trying to go to night school. Came April, I guess it was March, I enlisted in  
12 the Navy and went to boot camp on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1949.

13 JS: Okay.

14 CN: I went through boot camp and enjoyed that very much and afterwards went to  
15 class A electronics, electrical school. While I was there in A school, I guess we called it  
16 and we still do I think, I was working out at the gymnasium when the coach of the Great  
17 Lakes Navy basketball team found me and said, "Would you like to play for the base  
18 team?" Not knowing much about the Navy I said, "You know? Why not?" After A school  
19 they kept me on and I did tryouts and made the team and I became a, I guess an athletic  
20 person for the Navy playing basketball for the Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

21 JS: What position did you play?

22 CN: I played, at high school I played center because I was the tallest kid in the  
23 school. In the Navy I played forward because they brought in a couple of guys who were  
24 taller than me.

25 JS: Right.

26 CN: So I played forward on the basketball team.

27 JS: Okay.

28 CN: Then that winter in February, I think it was, yeah, February we flew—we  
29 were good enough to go and play in the All Navy Basketball Tournament so they flew us  
30 down to Opalika Naval Air Station in Florida and played in—I don't remember. I think  
31 we came in second on the thing but I am not exactly sure. I think we lost to a Marine

1 team from Hawaii. Then we came back from that and my sports career in the Navy was  
2 over and I was waiting for orders to my first sea duty when—and this is a true story—  
3 while I was in barracks, a telephone call came for me and I picked it up and I thought it  
4 was my mother because she was the only one that knew where I was, I think, essentially.  
5 It was not. It was one my best high school, actually grade school and high school, friends  
6 and still is. His name was George Frazier and he said, “Carl, how would you like to go to  
7 Annapolis?” I said, “Well, I don’t know much about it, but is it a good deal?” He said, “I  
8 think it is.” “Why aren’t you going to do it?” He said, “I am.” Well, he was at Pitt, the  
9 University of Pittsburgh, and he was in the Air Force ROTC (Reserve Officer Training  
10 Corps) and he didn’t want to be in the Navy so he said, “If you want it you can have a  
11 third alternate appointment and you can try for the Naval Academy.” I agreed to that and  
12 the Navy quickly changed my orders from whatever ship they were going to send me to,  
13 to Newport, Rhode Island, where we have a naval academy preparatory school at the  
14 time. We still do have that school. I think it is still in Newport. I got there in March and  
15 the examination was in April and I didn’t pass by one course. One course was a couple of  
16 points under the required grade. So I would have entered the Naval Academy with the  
17 class of ’54 but because I didn’t pass it someone else got the appointment. They elected  
18 because I guess I had done pretty well except for the one exam of a number of different  
19 exams they gave you. They decided to leave me, keep me there for another year and enter  
20 the following year, which is what I did. I stayed there and I played basketball for the  
21 Naval Academy preparatory school. I was a forward again still. I kept getting smaller as  
22 the kids kept getting bigger. Then the following year I passed the examinations for the  
23 Naval Academy and entered with the class of 1955.

24 JS: Okay. All right, before we get you to Annapolis I would like to ask you a few  
25 questions about—

26 CN: Sure.

27 JS: The courses and stuff that you were taking at the prep school. Could you tell  
28 me a little bit, what type of courses that type of thing?

29 CN: Yeah, because the Naval Academy curriculum is heavy in engineering  
30 courses, mathematics and science, the prep school taught us I guess the fundamentals of  
31 electronics and engineering mathematics. Actually taught us, prepared us to take the

1 examination. So we were taking courses that prepared us in areas of calculus, algebra,  
2 (pause) other math and science projects. Of course, a certain amount of—what do I call  
3 it? Rounding, well rounding things like literature and history and particularly Navy  
4 history. I am trying to think what else. Oh, and they had us involved in physical fitness to  
5 keep us fit and that sort of thing. It is a well-rounded preparatory school. The Navy still  
6 runs it and I think it is in Newport. We take—at the time the Navy took in as I recall  
7 about 160 young men from the fleet, we called it, from the Navy and we still do. A big  
8 proportion of those are actually athletes who might help Annapolis's football and  
9 basketball teams compete so I think they still do that.

10 JS: Okay.

11 CN: You had other questions about that.

12 JS: What was your favorite subject of the ones you were taking there? Did you  
13 have an—

14 CN: It was not necessarily engineering and math, although I had taken college  
15 preparatory courses in high school, it was not my strength. I thought that English,  
16 literature, and history and some of the so-called softer subjects were more interesting to  
17 me. By the way I might point this out that when my friend George Frazier called me that  
18 was an absolutely life changing moment in my life.

19 JS: I imagine so.

20 CN: I have subsequently recognized him, if we ever get to that later in my life I  
21 recognize him to my friends in Pittsburgh so they know what a genuine person he was to  
22 remember me. Anyway, prep school was mostly helping us, prepping to take the  
23 examination instead of questions related to math and science and that sort of thing.

24 JS: Right, okay. All right, and then so I guess we can talk about Annapolis now, if  
25 you don't mind.

26 CN: Yeah, I went to Annapolis. I would say that I was not the best sailor before I  
27 went through Annapolis. I was pretty heavy duty on enjoying my life and liberty and all  
28 the things that young kids do. When I got to Annapolis I got serious and became—while  
29 the academics were a struggle I was recognized by my classmates as having some  
30 leadership potential and ended up with high marks in potential for officer. I did play  
31 basketball for the freshman team at Annapolis the first year. By that time I bordering on

1 becoming a guard because the kids were getting bigger and faster and whatever. But  
2 anyway, the next year I tried for the team and did not make the team. That was the year  
3 when they brought in freshmen from—let freshman play varsity basketball. They brought  
4 in some really good players. I was a little bit old in the tooth by that time. Anyway, then I  
5 went on to become a leader in my class to—to become what we become midshipmen  
6 officers and I enjoyed that very much. Then I had a—I met my wife, my future wife  
7 Barbara and then I had a terrible thing happen. My wife at the end of my second class  
8 year, that would be my third year there, at the end of the year and about ready to go into  
9 my senior year. I failed a course in thermodynamics. They gave me a re-exam and I failed  
10 that and they called me before the admiral and they said, “You can”—“You are going to  
11 have to stay an additional year if you want to stay in the Navy. I had the GI Bill and my  
12 future wife and I, we were engaged then, discussed it and we decided the Navy was for us  
13 and so I did an additional year at the Naval Academy. Cruel punishment. They don’t do  
14 that anymore but at that time they made you take the entire curriculum one whole year if  
15 you had a problem with one course. In any case, we survived that and the following year  
16 I was made one of the ranking officers of the midshipman organization. The day after  
17 graduation my wife and I, Barbra and I, married at the chapel and went off on a career in  
18 the Navy.

19 JS: Right, okay. When did you graduate? What year was this?

20 CN: 1956.

21 JS: 1956, okay. All right, could you tell me a little bit more about your time at the  
22 Naval Academy, maybe like what a typical day was like, something like that, if there was  
23 such a thing?

24 CN: Yeah, I can. (Coughs) Excuse me. As a freshman or a plebe the first half of  
25 the year is extremely rigorous. The upperclassmen are turned on to challenge the plebes  
26 mentally and physically to get them—well, I think in retrospect to get them fit for the  
27 rigors of the ocean experience, being at sea on ships and that sort of thing. During that  
28 period there is a weeding out process and a great big number, some statistics show that an  
29 upwards of a third of the class leave in that first six months or certainly in that first year  
30 because of one reason or another. Either that or discover that they didn’t want to be in the  
31 military career in general or that they really wanted to become something else than a

1 naval officer. They may have wanted to become a doctor or a lawyer or something else.  
2 Or they just get fed up with being hassled by midshipmen upperclassman for such a long  
3 period of time. But it is a period where midshipmen, the plebes, have to run around and  
4 answer questions and be very rigorous in terms of their uniforms and style and the work  
5 of the day. But sometime after Christmas and after the Christmas leave the pressure on  
6 the plebes tends to slacken somewhat. By the end of the first year the plebe class is more  
7 relaxed and when that year is finished they go off on what is called a youngster crew.  
8 They become a youngster, that is the second, that is the sophomore year. They become  
9 youngsters and they are sent to sea for about two months on various ships, Navy ships  
10 that take them out and integrate them with the fleet sailors. They learn hands-on  
11 operation of guns and machinery and navigation and all the things that ships do.

12 JS: Okay.

13 CN: When they come back they are then upperclassman, sophomores now or  
14 youngsters as we called them and they are back to the academics of studying, and  
15 studying, and studying and making their way through the academics. It would not be a  
16 surprise if they tend to really enjoy themselves a little bit when they go on liberty and  
17 they relax a little bit and whatever. But they continue on with their sports and  
18 participating in physical activities. The next year, the second class year, it is a junior the  
19 toughest year academically at the academy. There is no leadership requirements although  
20 they are preparing to take over leadership of the brigade of midshipman during that year.  
21 They examine you in navigation and engineering, steam propulsion, and—an ugly word  
22 to me—,thermodynamics which I didn't do very well in. Then comes the first class year  
23 on top of the academics which somewhat, the pressure somewhat reduces for the seniors  
24 and that is typical around the nation in any college, the last year is a little bit easier. But  
25 also then they take on leadership requirements. The brigade of midshipman is managed  
26 by themselves, by midshipman. There are officers throughout the brigade of midshipmen  
27 acting more like mini-deans, if you would, but there is just one officer per company of  
28 midshipmen and the midshipmen are actually doing all the management of the day-to-day  
29 routine of the brigade. Then graduation and off you go to your chosen career. In my case  
30 I had two roommates, both of whom were going to flight training. One wanted to be a  
31 fighter pilot and the other one wanted to be a balloon pilot, a lighter than air pilot. I didn't

1 know what I wanted to do. I thought I wanted to become a surface officer, ship officer  
2 but I was twenty-five by that time, older than most. The cut off was so they convinced me  
3 and I convinced myself to go to flight training. Barbra and I, we stayed to the Naval  
4 Academy after we married for about two months while I was—hold on a minute. I'm in  
5 an interview. It is my wife just checking. I am going to close my office door here. I went  
6 to—I decided to go down there to flight training in Pensacola and along about February I  
7 decided it was not for me. I really wanted to be on ships. My wife was pregnant and we  
8 had to make the choice so that we could travel and so we left training and went to join the  
9 ship. It was newly commissioned and had been in World War II, a destroyer escort. I  
10 joined that ship and became the damage control assistant and we went to Newport, Rhode  
11 Island, where it was home ported and then the ship was U.S.S. *T.J. Gary* and it was one  
12 of the ships on the North Atlantic early warning, Distant Early Warning line that spanned  
13 from the Azores across the North Atlantic across North America and Canada and across  
14 the North Pacific. It consisted of radars that were focused in the direction of Russia  
15 expecting that the Russians would be sending bombers to blow us to hell and back. It  
16 never happened and thank god but it was interesting work that we did up there. I found  
17 that I loved the surface navy and the sailors and I found my niche in the Navy.

18 JS: Okay.

19 CN: After about—I became, I actually became the chief engineer or department  
20 head on that ship and then in 1958 I was cross decked to US. *Decatur*, a new destroyer  
21 and I was made, given a department, weapons department. I was a lieutenant J.G. (junior  
22 grade) then, now, and I was until 1960. I was weapons officer on the USS *Decatur*. We  
23 cruised into the Mediterranean and up the eastern or western side of Europe and spent six  
24 months in the Mediterranean trying to hunt down Russian submarines and whatever else  
25 that the Russians could mess with us with.

26 JS: Right.

27 CN: Let's see where—I guess we have come to the end of my tour on the  
28 *Decatur*, which by the way as weapons officer I was involved with the Navy's newest  
29 gun at the time. Of course, there had been a lot of water under the dam in terms of  
30 weaponry but at that time it was a 5"/54 rapid-fire gun and it had a lot of problems,  
31 technical problems and I spent a great deal of my time trying to sort out why the gun was

1 having problems. That eventually became an excellent weapon and I again had served on  
2 ships later on that had those weapons onboard and they performed very well. At the close  
3 of the tour of duty on the *Decatur* my wife and I, we had two babies and we were on the  
4 edge of leaving the Navy. I submitted my resignation to my commanding officer and  
5 expecting that I would be discharged in 1960 at the end of my four-year tour period as an  
6 officer in the Navy. But it turns out that my captain called me in and said, “I haven’t sent  
7 your resignation into the Bureau of Naval Personnel yet but I have a set of orders for you  
8 that you can take instead of leaving the Navy. You can go to Annapolis and become a  
9 company officer.” My wife and I talked it over and we already had a company, a toy  
10 company up in Massachusetts, wanted to hire me as their production manager but we  
11 decided to stay in the Navy. We went to Annapolis where I became a company officer,  
12 like as I said before like a mini-dean there, where there were twenty-four of us company  
13 officers. I had, if you would, the 11<sup>th</sup> Company and it was a marvelous experience. My  
14 wife and I thoroughly enjoyed it. We had our third child there toward the end of our  
15 second year. We were there from ’60 to ’62. There were competitions among the  
16 midshipman companies and the first year we were there my company came in second.  
17 Then in the second year I came in first. At the end of that second year the Navy changed  
18 its rules and decided they were going to keep me on shore duty an additional year which  
19 didn’t interest me too much. I wanted to go to sea but they said—the commandant asked  
20 what I wanted to do and I said what, “I don’t want to do the same thing again. If I can I  
21 would like to do something interesting.” He said, “Well, we have a spot at West Point.  
22 You can go up there as a company officer,” what they called a tactical officer there. So  
23 Barbra and I agreed to go up to West Point and join the corps of cadets as the tactical  
24 officer for company F-2 and that was a marvelous year, as well. Our officers up there  
25 treated us extremely well and my kids enjoyed it and we enjoyed it. My company at West  
26 Point won the colors while we were there, also. While I was there I ran across neighbors  
27 who had been to a little place called South Vietnam as advisors to the—that would have  
28 been in ’63 while I was—I have never heard of Vietnam, such a little country. So that  
29 was the first I had heard about it. At the time, of course, America was worried about  
30 Cuba and the missile crisis more than Vietnam. In any case, I learned that the Army had  
31 been sending advisors into Vietnam for a couple of years. The Navy was not involved at

1 that time. At the end of that tour with the Army at West Point I asked for command of a  
2 ship. I was honored by being given, as a lieutenant in the Navy, given command of USS  
3 *Cocopa* ATF 101. It was an ocean going towing and salvage ship with about four officers  
4 plus myself and about sixty-five enlisted men. It was exciting and interesting. I loved  
5 every minute of it. Shortly after I took command in the summer of 1966, '63 rather—  
6 actually, it was early fall and I took command in the summer and by early fall I want to  
7 say September, October, I was deployed to the western Pacific. I took a ship across the  
8 ocean, nervous as the dickens as a new officer might be taking crews—taking command  
9 of a ship and taking it across the ocean but in any, but it turned out to be an interesting  
10 and exciting thing to do. I got to Guam and we were notified that President Kennedy had  
11 been assassinated. The crew and I all went to the local Catholic church and then sent out  
12 a message to Mrs. Kennedy and that was a very sad time.

13 JS: Sure.

14 CN: Then as a point of note Mrs. Kennedy later sent us a nice thank you note  
15 for—we sent her a message back from the crew of the ship. We went on to the  
16 Philippines and then we went up—went in over to Cambodia and did some work there.  
17 On our way back we were ordered into Vung Tau, a coastal city on the coast of South  
18 Vietnam. Then we were—we had a tow and we were ordered to take the tow, it was a  
19 small PGM, a patrol boat, take it to Saigon which we did. During so we were ordered to  
20 get into combat gear and man our weapons. We went up through the place called the  
21 Rung Sat Special Zone on the Long Tau Channel to get to Saigon. That was the first time  
22 I had ever heard of the Rung Sat Special Zone in the Long Tau Channel, as a matter of  
23 fact. We went through—we went up to Saigon and stayed there and we were there the  
24 day before Christmas and we were there for Christmas and a day after Christmas when  
25 we turned over the boat. While we were there the deputy commander of the U.S. Military  
26 Assistance Command, Vietnam was the newly arrived formed commandant of cadets at  
27 West Point, General William Stillwell. I made contact with him and had Christmas dinner  
28 with him and he came aboard the ship and asked me what do we do about all these rivers  
29 down in South Vietnam and I didn't have much to add. He was starting to try to figure  
30 out how to contain the insurgents that were in South Vietnam in the Delta region where  
31 all these rivers were. Anyway, we then left Vietnam and we did a few other minor things

1 around in those waters then went back to the Philippines and eventually went back to the  
2 States.

3 JS: Okay.

4 CN: I am going to take a sip of coffee, please.

5 JS: Sure, sure. I would like to ask you a few questions about this anyway.

6 CN: About what?

7 JS: I would like to ask you a few questions about your duty while you were in  
8 Vietnam at this time. Was there much of a U.S. naval presence at this time?

9 CN: In Vietnam?

10 JS: Yeah.

11 CN: In '63, this was 1963 the winter, the winter of '63, '64 I was there for  
12 Christmas '63—oh, by the way, I think it was—was it Diem?

13 JS: Yeah.

14 CN: Was assassinated just before we arrived and there was heavy, heavy security.  
15 There was not much Navy in Vietnam, although I have subsequently learned that there  
16 were some small detachments of Navy and Marines into the Delta in an attempt to figure  
17 out how to defend those rivers and protect the people down there. But not—the activity  
18 hadn't really started. If you recall, we had—in the history of this thing President  
19 Eisenhower decided not to help the French at Dien Bien Phu.

20 JS: Right, right.

21 CN: But he brought—we did help bring the refugees down to South Vietnam. So  
22 we were—and we did put in a small mission, military mission in South Vietnam but it  
23 was mostly Army. To my knowledge there wasn't much Navy there in that period.

24 JS: All right. What was your—you said since you spent a few days in Saigon  
25 around Christmas time in just going in the rivers and doing your job at that time, what  
26 was your first impressions of Vietnam at that time?

27 CN: My impression in Saigon and that was—coming up through the Rung Sat on  
28 the Long Tau Channel first of all I had never navigated a river like that and I had to take  
29 a—I didn't have to but I mean I did, I took a Vietnamese captain with me who knew the  
30 river and gave him control of the ship because I—it would have taken us fifteen days to  
31 get up the river as scared as I was of the river. It had—the Long Tau Channel is a really

1    snakelike, if you would as a description, snakelike river. It just weaves and whatever and  
2    has some really treacherous areas. You have to be very careful in your navigation. That—  
3    and we were at general quarters the entire trip. It was hot as the dickens, as I recall,  
4    notwithstanding that it was December. I thought that we were in a hornet’s nest up there.  
5    I had no idea except that is what we were told and that there were guerillas waiting to  
6    attack the ships on the Long Tau Channel so we were a little tense. Once we got to  
7    Saigon the tenseness relaxed because it seemed like Saigon was at that time a very  
8    peaceful place. They had just killed their president and the army had taken over and  
9    locked it down and my sailors actually went—we gave them a few hours’ liberty up there  
10   and they seemed to enjoy themselves. But on Christmas day my crew came to me and  
11   said, “Hey, can we do something for the Vietnamese?” As great American sailors do,  
12   they found a couple of orphanages and brought kids from the orphanages aboard the ship  
13   for Christmas supper, Christmas dinner, and showed them around and gave them a T-  
14   shirt with the ship’s name on it, caps and all that sort of thing. They just had a grand time.  
15   I was not—I did not feel that—I did not feel danger in Saigon at that time. I traveled to  
16   my boss’s office at the MACV’s (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) headquarters  
17   and back in an open jeep and I wasn’t armed and neither, as I recall, was the driver of the  
18   jeep. It was not—for me I didn’t feel danger at that time.

19            JS: Okay. While you were going up the Long Tau Channel and going through the  
20   Rung Sat Special Zone or near that you never came under any fire or anything like that at  
21   all?

22            CN: No, we didn’t. No, we did not. We were—of course, this pilot that I took  
23   aboard asked me how fast I could go and I said, “This ship will go about eighteen knots,  
24   sir.” He said, “Take it to eighteen knots.” He raced that ship up there. I was biting my  
25   nails. I said, “There goes my career. If he misses a turn I will be up in the mud for  
26   months.” But he knew what he was doing and we didn’t make any—he was aware that  
27   there was a possibility of people out there that would take shots at us and wasn’t going to  
28   take any chances of going up slow, so it worked fine.

29            JS: Right. All right. You have mentioned the tow job that you did there. Can you  
30   tell me what kind of ship you were towing and what that was about?

1           CN: Well, actually, I can tell you what it is about. It was an interesting story. We  
2 were sent—I was in the—let’s see. It would have been in early December. I was in the  
3 Philippines and in the middle of the night I got a message, super-secret message that said,  
4 “Get underway and head west.” New captain, I questioned, you see, that rookie, “Is that  
5 really true? Do they really want me to do that?” But they did and so we got the crew back  
6 aboard, as many as I could. I think we had to leave a couple on shore that we couldn’t  
7 find but we got everybody back and got underway within about two hours and I headed  
8 west. Once I was headed west I sent a message back to my boss and said, “I am doing  
9 what you told me to do.” He said, “Okay, now go to Cambodia and lay out to a place  
10 called Ream, Cambodia, and lay out of sight of land, so we did that. That took us around  
11 the Parrot’s Beak and up into the Gulf of Siam, etc. We laid out of sight off maybe sixty-  
12 eighty miles at sea out of sight of land until the ambassador of Cambodia and my  
13 commander sent me a message and told me to go into the port of Ream, Cambodia, and  
14 take possession of a PGM, that is a patrol boat with guns, and was made, I think, very  
15 sleek beautiful boat that we were intending to turn over to Cambodian navy for close to  
16 warfare. But what happened was that the Prince Sihanouk, as I recall his name was, told  
17 the United States to—he severed relations with the United States and told us to take our  
18 forces out of Cambodia. So we did and we happened to have this boat ready to turn over  
19 to the Cambodian navy and we decided to take it back and not give it to the Cambodian  
20 navy. So I was ordered in to take under tow and bring it out. On the way out I did that,  
21 and on the way out we faced down a Cambodian navy. They didn’t try to force me to—  
22 take the boat from me but it was a little bit tense for a while. Then we left and I got to sea  
23 and headed back toward the Philippines and that is when we ended up in a major storm  
24 and I was ordered into Vietnam and to turn over that boat to the Vietnamese.

25           JS: How did the situation with the Cambodians come to a conclusion? Did they  
26 eventually just move out of the way and just—?

27           CN: Yeah. What happened is they had a destroyer escort that was originally, it  
28 looked to me like, it was originally an American or French ship. They had it at sea and  
29 when I came out they were in a blocking position but I—but they contained to, I guess  
30 what you call general quarters, and we did, too. We were just a little dinky ship compared  
31 to—they had a full destroyer escort manned with their sailors. But they didn’t take any

1 action. They just put on a show for us and we sailed on by and went on about our  
2 business and that was it.

3 JS: Okay. All right. Were there any other—did you have any other of these tow  
4 job type missions while you were in Vietnam?

5 CN: Not in Vietnam. On leaving Vietnam we had been out—we had been on this  
6 mission up into Cambodia and in Vietnam. We missed Christmas. We had Christmas in  
7 Saigon, so we missed Christmas in the Philippines. On the way home to the Philippines  
8 we were ordered to do another major salvage operation off the north coast of Luzon and it  
9 was a Philippine navy ship had run aground up there so we went up with a couple of  
10 other American salvage ships and we pulled the Philippine ship off the island. Then we  
11 went back to the Philippines but we missed New Years. You know how sailors are. We  
12 got back to the Philippines and I said, “Okay, I have got to give you some liberty. We can  
13 have a belated New Year’s Eve party,” which they did.

14 JS: Right.

15 CN: We did, what else did we do? I am trying to think now. We did some  
16 operations up in Japan, nothing as serious as the Vietnam stuff. Nothing—they were  
17 mostly delivery, delivered some things, picked up some stuff from one port and take it to  
18 another port that sort of thing.

19 JS: Okay.

20 CN: But it was—for me it was a very exciting tour of duty.

21 JS: Sure. I guess being your first command and all. Right.

22 CN: Yeah, I’m afraid, yeah.

23 JS: How long were you in command of the *Cocopa*? Is that how you—

24 CN: Yeah. About a year and a half.

25 JS: Year and a half, okay.

26 CN: Then the Navy cross-decked me again to the USS *Morton*, a destroyer, DD-  
27 948.

28 JS: Okay.

29 CN: I was cross-decked as an executive officer of that ship. Then that ship had  
30 just come back from a tour of duty in the western Pacific so we went into overhaul for a  
31 couple of months up in Long Beach and then we deployed back to the war zone in South

1 Vietnam. On that ship, that was in '64, and that ship we did gunfire support for—on  
2 northern zone, zone one up in the northern part, below the DMZ (demilitarized zone) and  
3 above the DMZ, as a matter of fact. We fired—I was exec and combat officer and skipper  
4 was a wonderful guy; was fearless with his destroyer. When they wanted—when the  
5 gunfire—when the Army and the Marine Corps and sometimes the Australians wanted  
6 gunfire support, we would run in and satisfy them. We got really good reports back in  
7 terms of our accuracy of our gunfire. We fired over 10,000 rounds of 5"/54 guns. The  
8 same gun that I had so much trouble with on the *Decatur* was now proven and was doing  
9 very well. We had three of them onboard and we were a prized gunfire ship by the people  
10 on shore because it had pretty good range and our team was pretty accurate and we fired  
11 gunfire support for advisors as well as regular Army and Marine Corps units who would  
12 be or would be within our range. Maybe being attacked we would give them support. So  
13 we did that for six months.

14 JS: Okay. All right. You were—you said you were on the *Morton* from the fall of  
15 '64 until '66?

16 CN: Yeah, I was there. I went to—when we came back from the deployment in  
17 '64 and then we overhauled the ship, repaired it again and deployed again. I went back  
18 out to Vietnam to the war zone and did some more gunfire support and I was relieved as  
19 exec of that ship in '66. In the summer of '66, like I think June, and then I went up to  
20 Monterrey for graduate school in the summer of '66, as I recall. It was like July or  
21 August but school started in late August or September.

22 JS: Okay. Before we talk about grad school I would like to talk a little bit more  
23 about your duty on the *Morton*, if you don't mind.

24 CN: Sure.

25 JS: So you were on duty at the *Morton* by the fall of '64. Were you anywhere in  
26 the area when the Gulf of Tonkin Incident occurred?

27 CN: Well, actually, the Gulf of Tonkin Incident happened the year that I went to  
28 *Morton* as exec. The ship had just come back from being out in the Tonkin Gulf area but  
29 it was not involved in that incident of the—

30 JS: Right.

31 CN: Let me see. What were the two ships?

1 JS: The *Turner Joy*, and let's see—

2 CN: Yeah, *Turner Joy* and one other. They were both—they were in our  
3 squadron. Now, I will tell you this, that I said that they were not involved in that specific  
4 action with the *Turner Joy*—if I could think of the name of the ship, terrible. But they  
5 were involved. They were in the Gulf of Tonkin. The ship because of the Tonkin Gulf  
6 Incident and the possibility that those two ships had been attacked when *Morton* went  
7 into the Gulf of Tonkin, the ship went in and a highly defensive posture. Our kids thought  
8 that we were being attacked in one cruise through the Tonkin Gulf. We had a  
9 commandant on board. There were two ships, *Morton* and I forget which other one, and  
10 the ship went to general quarters and fired rounds at things that according to the CIC  
11 (combat information center) people and the radar operators looked like small boats. We  
12 fired lots of rounds and then came out and never—and we learned later that they were not  
13 ships. But *Morton* did defend itself in fire and there was a division of two ships that did  
14 that. Subsequently, I am an active member of the *Morton* crew veterans' organization and  
15 we have discussed that backwards and forwards and the sailors who were aboard *Morton*  
16 on that period when they went up in the gulf, some say they swear that they were being  
17 attacked and others say, "Poo, poo. It is not true." We are kind of—we still mull it  
18 around. Since I wasn't there all I do is listen and give guidance and try to digest what  
19 they say. But it was a tense period and it was—they all felt like they were in combat. But  
20 I wasn't there.

21 JS: You ended up—you were on the *Morton* after it had already come back to the  
22 U.S. for refitting. That is whenever you joined the *Morton*.

23 CN: I am sorry. Say that again. I am having—my—let me tell you, I am up in my  
24 office and my—I have a—I hire a company that comes and cuts my grass and they are  
25 here now.

26 JS: Okay.

27 CN: I am trying to block out the sound, background noise.

28 JS: So you joined the *Morton* after it had come back to the U.S. for refitting. Is  
29 that correct?

30 CN: Yes, sir.

31 JS: Okay.

1 CN: Yeah, I did in the summer of—I am not sure it was the summer, it must have  
2 been—maybe it was the fall of 1964, I think it was.

3 JS: Right, okay.

4 CN: Yeah. I finished up the sea—yeah, it was something like the winter of '64 I  
5 left the CO. I was relieved as CO of *Cocopa* and went over and became executive of the  
6 destroyer.

7 JS: How did you feel about no longer being the commanding officer? How did  
8 you feel about that?

9 CN: Well, you know, I am a fairly flexible guy. I think that my attitude was that  
10 while *Cocopa* was a real highlight of my Navy career—I loved that tour—it was only a  
11 year and a half. I figure that—or how can I have lots and lots of interesting things to do in  
12 the Navy, one of which would be a number one to another captain. I didn't have a  
13 problem. I felt my job was to support the skipper.

14 JS: Sure.

15 CN: Well, I might have missed making, being the CO. Lucky for me I was greatly  
16 honored to have four other commands in the Navy, so I made up for it.

17 JS: Right.

18 CN: Exec is a trying job for anybody in the Navy career, the number two guy. It  
19 has a lot of pressure on them but it is an important job.

20 JS: Right, okay. What would the specific duties of the XO (executive officer) on,  
21 say, the *Morton*?

22 CN: Well, I think pretty much the same on any ship. The executive officer has—  
23 the staff of the ship, the ward room of the ship works for the XO and carries out the  
24 policies like who carries out the policies of the commanding officer. Well, you are  
25 challenged daily in terms of keeping the commanding officer informed and discussing the  
26 day's matters and the future of the ship and that sort of thing with the CO. Then your job  
27 is to work with the wardroom and the chief's quarters to make sure that the ship is  
28 manned and fit to fight. We were involved in making sure that all the equipment is  
29 working and that people are trained and that the young sailors, who the captain is  
30 entrusted with, are doing their job and are cared for (phone hangs up).

31 JS: Hello, hello.

1 JS: Set the recording here again real quick.

2 CN: Yeah.

3 JS: Okay, you were telling me about the duties of the XO.

4 CN: Right, yeah. You know, taking care of—making sure that the kids, the great  
5 young kids, eighteen-, nineteen-year-old sailors onboard are doing fine.

6 JS: Right.

7 CN: Helping them, keep them marching along.

8 JS: Okay. All right. Well, you mentioned a little earlier about the shore  
9 bombardment, shore support, fire support. Could you tell me—do you remember any  
10 specific incidents or specific happenings with that that you could tell me about?

11 CN: Sure.

12 JS: Okay.

13 CN: Uh, let me think now. Well, first of all the coastal waters of South Vietnam  
14 in the war zone were mirrored on the war zones of South Vietnam. They were divided  
15 into four corps. The I Corps, 1st Corps, was up near the DMZ. Most of the shore  
16 bombardment was in support of the fighting onshore.

17 JS: Right.

18 CN: So when—but the gunfire ships also went to 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and even  
19 down to 4<sup>th</sup> Corps when needed. *Morton* provided shore bombardment for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps  
20 and the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps. We did some shore bombardment, would you believe, up close to the  
21 Rung Sat Special Zone in support of advisors in the Rung Sat.

22 JS: Wow.

23 CN: We also did a lot of shore bombardment for the Marines and soldiers, Army  
24 in the I Corps. Specific—I remember because it is so close to me. I ended up being the  
25 senior advisor of the Rung Sat Special Zone, which we will talk about later. At the time I  
26 had already been there when I was skipper of the *Cocopa*. We had a call for fire to  
27 support senior or support advisors in the Rung Sat and my captain, Captain Bob  
28 Broodmare—was one of those things that said, “We are getting overrun! We need your  
29 gunfire support! Get here as soon as you can!” They gave us—I would be in combat, the  
30 captain was on the bridge and we were in brown water. They gave us the coordinates of  
31 the firefight that was going on. My captain raced the ship at high speed in brown water

1 actually risking our ship to get within range. Of course, then, you know, he slowed down  
2 and we started firing. It was an exciting period because we were—had been originally  
3 pretty far out and we closed the gap and got within range and provided first star shells  
4 over high above the battlefield, the battle whatever it was. It was between advisors and  
5 some—it could have been North Vietnamese or insurgents, I don't know which. But we  
6 fired star shells and then we changed to high explosives and we drove off. We got a  
7 report back later that we were successful in driving off and winning the battle in the Rung  
8 Sat. That would have been in '65.

9 JS: Okay.

10 CN: Then we had several really interesting missions up in the I Corps area. In one  
11 specific instance an advisory group with the Vietnamese army was being overrun and  
12 they needed fire support from us and we went as close as we could to the beach and fired  
13 as far as we could, as far as our guns would reach. Our potentials would reach to support  
14 these Australian advisors, were with the Vietnamese army. We got a message back that  
15 said, "Hey, you saved our ass." They were being overrun. They even wanted us to fire on  
16 top, which meant you fire right on top of the, where the battle is. Fortunately, we didn't  
17 wound or kill any of our own people but we did fire some rounds in that area.

18 JS: Right.

19 CN: Close to them and it was a very successful operation. All those messages  
20 related to those combat ops for shore bombardment that I had are in the Texas Tech  
21 Library. I don't recall that I had—how much I had but whatever I had I turned in with my  
22 papers to the archives.

23 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

24 CN: So whatever is there. Then, of course, the *Morton* veterans, the various  
25 veterans, had their memories of those firefights, or not firefights, but shore  
26 bombardments and they are very—some of them still have some paperwork or messages  
27 or something. I couldn't tell you who or what but we talk about them often at our  
28 reunions. You know, we tell—the instances have grown larger and larger and larger in  
29 our minds (laughs), actually they are fun to do.

1 JS: You mentioned Americans, American soldiers, American advisors and  
2 Australians and such being able to call in fire support from you guys. Would the South  
3 Vietnamese themselves be able to or did they have to have an advisor?

4 CN: No, they had to have an advisor. They had to have an English speaker. We  
5 had, of course, naval gun fire support liaison officers with them, with the advisors. They  
6 were our contact. They would call us on a gunfire support circuit on a frequency. Also  
7 some of those Naval Gunfire Liaison Officers, NGLOs, naval gunfire support people  
8 were in airplanes, as well. They would fly over the battlefield and help us adjust fire as  
9 did the officers who were on the ground. They would call for fire, tell us where the—give  
10 us the coordinates of the firefight, give us the coordinates of the front lines, they would  
11 give us the coordinates of the enemy and whatever else needed. Then they would adjust  
12 fire. We would fire several rounds and then the naval gun fire support liaison person  
13 would move it to the right or left or father out, adjust the range, etc., etc.

14 JS: Okay.

15 CN: Once we were on target they would—they would give the command fire for  
16 effect and we would pump it out.

17 JS: Right, right. Okay.

18 CN: I would have to say that, of course, the USS *Morton* was the very best  
19 destroyer operating in South Vietnamese waters during that period of time (laughs). We  
20 think so.

21 JS: Right. Well, do you know if the *Morton* supported Operation Starlight? Do  
22 you know if that was one of the support positions?

23 CN: I don't remember that name. I don't know what the Starlight—

24 JS: Okay, I was just curious. That was one of the first Marine operations up on—I  
25 believe it happened in March of '65 after, soon after the landings, the first aggressive  
26 operation by the Marines.

27 CN: To tell you the truth, I don't. It doesn't strike me. We were—I just don't  
28 remember that.

29 JS: Okay. All right. Just thought I would ask.

30 CN: Yeah, thank you.

1 JS: So you were, you said you were in support of the ground forces there for  
2 about six months, you said?

3 CN: Yeah, yep.

4 JS: Okay. What was the rest of the time on the *Morton*? What were you guys  
5 doing?

6 CN: Well, after the sixty—the operation at '64 or '65, that would have been—let  
7 me think now, '65. We finished that six month deployment (coughs), excuse me, we went  
8 back to the States and prepped to redeploy and we redeployed in '66.

9 JS: Okay.

10 CN: To provide a gunfire support. The ship—while I got relieved out there in the  
11 summer of '66 for, to go to Monterrey, the ship—I was relieved in Taiwan, as I recall,  
12 and the ship—they were up there for just a short R&R (rest and relaxation) and then they  
13 went back to the combat line, the shore bombardment line in shore support and they did  
14 marvelous work. They fired as many projectiles or even more than we did on the first  
15 cruise, so the ship went right back to war. I saw about half of this, the second cruise,  
16 before I was relieved.

17 JS: Do you know how long the *Morton* stayed—when did the *Morton* leave  
18 Vietnam for the last time? How long was it there, I guess?

19 CN: I don't know. I don't have that history, although I will tell you this that there  
20 is—you know, if it was important I could find it because *Morton* has a website and has a  
21 history of the ship and you can find anything you want about the ship.

22 JS: Okay. All right. Okay. All right. Were you—was the *Morton* and were you in  
23 Vietnamese waters whenever the first Americans came ashore in March of '65? Were  
24 you in the area?

25 CN: No.

26 JS: Okay. All right. Okay then. All right.

27 CN: No, I take it back. The ship may have been there. Okay.

28 JS: Right, but you were already gone.

29 CN: But I was still, I was in command of *Cocopa* and I just, all I did—when I was  
30 relieved I walked across and became the exec of the *Morton*. I nearly had just returned  
31 from the western Pacific and the war zone.

1 JS: Right. Okay. All right. Okay. Well, if there is—I guess if there is nothing else  
2 to talk about with the *Morton* we can move onto Naval Post-Grad School, or is there  
3 anything else you would like to mention?

4 CN: Um, not on the *Morton*.

5 JS: Okay.

6 CN: It was an exciting and interesting tour of duty. I wouldn't change it for the  
7 world. With grad school my wife and I and the kids went up there and I was just there for  
8 one year and I got a Master's degree in Economic Systems Analysis. Relaxing, and got  
9 back from the excitement of the war zone, relaxed and came back to normal, I guess.

10 JS: Is this something you applied for or were just assigned to?

11 CN: The Navy has a system and I assume they still have a similar system. I am  
12 sure it has changed somewhat. They ask officers and to a certain extent enlisted men  
13 nowadays what would you like to do next? You are given two or three options. It's your  
14 first choice, second choice, third choice. One of my choices was that I wanted to go get a  
15 Master's degree. So that was on the card and when it came to touring me off of *Morton*  
16 they toured me to my first choice which was graduate school. They sent me to Monterrey  
17 to through the Navy Post-Graduate School in Monterrey, which is one of the finest  
18 schools in the nation. Little understood, not well known because all for military but it is a  
19 great school.

20 JS: You said you were there for a year ,so from '66 until '67.

21 CN: That's right, yeah.

22 JS: What—you mentioned a little bit about your classes and things but could you  
23 tell me a little bit more about the types of classes you were taking and the training?

24 CN: Well, part of it, the beginning class, everybody who was a student there with  
25 some exceptions, I am sure, coming back from sea duty. It's something—if there is—if  
26 the war, whatever war we happened to be, it permits you to go to shore duty. They bring  
27 you back from sea duty to shore duty and counts as part of your shore duty. So you go to  
28 school in civilian clothes and you study rigorously. You are assigned to a specialty  
29 depending, I suppose, on your preference and to a certain extent your academic prowess.  
30 For instance, if you wanted to get a Master's degree in physics you probably would have  
31 had to have had a Bachelor's of Science in physics in something like that to do that. In

1 my case I was interested in management and to a certain extent economics and that is the  
2 curriculum that they put me in. It was very rigorous and lots of hard work, lots of  
3 studying and it worked fine for me.

4 JS: Okay. Did you find—was there any difficulty adjusting from, say, being the  
5 XO of a ship to shore duty and grad school? Was there any difficult—

6 CN: Personally for me it was not. I took it to its—for what the reality was that you  
7 were a student and you were no longer in loss of anything except your grades and your  
8 family. I did not have a problem, however, one of my closest friends had a terrible  
9 problem. He could not adjust to the academics, the pressures of academics. He had just  
10 come from being CO of his own ship and he just one day just stood up in class and  
11 walked out and went up to the superintendent and said, “I quit and send me back to the  
12 Navy.” There were incidents that are the data point of one. There are incidences where  
13 guys come back from being a company commander with the Marines or whatever they  
14 were doing operationally, come back and can’t—not ready to settle down and put in the  
15 time, quiet time that you need to study. That happens.

16 JS: Okay.

17 CN: I guess you probably, in retrospect, what we now know about PTSD (post-  
18 traumatic stress disorder), it is probably a version of that, my guess is, anyway.

19 JS: Okay. All right. Well, how would you evaluate your education that you  
20 received there?

21 CN: I have been fortunate. I got through the Naval Academy by the skin of my  
22 teeth, I guess. It actually took me five years. I loved the Naval Academy curriculum,  
23 except for thermodynamics. I enjoyed being there. Then I was ten years out of the  
24 academy, they let me go back to school for another year and I thoroughly enjoyed that. I  
25 became aware of the concept of continuing education. That year up there working for a  
26 Master’s degree was perfect for me. I thoroughly enjoyed it, very broadening and gave  
27 me an opportunity to sink my teeth into academics again. I couldn’t have had a better  
28 experience.

29 JS: Okay. Did you have a desire to go back to commanding ships again?

30 CN: Actually, I did have a latent feeling that I wanted to command in the Navy.  
31 Whenever my time was ready I would to go, I wanted command of a destroyer. I had

1 already been CO of my own ship and the executive of a destroyer. I was ready to be a  
2 captain of a destroyer. But it wasn't going to happen right away because I was just  
3 coming back from sea duty and they were going to send me back to sea duty. They  
4 came—I came out to Monterrey and determined that I should go back to the Bureau of  
5 Naval Personnel and that is what I did for two years from '67 through '69. I was what we  
6 called an assignment officer in the Bureau of Naval Personnel for Navy lieutenant  
7 commanders.

8 JS: Okay.

9 CN: I assigned them from sea duty to shore duty and sent them to places like  
10 facility staff, E Ring of the Pentagon or whatever.

11 JS: Okay. All right. So this—your job was to—well, you just said it is transferring  
12 them from sea duty to shore duty.

13 CN: Yeah. I would have to—we have the system, the Navy system is—well, I  
14 don't think it is any different than personnel or human resources, as we call it today.  
15 Today we have a high turnover rate in the Navy. In general we have a high turnover rate  
16 on our ships as much as 50 to 60% a year. Half of the ship is going somewhere else and  
17 others are coming to the ships. Then we have to assign them to—we wanted to assign  
18 them to our shore facilities. In order to do that we have a system. Today I am sure it is all  
19 done electronically but when I was there it was manually and we keep track of where the  
20 officers are and we have a little bit of an idea of where their career pattern, what jobs they  
21 are in line for, for their career pattern. Our job is to track them down maybe three months  
22 before they are ready to leave their current duty and to a certain extent negotiate with  
23 them to where they are going to go for their next duty. Once we have decided where the  
24 proper place is for them to go concerning their careers and what their druthers are, we  
25 then cut a set of orders and send the orders to the officer. Once he is relieved then he  
26 carries out his orders and goes to the next job. I would go to the men who were at sea and  
27 bring them to shore duty.

28 JS: Okay. All right. What was your rank at this time?

29 CN: I was lieutenant commander.

30 JS: Okay. All right. Any of these—were any of these guys assigned to shore duty  
31 in Vietnam?

1           CN: Yeah, yeah and I had that, that was part of my job, too. I assigned them—  
2 actually, we had a special desk that carried all the billets that were war zone billets in  
3 Vietnam and I had to work with them to bring people to them who might be ready to  
4 serve ashore. We didn't always take men who were coming off of sea duty or the war  
5 zone and then send them back in-country. We had to be careful somewhat of that, that we  
6 didn't back-to-back them into combat. But we had to keep those billets filled and I was  
7 there '67 to '69 during the greatest build-up of our navy in South Vietnam. It was a real  
8 busy time. I was not a very popular officer in the Navy's personnel business because I  
9 was sending, almost every other guy that I assigned was going in-country Vietnam  
10 because some of the jobs in Vietnam were considered sea duty jobs. Those in the riverine  
11 warfare were considered sea duty jobs. Some of them were considered shore duty jobs,  
12 like if you were in a desk job at MACV. So they were all in the war zone, though, for  
13 purposes of combat duty and that sort of thing. We had to assign a lot of people into  
14 Vietnam for a year of duty there. Some on the rivers and some on the desk jobs, etc.,  
15 wherever they were needed. It was not a popular time. It was guerilla warfare particularly  
16 in the south and a lot of the guys, there were a lot of people who didn't want to do that.

17           JS: Did you have to—when assigning them to Vietnam would you have to take  
18 into consideration things like health, pregnancy, the wives being pregnant and things like  
19 that?

20           CN: Well, I will tell you, Jason, it's actually—I think we spent more time on the  
21 human side today than we did in those days. We had—it was a war and there was not a—  
22 I mean, we spent a certain amount of time and there were certain things, certain times  
23 when we could negotiate that sort of thing. But it was not a major element of our decision  
24 making. Our decision making was we have a job in the war and we need a body to do that  
25 job. It may sound brutal but—and to a certain extent it was. There were a lot of people  
26 who did not want to go.

27           JS: Right.

28           CN: So, you know, it was not an easy thing to do.

29           JS: Uh-huh.

1 CN: I think, frankly, that is the way it is in war time. But on the other hand, I will  
2 say this, the number of people who didn't want to go were a very fraction of the men who  
3 marched off and took their assignment and did what they had to do without any whining.

4 JS: Right. Did you have a lot of cases of people trying to get out of assignment to  
5 Vietnam?

6 CN: Not really. I had a few. I had one major incident. I had a superb lieutenant  
7 commander exec of a destroyer in Norfolk, Virginia, who was working for a then-former  
8 submarine officer who was captain of the destroyer. I had to send—I wanted to send a  
9 guy from executive officer of a destroyer in the Atlantic into the riverine warfare business  
10 in Vietnam. His boss made a big fuss about me sending this superstar lieutenant  
11 commander into Vietnam. I was asked to look at the assignment. It turned out that the  
12 officer did go in-country and he was a superstar in the riverine warfare business, highly  
13 decorated, Silver Star, etc., etc., even got promoted to admiral, and it worked out fine.

14 JS: Okay. All right. Let's see—I am trying to think of what else I can ask you  
15 about these duties. Let's see. You were at this position, you said, for about two years?

16 CN: Yeah, yeah.

17 JS: All right. Okay. Following your assignment here where did you go next?

18 CN: I am sorry.

19 JS: Following your assignment with the Bureau of Naval Personnel you were then  
20 assigned to—let's see. What, assistant chief of staff for logistics?

21 CN: No, actually the next thing I did was sent up to Newport, Rhode Island, for  
22 one year to the Naval War College.

23 JS: Oh, right, right. That is one of the gaps I missed there. Could you—

24 CN: Then I went out to first lead staff as the assistant chief of staff for logistics.

25 JS: Okay. All right. Could you tell me a little bit about the Naval War College?

26 CN: Well, what do you say about that? It's—there are, I think, a half dozen war  
27 colleges in America, Air War College, National War colleges. The Army has several war  
28 colleges so there is quite a few of them. We send our mid-rank officers for one year of  
29 intense discussion about warfare and why we do it and how we do it and just the strategy  
30 of warfare and tactics and that sort of thing.

31 JS: Right.

1 CN: We also have a—all the war colleges are divided into junior and senior. The  
2 seniors are usually commanders or captains and I hadn't been promoted to commander  
3 yet so I was at the junior course at the Naval War College. That course was focused on  
4 day-to-day tactics and naval warfare and how it integrated with the other armed forces,  
5 etc.

6 JS: Was there any sort of specific focus on Vietnam or more general?

7 CN: Well, all of us there by this time, almost all the students had been in the war  
8 zone one time or another. We talked about it a lot. Everybody—we had Marines and  
9 Navy officers there and we even had a few Army officers. There was a few civilians who  
10 went there. The war colleges are considered a broadening experience for any career  
11 person in government, so lots of civilians come up from the State Department and  
12 Defense Department and that sort of thing.

13 JS: Okay.

14 CN: So we did talk about Vietnam. Everybody has a different story to tell, as you  
15 probably know, in doing these things that everybody's story is different in the war zone  
16 in our longest hot war. The Air Force and Navy, Coast Guard, Army, etc., etc. Everybody  
17 did something different. They have a little piece of what that warfare was about so we  
18 talked about that.

19 JS: Right.

20 CN: It was very broadening discussions.

21 JS: Along this time period since you have been away from Vietnam and we will  
22 talk later on, of course, about your assignment as advisor but this time period since you  
23 left Vietnam after the *Morton* and naval post-grad school had you been keeping up with  
24 how the war had been going at that time? Were you following it fairly closely?

25 CN: Yeah, I think I followed it as closely as I could. You know, I read the  
26 newspapers, watched the television, there was no—in the Bureau of Naval Personnel we  
27 were focused on our specific jobs of assigning the officers to their next jobs and had very  
28 little time to do any philosophical discussions other than maybe a lunch time beer or  
29 something like that. Or a coffee around the breaks and whatever but not a lot.

30 JS: Okay.

1           CN: War College gave us an opportunity to think about it a little bit. I had not  
2 been—since the day that my, the commandant of West Point challenged me to help him  
3 figure out what to do in the Delta I never thought much about it again. But after the war  
4 college I went out to be chief of staff for logistics, which was actually, it was interesting.  
5 I had just been promoted to commander and they sent me out in a captain's billet so that I  
6 guess they wanted me to have a job near—on the admiral's personal staff and have again  
7 a feeling for what a major operational staff operated like. I had not had a sea assignment  
8 staff job and I guess that is the reason they sent me there. They were beginning to focus  
9 me on a subspecialty of logistics, so that is probably why. I was there for one year and  
10 then they sent me orders to go in-country to be a senior advisor in Nha Be.

11           JS: Right. Okay. Before we get to that could we talk a little bit more about this  
12 your job description with the—just tell me a little bit more about the chief of staff for  
13 logistics?

14           CN: Yeah, excuse me. The admiral was a three-star and there were Admiral Ike  
15 Kidd and Admiral, Vice Admiral Ray Pete were the commanders that I worked for during  
16 that year. My job for them—Ike Kidd eventually made four stars and he was very much  
17 into logistics. He wanted to know—he wanted me to look at sustained ability at sea from  
18 a logistics point of view maintaining the force at sea. How could we do that? How could  
19 we move parts around the fleet? How could we keep them in battle on a sustainable  
20 period? How could we best get them ready from a logistics point of view, from an  
21 engineering point of view? To monitor—he wanted to, wanted me to look at how we got  
22 ships ready to deploy and how we kept them in war fighting condition at sea during a  
23 period of combat or—yeah. I did a lot of statistical analysis for—I had a very small staff.  
24 I fortunately had a couple of reserve officers come in and work for me and we went  
25 into—we met a major part of a major training exercise at the fleet level with carriers and  
26 cruisers and destroyers and submarines and the whole bit. We looked at logistics in a  
27 sustainable warfare environment. I did that for a year and turned out a couple of reports  
28 and we did deploy to Hawaii for major fleet exercises and it was an interesting job for  
29 one year.

1 JS: Okay. All right. Well, before we get into your assignment as the chief of  
2 advisor and Rung Sat and your return to Vietnam, can we take a break real quick? Do you  
3 mind?

4 CN: Sure.

5 JS: Okay.

**Interview with Carl Nelson**  
**Session [2] of [2]**  
**5 September 2008**

1           JS: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University  
2 continuing an oral history interview with Dr. Carl Nelson. Today is September 5<sup>th</sup> 2008. I  
3 am in Lubbock, Texas, and Dr. Nelson is joining me once again from Chula Vista,  
4 California. Okay, yesterday when we left off you were just about to get your assignment  
5 to your in-country duty in Vietnam, so why don't we begin there? If you will, could you  
6 tell me a little bit about when you received these orders and what was your reaction to  
7 them?

8           CN: Let's see. I must have received them after Christmas in 1970, um, 1971 or  
9 January of '72. I was not surprised. I was expecting them. I got the heads up from the  
10 detailers that they were going to move me from 1<sup>st</sup> Fleet to in-country. They were going  
11 to give me a CO job there, a senior advisor for the logistics support base at Nah Be. It  
12 was—sounded interesting to me and I began training and I am trying to remember, I went  
13 in-country in I want to say March. Yeah. I went in-country in March. In between they  
14 sent me to survival. I guess you are familiar with this, I guess, SERE (Survival, Evasion,  
15 Resistance, and Escape) training. They sent me to that. Then they sent me to the base for  
16 culture training which was valuable and language, language school. That school they  
17 tried to teach me about 200 Vietnamese words and understand the Vietnamese culture.  
18 The culture was most interesting, the language was difficult.

19           JS: Right.

20           CN: But I did learn a few words and took them with me.

21           JS: Okay.

22           CN: Then I shipped out to Vietnam in, I can't remember exactly when, in March  
23 fairly early, I think. Upon arrival I made a call on the Commander, Naval Forces,  
24 Vietnam and then kept riding down to the Rung Sat which was not too far from Saigon in  
25 terms of distance and in terms of road miles and junk on the road and all sorts of strange  
26 cultural things. It could, might as well have been 300 miles or 1,000 miles, who knows.  
27 But the base was fairly modern. We had built up the area of Nha Be, fenced it in, and  
28 built some decent barracks, lots of logistics warehouses. We had a, oh, boy, place to put

1 up ships, small ships apparently. Actually to probably LS, probably would take an LST  
2 (landing ship, tank). It was almost a shipyard. It was not as big as—the Vietnamese had a  
3 shipyard in Saigon. It was quite large by Nha Be, was probably the second largest  
4 shipyard in Vietnam, as far as I know.

5 JS: Okay.

6 CN: We had when I got there probably had 100 advisors in the logistics base.  
7 Then the other command that was stationed there was the Rung Sat advisors. The Rung  
8 Sat advisors were actually a—they were the operational organization. They had a—they  
9 had Marines and sailors. The sailors operated the boats out of Nha Be on the Long Tau  
10 Channel. There was a separate senior advisor. At the time, my counterpart was as senior  
11 advisor of the Rung Sat was Lyle Armel who—then I had headquarters there adjacent to  
12 him or nearby. I had all the warehouses. My counterpart was a Vietnamese engineering  
13 specialist, a commander. He was the CO of the logistics base and I was his advisor and  
14 my American advisors were advisors to his sailors. We had repair capability for PBRs  
15 (patrol boat, river) and other vessels that—mine sweeps and whatever that happened to  
16 get shot up or out of repair. We had all the supplies for that area. I had a—I had quite a  
17 few supply people with me and other technicians. The beauty of that time as I recall is  
18 that we were at the point where we were no longer, the Navy was no longer taking  
19 draftees into Vietnam. They were all volunteers.

20 JS: Right.

21 CN: They were terrific guys. They were people who were—a lot of them were  
22 career sailors and completely committed to serving and during the short period that I was  
23 senior advisor to the logistics base there, which is only about two months, I had  
24 absolutely no problems. Just the sailors were so good and I think the Vietnamese, my  
25 Vietnamese counterpart had some problems with his sailors but I didn't have any with the  
26 American sailors. About two months into that job Lyle Armel was selected for captain  
27 and moved to Saigon and I was given, made senior advisor of the Rung Sat Special Zone  
28 as well as the logistics support base. Within in a month or so we merged them into one  
29 command.

30 JS: Okay.

1 CN: That moves us down into—so then I had an operational hat and I had a  
2 logistics command hat or senior advisor hat. My counterpart on the Rung Sat side was a  
3 Vietnamese navy captain. He was in command of everything that was in—everything that  
4 was in the Rung Sat.

5 JS: Okay.

6 CN: Rung Sat Special Zone included the Nha Be base and one, two, three, four  
7 outlying bases in towns, in villages where we had a small contingent of Marines. We had  
8 the river itself all the way from Saigon, well— let’s see. No. Somewhat short of Saigon  
9 but certainly north or rather west of where we were and all the way to Vung Tau to the  
10 ocean. Our responsibilities were to protect the river principally. Now, Rung Sat, of  
11 course, it depends on who the translator is. The Rung Sat in Vietnamese means either  
12 “Killer Forest” or “Forest of Assassins.”

13 JS: Right.

14 CN: I guess you know that. We—the Long Tau Channel was the only deep-water  
15 channel from the ocean to Saigon that carried—we had ships coming and going all the  
16 time coming up the river to offload oil at the off oil tank farms or go into Saigon and  
17 offload tanks or other logistics or by the field commanders. Long Tau Channel pretty  
18 much supported the logistics that came up there, came up the river pretty much supported  
19 the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Corps. I think 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps and I Corps were supported by ports north of  
20 where we were. On the river we had—by the way, I did publish a discussion of the Rung  
21 Sat. I don’t know if you have that or not, but I published it in the *Vietnam Magazine*.

22 JS: Oh, okay.

23 CN: It has an extensive discussion of who was there and at least during my time.  
24 Now, there was a period when the Americans were in charge of the Rung Sat and—I am  
25 trying to remember the senior advisor at the time was a Navy commander. In any case,  
26 his discussion of what were in that area in terms of ships and boats and forces differs  
27 from mine considerably because I was there after we decided to turn over and put the  
28 Vietnamese back in charge.

29 JS: Right.

1 CN: I had a different set of equipment and fighting materials, etc., than previous  
2 senior advisors. My discussion that I had published years ago differs somewhat to the  
3 recollection of some people who were there at a different time.

4 JS: Right.

5 CN: Basically we had—let's see. We had an intelligence arm that was with PRU  
6 (Provincial Reconnaissance Units) and the PSYOP (Psychological Operations) people,  
7 Phoenix and all that down there.

8 JS: Okay.

9 CN: We had our RPDs (river patrol division) and PBRs and RAG (river assault  
10 group), MSBs (mine sweeper, boat), I know—MSRs (mine sweeper, river) and PBRs  
11 and—what am I saying. I had SEALs (sea, air, land teams) come in as needed. We had  
12 choppers, Hueys. As it turns out, we had already turned over those helicopters to the  
13 Vietnamese and the pilots were basically 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant army pilots, Vietnamese,  
14 young kids who were really young, right out of aviation school. We also had besides the  
15 PRUs, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, we had, let me think, Regional Force and  
16 Popular Force people and Self Defense. We had a—we could call in, we could call in  
17 support from other places from up in Tan Son Nhut and Cam Ranh. Cam Ranh was pretty  
18 far away. The American, we had American aviation available.

19 JS: Right.

20 CN: All those airplanes that we could call on as, and that sort of thing. Anyway, it  
21 was an active area. In my tour there we had some attacks in the village areas which we  
22 pursued. We did some—we went into the—the Rung Sat itself is about 500 square miles,  
23 maybe I said that, a 500-square-mile area surrounding Long Tau. It was absolutely the  
24 ugliest piece of property I ever saw, maybe, will ever see.

25 JS: Could you elaborate on that a little bit about the environment?

26 CN: Oh, gosh, yeah. It was a—if you were to look down from the sky on the  
27 Rung Sat it would look like—it had a feel to it that looked like a human brain with  
28 thousands of squiggly, wormy looking rivers and was mostly out of water, covered with  
29 water, rather, lots of water and some dry areas from time to time, all mud. The only way  
30 you could get around in the Rung Sat was by boat or a chopper, if you happened to have

1 one. We owned the only choppers. There were other large rivers paralleling in some cases  
2 but none of them were as deeply channeled as we made the Long Tau channel.

3 JS: Right.

4 CN: Good morning. I just said “Good morning to my wife. So, let’s see. As a  
5 matter of fact, I can remember standing on the tarmac down there and looking out at that  
6 terrain and saying to myself, you know, “Someday I’m going to write a book about this,  
7 this ugly thing,” and I did. [A novel titled, *The Advisor: (Co-Van)*]

8 JS: Right.

9 CN: I spent—once they gave me both, gave me the whole organization as the  
10 senior advisor I was advisor to two Vietnamese, a captain and another commander, then I  
11 began—and we began reducing the Americans over the next year from a force of  
12 probably a couple hundred. I don’t remember the exact number when I first went there, a  
13 couple hundred advisors, we reduced it down to, a year later, in February we turned it  
14 over in January or February of ’73, February of ’73. We were—we drove out of there,  
15 turned it all over to the Vietnamese and drove on up to Saigon and went into barracks up  
16 there for a week maybe and then we caught a plane—all the advisors, Marines. Marines  
17 didn’t go with us, actually. All the sailors. The Marines kept their guys in-country. We  
18 flew out on—we had twenty-four. We were down to twenty-four advisors when we left  
19 the Rung Sat. We turned it over. They had a little ceremony for us and when left and we  
20 had trucks and jeeps and we mounted up and drove out and went up to Saigon and then  
21 got a plane back to the States. It turned out that when our plane took off—for history’s  
22 purposes, when we took off, the North Vietnamese released the first plane back to, with  
23 the POWs (prisoners of war) [back to the U.S.]

24 JS: Oh wow. Okay.

25 CN: That was the deal. We were to—when the Americans began to leave then  
26 they would start letting the POWs go. I can imagine what the POWs felt like when they  
27 got on the plane and flew out of there. They probably were a shade happier than we were,  
28 but not much. Our guys were stomping their feet and saying, you know, happy as hell to  
29 go home.

30 JS: Right.

1 CN: Anyway, my duties as the senior advisor were to meet with my counterparts  
2 on a daily basis and go over the situation in Rung Sat and go over the logistics numbers  
3 and that sort of thing. Then we would—I would almost always jump the reconnaissance  
4 chopper and fly [the length of] the Long Tau. Or I would go with my advisors or my  
5 counterparts on an operation or a meeting, that sort of thing. I always had a translator  
6 with me, usually a sergeant, a Vietnamese sergeant. Whenever I went to meetings they  
7 would translate for me.

8 JS: Right.

9 CN: Then I would go on specific operations. We made amphibious ops into  
10 various parts of the Rung Sat where we thought the enemy were hiding or trying to build  
11 up forces and that sort of thing. Occasionally I would remember that I had a routine, take  
12 a ride in a PBR with the sailors or get on the mine sweep and take a drive down to Long  
13 Tau overnight, night sweeps.

14 JS: Right.

15 CN: And go with—my Marines, I had a Marine major, John Carty, who I made  
16 my exec of the operational side of the operational hat. I made a—well, a lieutenant  
17 commander of supply corps officer my exec on the logistics side. I would meet with them  
18 and we would work on whatever is going on operationally. I would pick—go with the  
19 Marines from time to time. I was quite busy the remainder of my tour there. I guess I  
20 came home about a couple weeks short of the one-year mark. But I was there—we came  
21 home in February and I had gone in in March the year before.

22 JS: Right, okay.

23 CN: So that is basically what I did down there.

24 JS: Okay.

25 CN: Language. I used the language, a few words.

26 JS: Right.

27 CN: Most of my, both of my counterparts spoke English very well. I could listen  
28 and understand some of the language but the briefers, military briefers, tended to talk  
29 pretty fast and I couldn't keep up all that well so I needed a translator. I could catch a few  
30 words here and there. If they had charts they were talking to I could follow the charts.  
31 Culturally I was very impressed with the training they gave us back in the States.

1 JS: Yeah.

2 CN: That prepared me to live with the Vietnamese. They were—it's a feel that  
3 continues to be important to me in what I do now. As far as SERE training and that sort  
4 of thing, I just assured myself I was never going to get captured. (Laughs)

5 JS: Right, right.

6 CN: I never wanted to do that. I was lucky. Fortunately, nothing ever happened.

7 JS: Sure.

8 CN: I flew a lot. I think just short of one hundred chopper missions in there. We  
9 were dinged at once or twice, the pilots told me, but I never got hit. Although we did kill  
10 some guys down in there that were probably insurgents. They were not uniformed  
11 although we went up against North Vietnamese, a unit, down there after a little bit of—  
12 we had an ARVN battalion and we sent the Marines and the battalion in and there was a  
13 fight. We had—it wasn't long and we didn't have—of course, we had helicopters and we  
14 had boats that went in there.

15 JS: Right.

16 CN: It was short and when it was over they gave me a flag that they captured,  
17 North Vietnamese flag.

18 JS: Right.

19 CN: Which I donated to the Texas Tech.

20 JS: Oh, okay.

21 CN: I donated all my papers and the flag and all sorts of things to Texas Tech  
22 somewhere down there. Let's see. What else?

23 JS: Could I ask you a question real quick?

24 CN: Sure.

25 JS: What was your opinion of the South Vietnamese forces, your counterpart and  
26 of the South Vietnamese forces there?

27 CN: Well, that is an interesting one because there was always a discussion how  
28 my American forces, that the Vietnamese were lazy or corrupt and that sort of thing. I  
29 remember that even before I left—while I was still in the States I remember people  
30 talking about that. I didn't discover any of that. I found—I do know that my commander,  
31 Commander Nang was my counterpart on the logistics side, also owned a restaurant in

1 Saigon. But I didn't see that he was corrupt in his naval work. He had a set of quarters on  
2 Nha Be base and he would occasionally bring his wife down there but she didn't live  
3 there. He brought her down one time and had me for supper that she prepared. I never  
4 could see that he was taking anything. The other guy, Captain—give me moment to  
5 remember his name, Hop, H-O-P, Di Ta Hop. He invited me to go with him to his  
6 quarters where he and his wife, where his wife lived because he had quarters at the Nha  
7 Be base, as well. He had his wife and children on the base at the shipyard in Saigon.

8 JS: Right.

9 CN: I went up there and had supper in his quarters. His wife made a meal and  
10 unlike most women, Vietnamese women, she did in fact eat with us. Usually they eat in  
11 the kitchen while the men eat separately but she came and she actually knew some  
12 English. She was educated. My observation of Captain Hop was that he was assigned a  
13 set of quarters on the base there and he had several children that were going to school at  
14 the base school and they were learning English. They came to meet me and we spoke  
15 some words. He encouraged his children to speak English to me. I did not detect anything  
16 untoward by either of those men. As a matter of fact, Hop was a tough leader. He felt  
17 strongly about protecting Long Tau. He religiously included me in all the briefings about  
18 operations in Long Tau. I was a bull-headed guy. I would go to the meetings even if I  
19 wasn't invited. In any case, he caught a sailor or his people caught a sailor from one of  
20 the RAG units doing, violated the rules and they gave him a court martial. When it was  
21 over part of his punishment was to be put on display at the front gate of the Rung Sat  
22 base, the Nhe Be base, on his knees. Now, I disagreed with Captain Hop about this but he  
23 said, "Yeah, well, you take care of your soldiers, your Marines and sailors, and I will take  
24 care of them my way." He had this guy, tied up his feet, his arms behind him and his feet  
25 and his arms, his hands tied to his feet on his knees. Had him sit out there on his knees on  
26 display for almost the entire day as a warning to the rest of the men who were at the base  
27 at Nha Be, the Vietnamese. He was a tough guy. I talked about that as fairly, very cruel  
28 punishment that we would not do in the American Navy. I talked about that to  
29 COMNAVFORV (Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam) and I told him and he said,  
30 "Well, this is our culture and this is what we do and this is how we keep them." Now the  
31 Navy and the Marine Corps were like, I am guessing, I guess I can say this, a little cut

1 above that. The draftees that they had were pretty proud warriors. They were very proud.  
2 They kept aboard their ships squared away and did a pretty good job. I hope that's a long-  
3 winded answer to your question.

4 JS: That is very good. Were there other incidences similar to this? Did this type of  
5 punishment, did this happen quite a bit?

6 CN: Well, when I observed this one it was the first time I had observed them  
7 doing this. I did make it clear to Captain Hop that we didn't approve of that. I think he  
8 backed away. If he did it, it was certainly out of sight for me. I didn't see it again after  
9 that. I am not saying that he did it because I disapproved or whatever it is, just I don't  
10 remember, you know, him doing it.

11 JS: What types of things were the Vietnamese sailors doing to get into trouble and  
12 to be punished like this? Do you know?

13 CN: Well, he held captain's mast, which is the equivalent of captain's mast that  
14 all the armed forces in the world hold. That is at the local command level short of court  
15 martials and whatever. He had an exec. By the way, who was an army officer and he was  
16 an Indian. He was from India. Well, he was Vietnamese but originally his family had  
17 come to Vietnam from India. He was a darker skinned man. He was slender and he was a  
18 tough infantry kind of guy. He did most of the stuff, the small stuff. If a soldier or a sailor  
19 weren't wearing their uniform properly he took care of that sort of thing. The only ones  
20 that went up to Captain Hop were serious offenses and I frankly think that they probably  
21 are no different than the kind of things that our American sailors do today. You know,  
22 somebody goes out and gets drunk or beats up somebody or thievery or—if it gets to be a  
23 serious thing we in the American Navy, we take it to court martial. They did very much  
24 the same. They had the same essential rules that we did and took care of it that way.

25 JS: Right, okay. What—but as far as the fighting ability of the South Vietnamese,  
26 were they pretty good?

27 CN: Actually, yeah. I thought they were. What happened is, is my exec, John  
28 Carty, who was a Marine major at the time, he's a retired colonel now and lives in the  
29 Washington area—I just saw him two weeks ago, as a matter of fact. John and his  
30 advisors stuck to the Vietnamese soldiers like Superglue, I will tell you. They set a high  
31 standard for the Vietnamese and went on every operation with them. We had a battalion

1 of Vietnamese army there and it was commanded by a Vietnamese—this is a regular  
2 battalion and the battalion commander was a major. He was weary and he was very  
3 offensive. He was very demanding and so—they were good soldiers. Carty and his  
4 advisors kept me informed on their training and how good they were and that sort of  
5 thing. So they were very good. It was a good battalion.

6 JS: Okay. Do you remember any particular incidences or encounters they had  
7 with the enemy that you could talk about?

8 CN: You know, it is really fairly vague in my memory right now. We had a, oh,  
9 boy. I wish I had a map of the Rung Sat in front of me. I don't.

10 JS: That's okay.

11 CN: I turned all that stuff over to Texas Tech, like my maps, my leg maps that I—  
12 we had—the way the shape of the—Rung Sat was shaped is, oh, maybe it was shaped a  
13 little bit like a heart, if you can follow me. It was fatter at the top and skinnier at the  
14 bottom and the river ran through it. Up in the northern part, no, the western part because  
15 Vietnam runs north and south and the river ran basically east and west from the ocean,  
16 from the ocean to the east into Saigon. Up in the northern part of the Rung Sat there was  
17 a section or region called Nhon Trach where we were sure we had Cong organized in  
18 there. We definitely—the intelligence told us that we did. We even knew, we even knew  
19 the name of the guerilla leader who had been—and I am trying to reach back into my  
20 memory of the papers that I had that I brought out and turned over to Texas Tech—we  
21 even knew the name of the colonel. It was a North Vietnamese colonel who, according to  
22 our intelligence, had walked a whole year, it took him a whole year to walk from An Hoa  
23 down to the Delta.

24 JS: Wow.

25 CN: He took command of the guerillas down there and he lived up in that area. I  
26 am trying to remember the name of the area now. We could never get him. We had  
27 operations go in and—we had PRU go in there for intel. Anyway, we had a battle up in  
28 that area. We sent a pretty good sized force into the area. We had intel that said that the  
29 guerillas had set up a pretty good camp. We went up and we found lots of stuff up in  
30 there, weapons and whatever. They brought back bodies. I was in the command boat but I  
31 was pretty distant from the fight. We were up manning the fight from a command boat,

1 the Vietnamese were, and they were monitoring radio signals and whatever. They  
2 brought back bodies and then—I am trying to remember—I don't remember what year  
3 that—what time of the year that was. It was more likely, as I recall, it was more likely to  
4 fall when the dry season was coming on. Some of that—in the wet season it would rain  
5 almost every day. The temperatures were 113 to 115.

6 JS: Wow.

7 CN: You put on a uniform in the morning and half an hour to an hour it was  
8 soaked. What else can I say? Your boots got heavy.

9 JS: Uh-huh, sure, sure.

10 CN: Right. You know, you just—flashback here, memories. There were bugs and  
11 all that stuff that we had.

12 JS: Okay.

13 CN: Then we had another excursion down in the western side. I am sorry, no, the  
14 eastern side of the Rung Sat where near the mouth of Long Tau there was a village down  
15 there and we had, we had a boat come in that brought weapons in down there. If you  
16 remember, we had ashore, what were the boats we used to run off the coast, coastal craft.  
17 They weren't mine. They had another part of the organization, 117, I think. They [the  
18 enemy] got by whomever, this boat got by them and was spotted and went down and our  
19 people fought them and captured the stuff. That was our two isolated things but there  
20 were things going on from time to time. During my tour there no ship was hit on this  
21 transit to and from Saigon. I had one ship run aground during my tour. There were ships  
22 that reported being shot at but none were hit. The one that ran aground, we were worried  
23 about it because it wasn't, you know, it was stationary and was a big target. But we got  
24 down there. I called in Navy tugs from Saigon and it took about an hour and half to two  
25 hours for them to get down there and we got the ship off the mud. We had to wait until  
26 high tide and we had to have two tugs come alongside and pull it off the mud. Then, of  
27 course, we—the ship got under way and went out onto Saigon. My counterpart, Captain  
28 Hop, and I and small force of soldiers that came onboard to protect the ship. We all got  
29 off down rope ladders and into the boats, into some swamp boats and the ship went on its  
30 way into Saigon. That was the only river incident that I remembered. No ship was hit  
31 during that period. So what else was I going to say? Tactics, they were—the tactics used

1 there were I suppose ambushes and we did alter from time to time all those tactics that  
2 you would—that were used in the riverine business.

3 JS: Right.

4 CN: So anyway.

5 JS: Could you tell me a little bit about your thoughts on the enemy and their  
6 capabilities?

7 CN: Well, let's see. The enemy—we had—we were worried about the enemy  
8 using the Rung Sat terrain to move goods from the north to south. We thought that they  
9 had regular forces up in that area that I discussed a minute ago up in the northern and the  
10 western corner of the Rung Sat. It was a much drier area and more—they, we think they  
11 used that area to build tunnels and other places to live in order to move goods through  
12 there. There were North Vietnamese forces in there. How many, I don't know. We had  
13 reports and I don't have any of the intel reports with me now. The reports that we had,  
14 North Vietnamese. We had mostly guerillas and mostly young people. How well trained  
15 they were? Probably no better than or worse than the terrorists we were experiencing over  
16 in the Middle East anymore. They came out of some school and they would give them a  
17 gun and take it and point it and shoot it and give some—and I didn't think—the few  
18 times that we—during my year there that we had combat they were no match for the  
19 people we sent in, if that answers your question.

20 JS: Yeah, yeah, it does. What types of weapons were they using? Do you know?

21 CN: AK-47s. Anything they could steal. They had B-40 rockets. As it turned out,  
22 I wish I could—as it turned out, toward the end of my tour we had intelligence that the  
23 Rung Sat guerrillas had acquired Russian rockets, wired-guided rockets. Basically they  
24 used—they attempted to mine the Long Tau but we kept mine sweepers on—we swept  
25 the mines every day, swept the river, rather, for mines every day. They attempted to  
26 mine. They carried shoulder-held weapons. They had no major weapons. You couldn't  
27 move them around in the Rung Sat. You couldn't move a howitzer, for instance. You  
28 could move a mortar around but you had to have boats, a substantial boat to move that  
29 stuff.

30 JS: Right.

31 CN: They were mostly shoulder-held small weapons.

1 JS: Okay. All right. Could you tell me your thoughts on the Vietnamization  
2 process and how well you thought it was going? Did you at any time think that the South  
3 Vietnamese, no matter what we do, they are going to lose the war? I mean, did you have  
4 those kinds of thoughts? Could you tell me a little bit about the Vietnamization process?

5 CN: Yeah, yeah. Actually, I felt that in my area and I am not—it had nothing to  
6 do with my capacity as a leader. I thought they were quite good. I always thought that if  
7 you were to look at what we turned over through the men who we turned over they were  
8 quite competent and would engage very well. I never thought that they would lose the  
9 war. They had the same desires. Most of them—the senior captain, Dai Ta Hop, had been  
10 to America and had been trained in America and they were strong. Now, I would say this  
11 that when I went in-country in '72 the politics were such that America was really upset  
12 about the Vietnamese War. They were marching back here in the States and yelling and  
13 screaming and whatever else. We didn't pay them a great deal of attention to that because  
14 we had a mission to do but the undertone was that the war was going to come to an end.  
15 Our job was to keep the Vietnamese motivated but the reality was that we were going to  
16 be leaving sometime.

17 JS: Right.

18 CN: They—and we began sending our soldiers, sailors, and Marines home. Over  
19 the year we went from a couple of hundred advisors down to, as I told you last group, I  
20 left with twenty-four sailors and Marines in February of '73. During that period we were  
21 well aware that the war was—that we were to turn over and we did. We turned  
22 everything over basically during that year to the Vietnamese. We helped them with  
23 maintenance, we helped them—they didn't need a lot of help on tactic, operational  
24 matters because they had already, they already had the forces and they already had  
25 command of PBRs and mine sweeps and that sort of thing because the people started the  
26 Vietnamization a year or so before the year I was there so it was well under way.  
27 Basically, they were running everything during that time. We made an effort, big effort,  
28 to make sure that they were well trained and that they understood all the equipment we  
29 turned over to them. They were quite good. I thought that they would be able to protect  
30 the Long Tau and do the work of the Rung Sat without any problems at all no matter  
31 what happened.

1 JS: Okay.

2 CN: That was my feeling.

3 JS: Right, okay. How did the South Vietnamese, how did they react to this  
4 Vietnamization process? Were they concerned about the Americans leaving or how did  
5 they react?

6 CN: No. We never talked about it in terms of whether or not, how they felt. It was  
7 essentially the late fall of '72. It was locked in concrete that America was going to leave.  
8 We talked about our leaving, we talked about the politics—excuse me a minute. I have  
9 got to take a sip of coffee here.

10 JS: Sure.

11 CN: There was never—I don't remember ever discussing that they didn't want it  
12 to happen. They talked—we talked occasionally about the politics of Vietnam. They—  
13 my counterparts, my two counterparts, Captain Hop had been going through the military  
14 academy in Hanoi and he had been in his career he had already, already been in the navy,  
15 Vietnamese navy for about twenty-five years or more. He had already been fighting for  
16 that period of time. If it wasn't the North Vietnamese it was guerillas or it was always  
17 something that they were fighting. It wasn't anything new to them. They knew how to  
18 fight in the Rung Sat.

19 JS: Right.

20 CN: I don't think they ever felt like our leaving was going to change what they  
21 did at all. But we—I guess what our main thing was, at least from a COs point of view, I  
22 talked to my troopers, my Marines and sailors, and I said, "Keep up. You have got to  
23 keep doing your job right to the end." My Americans did. I had no problem my entire  
24 year with the American Marines and sailors that I had as advisors. They were the best  
25 guys I think I have ever served with. First, of all they were all petty officers, the lowest  
26 Marines I think were sergeants that were in the—went out into the villages. We had very  
27 confident personnel, never caused me—I never had a whole lot of captain's masts at one  
28 time for any of my guys.

29 JS: So there were no misgivings about participating in the war. You know that  
30 America is about to leave and go home. There was no issues with that or anything?

31 CN: On the Vietnamese part?

1 JS: Well, no. I mean on the American part.

2 CN: On the Americans part, not at all. They were—these were all volunteers and  
3 they had come over to serve and, you know, you would hear a little buzz in the bar  
4 occasionally but they were solidly about doing their job right to the end.

5 JS: Okay. All right. One thing I wanted to ask you, do you know what happened  
6 to Captain Hop and the other—?

7 CN: Yeah, yeah, I do as a matter of fact. I have never gotten in contact. It's  
8 through the grapevine. I have had contact with Vietnamese military guys over the years.  
9 Captain Hop retired and he was taken into, put in jail and spent four or five years in what  
10 I guess they call reeducation. At some point he got out of Vietnam and he was up in the  
11 Chicago area. Commander Nang also got out and came to America and I want to think he  
12 was in the Southwest but I have never made—I have put out word to Vietnamese military  
13 organizations here in the States. When they came here they kept their affiliations. If they  
14 were in the army they did just like we do. You know, we have Vietnam Veterans of  
15 America and all those different organizations in America. They also have organizations  
16 of Vietnamese veterans. I let people know that I was interested in making contact with  
17 Captain Hop and Commander Nang but never was able to do that. I never heard from  
18 them, never knew exactly where they were, never got a phone number or anything but  
19 they did get back to the States.

20 JS: Okay. All right.

21 CN: I had one incident where I got a call from a congressman and his name was  
22 Boart or Bomart out of New York. He asked me if I remember Sergeant Ahn or  
23 something, Ahn, and he said he has been—he is in Vietnam, he has applied to come to  
24 the States and he wants to come up to a family in New York and he wants to know if you  
25 remember him. He needs verification that he was a good guy. I wrote a letter to the  
26 congressman and said I remember him very well he was my interpreter and he certainly  
27 deserves to come, come back to—come to the United States. I never heard any more  
28 about it. My guess is that it happened.

29 JS: Okay. All right. What about the units that these guys were commanding? Do  
30 you know what happened with them? Did they—I am assuming that they fought all the

1 way to the end until the last day but do you know anything about what happened with  
2 them?

3 CN: Well, I will tell you—let me think. Moving ahead after I left Vietnam I was  
4 given command of a brand new destroyer escort, a frigate. Actually it was USS *Cook* and  
5 as it turns out *Cook* was named after my Annapolis classmate, Wilbur Cook, who got  
6 shot down over North Vietnam. I deployed back to, would you believe, back to the  
7 Vietnamese War.

8 JS: Right.

9 CN: For one full deployment and then went home and then came back out and I  
10 was relieved in 1975 before our final people left in '75. But I had been briefed by guys  
11 who were on the ship. The *Cook* was there in '75 when the Vietnamese, North  
12 Vietnamese overran the country and they all came out. I have been briefed by shipmates  
13 of mine on *Cook* who were there and I was not, that the Vietnamese navy packed up  
14 every ship and boat that they could and then sailed down through Long Tau and out  
15 through the Rung Sat, Vung Tau and went to sea and went over to the Philippines. I am  
16 trying to remember what the original question was because I got sidelined.

17 JS: Right. Just what had happened to those units?

18 CN: Okay. Yeah, they abandoned everything that they didn't need. At the Nha Be  
19 base everybody went out on their own. People—the officers all got onboard the big ships  
20 and went to sea. Sailors went to sea with as many people as they could with families that  
21 were put to sea. Nha Be was turned over, not turned over, rather, was abandoned. Where  
22 I was going with this is years later in 2000 I went back to Vietnam and went to Nha Be.  
23 One of my—I tried to get aboard the base. It was turned over to the Vietnamese navy  
24 now. There is no north and south anymore there is just a Vietnamese navy.

25 JS: Right.

26 CN: The Nha Be base still exists, the American buildings still exist and they  
27 wouldn't let me aboard the base because they told me I had to have permission from  
28 Hanoi to go aboard. But they were—they sent the Officer of the Day to talk to me about  
29 it. So that base was turned over to the Vietnamese navy and it still exists and it still has  
30 functioning capabilities there. It is a ship repair facility, etc.

31 JS: All right.

1 CN: Let's see, then (coughs), excuse me. To verify that one of my corpsmen, who  
2 was with me in the Rung Sat Special Zone, just last year went back to Vietnam. He went  
3 to Nha Be and he speaks fluent Vietnamese. He somehow conned his way to get aboard.

4 JS: Oh, wow.

5 CN: Because he was such a smooth talker, I guess. He toured the base and he said  
6 that it looked very much like it had been when we were there.

7 JS: Right, okay.

8 CN: So we built some pretty good buildings anyway.

9 JS: Right.

10 CN: Okay.

11 JS: All right. So when did you receive your orders to pull out, that last pull? Was  
12 it February '73?

13 CN: It was probably—it took us a month to turn over everything, as I recall. It  
14 probably came in January. I don't remember when they announced. If I remember  
15 correctly, Nixon was president and had set up a program that we would pull out in a  
16 phased way. We were in pretty good shape in the Rung Sat and we matched up pretty  
17 well with the POW handshake up there in that we were one of the first to leave, thus  
18 permitting the POWs to go home. But we had to have about a month, as I recall, was  
19 sometime in January that we got the word that we would be pulling out as soon as we  
20 could turn over so we turned over all the boats and all the barracks and all whatever  
21 equipment we had. We got a couple of big trucks and jeeps and whatever and loaded  
22 them up and then drove up to Saigon and stayed in—I forget what they call that hotel up  
23 there—Annapolis Hotel.

24 JS: Right, yeah, yeah.

25 CN: Then we all went as a group over to the airbase there, Tan Son Nhut, and got  
26 aboard a big old ship, big old airplane and flew away.

27 JS: Okay. What were the—do you remember the conversations and just the  
28 attitude leaving?

29 CN: Oh, they were giddy.

30 JS: Sure.

1 CN: First of all, they came aboard the airplane and half of them were drunk. They  
2 were capable of carrying their bag but that was about it.

3 JS: Right.

4 CN: They were happy guys. I remember the hooting and hollering when we taxied  
5 out and I remember the guys saying, “How do I get out of this fucking place? I am finally  
6 out.” Excuse that war language.

7 JS: Sure.

8 CN: I don’t know, “Take me back to freedom,” and “I didn’t leave anything  
9 behind,” and all sorts of things like that.

10 JS: Right, sure.

11 CN: They were stomping their feet and when that plane lifted off and those  
12 wheels pounded into the bottom of that plane, you know how that goes, they were just the  
13 happiest guys in the world. They were up. We were on a civilian airplane and stewards  
14 onboard and they were trying to keep these guys in their seats and they were up dancing  
15 around and stomping their feet, high fiving and, you know whatever else; hugging their  
16 buddies and saying, “Boy am I!” It was a real show.

17 JS: Sure, I bet it was. I bet it was. Well, where did—

18 CN: I have to say that when we landed back in northern California, as I recall,  
19 then we spilt up and we said our goodbyes and went on back to our homes. I did not  
20 experience any spitting or bad stuff, personally I didn’t remember it. Although the  
21 newspapers of the day talked about the behavior of Americans related to the kids coming  
22 back. I didn’t experience any of that.

23 JS: Okay. So then would you say your reception back was pretty good then?

24 CN: Well, we—my wife was in southern California, San Diego, with my children  
25 and I had to make my way back down here. We all—I am trying to remember how I got  
26 down there. I think I walked across the tarmac and caught a Navy plane or—I can’t  
27 remember. I don’t remember.

28 JS: That’s all right. That’s fine.

29 CN: I only know I got home.

30 JS: Right. Did you have some time off? I would assume you did before your next  
31 assignment to the *Cook*?

1 CN: Well, not very much. I was home on leave for I think a better part of a  
2 month. I had received orders to the USS *Cook* and it was home ported in Long Beach,  
3 California. I went up and took command in Long Beach and my family was there, of  
4 course. My wife wasn't too keen on that because I had been on the 1<sup>st</sup> Fleet staff, that was  
5 a sea job, although we didn't deploy to the western Pacific. We deployed to the middle of  
6 the Pacific on that staff. Then I went in-country for a year, or almost a year, and had all of  
7 that training stuff I was doing before that. Then I come out and they gave me a ship. I  
8 had—the reason I was sent over to Vietnam was that the jobs that I was sent to in Nha Be  
9 and the logistics base in Rung Sat was that they had to have, to be the senior advisor there  
10 you had to have screened for command. I had already screened when I was—I had  
11 screened for destroyer command back when I was at the War College. When I was  
12 promoted to commander I had already screened to be a captain of a destroyer but they  
13 had to have me—they needed somebody who was prescreened in Vietnam so I went over  
14 and did that job. When I came back out I was very much anxious to take command of a  
15 ship because I had been yearning to be a destroyer skipper for about four years. They said  
16 that you could go to shore duty or you can have, we will give you a ship. Withstanding  
17 arguments from my wife, who was a wonderful trooper, I was given command of a new  
18 ship and I jumped at it.

19 JS: Sure.

20 CN: We almost moved up to Long Beach but it turned out in '74 they changed the  
21 home port to San Diego and we were able to stay in San Diego. Then it wasn't too long  
22 after that that I deployed the ship back over to the western Pacific for seven months. I  
23 spent a lot of time in the western Pacific.

24 JS: Sure. You mentioned in your veteran's questionnaire, talked about your duties  
25 and the demining, participation in the demining of Hai Phong Harbor. Could you tell me  
26 about that?

27 CN: Yeah. I had forgotten that I had filled out a form like that. I don't remember  
28 doing that. In any case, I wondered why you knew some of the questions to ask me.  
29 Yeah, my first deployment with *Cook* I had a helicopter onboard and we were—we went  
30 back over to—as a matter of fact, the helicopter ship—taking a helicopter on a ship for  
31 deployment was new. We had used helicopters on the ships in and around the States but

1 *Cook* and its helicopter was the first to make a full deployment to the western Pacific. So  
2 I was—when we got over, I forget exactly when, we were set up into the Tonkin Gulf as  
3 protection for the mine sweeping craft and mine sweeping helicopters that we had up  
4 there on amphibious ships. While we demined that Haiphong Harbor *Cook* was shotgun  
5 for, and a few other destroyers were shotgun for, the amphibious ships that carried the  
6 demining helicopters and mine sweepers that we had up there, small mine sweepers. It  
7 was pretty interesting. We had a hurricane or typhoon come through one time and we had  
8 to pull out of there. I remember my ship had some damage to a forward gun mount as a  
9 result of the weather, but other than that it was interesting to be up in that area into the  
10 Tonkin Gulf without anybody shooting at you, you know, that sort of thing.

11 JS: What were your thoughts on this duty about demining the harbor? Did you  
12 have any thoughts about why are we doing this or anything?

13 CN: Well, truthfully I always thought that America had invested so much into  
14 Vietnam that we should have come away—we should not have lost the war. I always felt  
15 that.

16 JS: Right.

17 CN: I had strong feelings about what we should have done to win the war and that  
18 would have been seal off North Vietnam and bomb their dikes and flood the bastards and  
19 whatever we needed to do to win the war. That was just my personal feelings. So when  
20 we—the mines, mining the harbor up there was just one of the things that I thought we  
21 should do. When it was all over and you pull them out at least you know that we did  
22 some of the things that we should have done. I thought we should have done even more.

23 JS: All right.

24 CN: But that is an old sailor talking.

25 JS: Right, yeah. Well, how close to the coast did you actually get. I mean, could  
26 you see Haiphong fairly closely? I mean, how close?

27 CN: Pretty vague right now. I think we knew where we were, we had the charts,  
28 we were right near by the mouth of the Haiphong and I can't remember how much I saw.  
29 I had my nose down on navigation making sure we didn't run aground and we stayed in  
30 the formations and that sort of thing. That was about it.

31 JS: Okay. How long were you there in the Haiphong area?

1 CN: I don't remember that, either. It was days. It was days. I don't know how  
2 much—whether it was weeks or not. I don't know. We were there a pretty good piece of  
3 time because it took—I don't know that much about mine sweeping. Some of them were  
4 bottom mines and some were—you had to go in and cut the wires and pop them to the  
5 surface and whatever the mine force does to demine—shut them down. Then you have to  
6 get them aboard and carry them away. It is a grueling job and very dangerous.

7 JS: Sure.

8 CN: I don't remember any explosions or anything. Whatever they did, they did  
9 pretty safely, as I recall. I never got any reports that there were mines exploded, that sort  
10 of thing.

11 JS: All right. Outside of this duty at Haiphong what other types of things was the  
12 *Cook* doing while you were the captain of the ship?

13 CN: Well, we did—of course, some of the fleet is involved in show-the-flag  
14 training with our allies. We went into South Vietnam and did an operation with the—did  
15 I say South Vietnam? Meant to say South Korea, the South Korean navy. We used our  
16 helicopter, which was basically an anti-submarine chopper. We used it in an operation  
17 with the South Koreans. We went into Japan and did a major flag showing. Commander  
18 cruiser/destroyer Three came aboard my ship. During a major exercise with the Japanese  
19 navy and we were launching torpedoes, not armed, and flying missions with the Japanese  
20 navy during that ASW operation. What else were we doing? We did show the flag in port  
21 visits and the typical things that peacetime Navy does as the war was over. For us, the  
22 Americans had come out in '73. We were among, I guess, the first to come out but  
23 eventually the entire military got out in '73. By '74 we were back to peacetime  
24 operations.

25 JS: Right, okay.

26 CN: I redeployed, went home and then prepared the ship for redeployment. I  
27 came back out in '75 and I was relieved in April of '75 and flew back to San Diego. The  
28 ship in turn went off South Vietnam and were there, if you recall, when the last  
29 Americans came out.

30 JS: Right.

1 CN: In '75, April. They call it "Black April" now. You know that is a nickname  
2 by everybody, I guess.

3 JS: Yeah. How closely did you follow the fall of Saigon and the end of the war?

4 CN: I followed it very closely. I have to say that when I said I was going to write  
5 a book about the Rung Sat after I retired from the Navy I sat about to do that. I knew a lot  
6 about what was happening in Vietnam. I followed it to the extent that we were able to  
7 know in the newspapers and television through the '70s. To the extent that I could, I  
8 followed the war from '75, from '73 on. I knew pretty much what was going on.

9 JS: How did you feel—did you have any particular emotions or feelings the day  
10 that you heard that Saigon fell?

11 CN: Yeah, I did. I had very strong feelings. I just felt we never—we shouldn't  
12 have lost the war. We should have, from a military point of view, not necessarily  
13 (coughs), excuse me, not necessarily from a citizen's point of view, probably citizens see  
14 it a different way, but we military guys, us career military and I felt we should have won  
15 the war. We should have funded it, whatever they needed. So I felt very strongly about  
16 the overrunning of Saigon and North taking over the South and that sort of thing.

17 JS: Right.

18 CN: I was also influenced by my counterparts who hated the North Vietnamese.  
19 Even though Dai Ta Hop had been a graduate of the military academy up in North  
20 Vietnam, when he came, he was a South Vietnamese man and so was Commander Nang.  
21 It was clear to me that they were—and they talked to me about that there were two  
22 countries, there was a North Vietnamese in the North and they were the South and they  
23 hated the North they called them dog eaters. They felt they were just—they did not like  
24 the North. It was almost like—well, anyway, so I was affected by their comments such  
25 that when the South was overtaken I felt very badly for them.

26 JS: Okay. All right. Let's see, after—I am kind of jumping around here a little bit,  
27 I guess, but after you left the *Cook* could you pick up on the story, your career from that  
28 point?

29 CN: Yeah, well, I was—Vice Admiral Bob Salzar, who had been one of my  
30 bosses in Vietnam, called me or had his aide call me and asked me if I wanted to go to  
31 work for him at the naval surface warfare organization, new organization they were

1 forming in San Diego. He wanted an experienced destroyer captain to come into the  
2 logistics side of his operation and manage fleet maintenance. You know I couldn't say no  
3 so I went there and I became the director of operational maintenance for the destroyer  
4 force, the mine force, the amphibious force, the logistics force, all the ships there were  
5 about 100 or so ships in the Pacific. I was director of maintenance for the ships, not when  
6 they were in major overhaul, which was usually a three- to four-month period, but in  
7 between deployments and when they were deployed and when they were operational. All  
8 their maintenance was under my hat. It was an interesting two years that I served there. It  
9 was a—we had to bring all these they had in separate organizations and then we brought  
10 them all under one command as a surface force specific. When I started I had no money  
11 practically, some of the type of ships had lots of money and some had none so I had to  
12 design a program, a funding program. I went from a budget of something like, you know,  
13 as many as forty million bucks, hardly anything, up to hundreds of millions of dollars in a  
14 program that I developed on maintaining the ships during their operational cycle. That  
15 was interesting and then while I was there I got promoted to captain and very shortly after  
16 that they sent me to Commander Cruiser Destroyer One as the chief of staff for  
17 operations and plans. I did that for about a year and a half and we deployed again back  
18 out to the Pacific. Then after that I got emergency orders to take command of the cruiser  
19 USS *Worden* CG 18. It was in the Pacific, home ported Yokosuka. The emergency was  
20 that the captain's wife was diagnosed with cancer and he had to leave the ship so I was  
21 asked to go out and do that. So I had a guided-missile cruiser, which is frosting on the  
22 cake for this old sailor. I had it for almost three years, homeport in Yokosuka, Japan, but  
23 I was seldom there. I was operating about 75% of the time I was underway. I had my wife  
24 and my youngest daughter with us. Then after that job I retired from the Navy. We had  
25 enough.

26 JS: Okay. Well, one thing I wanted to ask you about the *Warden*, you had  
27 mentioned yesterday in our conversation that wasn't on the interview about coming  
28 across some Vietnamese boat people. Could you tell—?

29 CN: Yeah, yeah, we did a lot of that. I don't know, maybe it was my closeness to  
30 the Vietnamese people that I developed when I was in-country but my leaning was that if  
31 we came across Vietnamese boat people, refugees at sea we would pick them up. In the

1 course of my plying the waters between the Philippines and Vietnam and Thailand and  
2 those places I ran across the Vietnamese in these small boats, I tended to pick them up.  
3 Over—I suppose we brought aboard more than—over several months, over 150  
4 Vietnamese refugees. The last group was the most significant one in terms of my life  
5 connection to Vietnam and to Vietnamese people. We were heading, as I said before, we  
6 were ordered to go to the Indian Ocean and the *Worden* was to relieve a cruiser out there  
7 and become the commander of anti-air warfare for two carriers that were prepositioned  
8 there to attack Iran because they had taken our embassy personnel as hostage.

9 JS: Right.

10 CN: On the way there I had to go through the waters of the South China Sea. A P-  
11 3 came flying by and the skipper of the airplane called me and said, “On your track, there  
12 is a boat with some people on it and you may want to take a look at it.” We did. We went  
13 over and we found the—we were in a hurry but we slowed down to investigate the boat  
14 and I sent an armed guard in the boat over. My chief and the boat officer, a lieutenant,  
15 called me and said, “You won’t believe this, skipper, but we have got a boat full of  
16 children.” We searched the boat and took any weapons away from them and brought it  
17 alongside and we discovered they had been in the storm the night before and all their  
18 food had been wet and/or washed overboard. Their engine failed and they didn’t know  
19 where the hell they were. They had been at sea for some period of time and they were  
20 almost—there were little babies on board. Well, there was a mother and a father they  
21 were like nineteen, twenty years old or something and they had some babies with them.  
22 We had a lot of teenage kids. I decided to bring them onboard and they came onboard.  
23 Then I had them tow the boat out and I had my gunners shoot at it to sink it. For whatever  
24 reason they must have built the boat to never die because the gunners couldn’t make it—  
25 they hit it but it wouldn’t go down. I backed off and had my boat guys go over with some  
26 charges and we sank the boat with some explosives. It would have been a derelict at sea  
27 and I couldn’t take it with me.

28 JS: Right.

29 CN: We went on to [Singapore]. Just as a little sideline, my sailors as they always  
30 are great people and they took these kids and they got them showered and cleaned and the  
31 medics examined them and gave them a chaplain that prayed over them and did all this

1 stuff. They fed them and then they gave them all sorts of *Worden* T-shirts and ball caps  
2 and made them—you know, took the kids under their arms and, you know, helped them  
3 and we went on to Singapore where we took them ashore. We turned them over to  
4 organizations that take care of refugees and that sort of thing and we went on into the  
5 Indian Ocean and carried out our mission. I might say that fifteen years later I got a  
6 telephone call and one of the Vietnamese, he was in Moline, Illinois, and he had a  
7 restaurant, Vietnamese restaurant, and he had a retired naval officer come in as one of his  
8 regular customers. He asked this guy, “How could I get a hold of the skipper of the US  
9 *Worden*?” He told him, “Well, you can call the Pentagon and they will help you find  
10 him.” This guy did that and he found me. I connected with those forty-four children and  
11 had a marvelous connection. It goes on today. We were—then I got a telephone call and a  
12 letter from a lady in San Jose, California, who was—who told me that she was going to  
13 marry one of the boys that helped build the boat. They had built this boat themselves, by  
14 the way.

15 JS: Oh, wow.

16 CN: A couple of teenagers, nineteen- or twenty-year-old guys. She was going to  
17 marry him but she [Kim Que] wanted me to come to the wedding but she wanted me to  
18 come—she wanted me to be her surprise wedding present to her husband. My wife and I  
19 went up and we went to church and watched them get married and then we went to the  
20 reception and they squirreled us around into a table with as little notice as possible and  
21 the place was full of Vietnamese people. At the perfect time this young lady got up and  
22 took the microphone, (speaking to someone in background) I am still in an interview.  
23 Okay. Bye-bye. Oh, is it that time? Wow. Wait a minute. Hold on a minute. Wait. I  
24 thought you weren't going until 1:15. Yes, I am pretty sure. Yeah. Yeah. That is what I  
25 have down, 1:15. You better check it. Yeah. That was my wife she has a medical  
26 appointment.

27 JS: Okay.

28 CN: Anyway, this Vietnamese American lady [Kim Que] who had just been  
29 married to one of the guys on the boat, and she was not on the boat. She had come over  
30 earlier from like some other means. She introduced and said, “Would Dr. Nelson come  
31 forward?” So nobody knew who Dr. Nelson was. We got up, my wife and I got up there

1 on the platform and she said, “You probably don’t know, don’t recognize him as Dr. Carl  
2 Nelson, but you will recognize him as Captain Carl Nelson, the former commanding  
3 officer of the USS *Worden*.” Those people were all there and it was amazing. The place  
4 went crazy. Then they asked me to make a speech and I couldn’t do it. I fumbled some  
5 words out and her husband came over and hugged me. The brothers, a couple of brothers  
6 came and then a lot of other people came. By now fifteen years or so later they had those  
7 that were older and some of them married and they have children and they brought their  
8 babies over and I kissed a lot of babies that night. It is marvelous and we have stayed  
9 connected for all those years now. Anyway, where are we? After *Worden* I retired and  
10 wanted to keep busy so I went back to school and earned a doctorate and became a  
11 professor. I always wanted to write so I began writing. I wrote my book—a novel about  
12 Vietnam.

13 JS: Right.

14 CN: I wrote, published eight nonfiction books in my field, which is international  
15 economics and trade, one of which is a best-seller on—in America for its purpose;  
16 import, export, how to get started in international trade. Four editions and untold number  
17 of printings of the book, it is coming out in the fourth edition this year, next year actually.  
18 Then I have written and published three novels, one of which just came out in the first of  
19 May. It has been out four months now. Life has been good except for one terrible thing. I  
20 lost my wife Barbara to lung cancer in 2004 and that has changed my life a great deal.  
21 But I was fortunate to meet a lady and remarried subsequently and life has been going on  
22 okay.

23 JS: Okay. All right. Well, before wrapping the interview up if you have a few  
24 more moments I have just some broad questions about your opinions on the war and your  
25 service. You can say as much or as little as you want about these.

26 CN: Okay.

27 JS: One of the things I thought of, I just thought of this one, you know, as you  
28 were talking about your career, your long career in the Navy, but what would you say  
29 was the moment you were most proud of in your career with the Navy? Or is there one  
30 that comes—

31 CN: Most proud? Probably saving the lives of the refugees.

1 JS: Okay.

2 CN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, all the other work was about war and this was about  
3 saving lives as opposed to killing people.

4 JS: Okay. All right. We have touched on this again, so you don't have—we have  
5 touched on this before so you don't have to say too much about this if you don't want.  
6 Just your opinion of American policy towards Vietnam and Southeast Asia, looking back  
7 on it now, has your opinion changed over time?

8 CN: I have to go on what I think we knew and at the time we had gone through a  
9 period of time when the Cold War had started. Okay? We were—we had a passion, we  
10 were passionately against communism. We were afraid because our free enterprise  
11 capitalistic, socio-capitalistic system was working for us and it was not working for other  
12 countries at the time who then turned to a heavy socialistic government. So we were  
13 afraid and based on that we were worried about the expansion of communism and highly  
14 social organizations eroding the success that we had experienced in America. When we  
15 diagnosed the government people, Eisenhower and beyond began looking at the whole  
16 strategy. They saw the possibility of very poor countries including Vietnam adopting  
17 communism. It was a real fear by our leaders. Based on that our movement to help the  
18 South Vietnamese fend off communist North was valid. I think based on what we knew,  
19 as best I can determine, it was valid. It turned out that—if they were looking at Asia right  
20 now they would realize that communism not only didn't work, the capitalism and the free  
21 enterprise has gripped Asia and they are doing it better than we are.

22 JS: Right, right.

23 CN: They love capitalism—

24 JS: Hello, hello.

25 CN: I am worried that this phone that I have may have lost its charge. I am not  
26 sure, but I switched phones.

27 JS: Okay. All right.

28 CN: I would say that based on the strategies of the time we did the right thing to  
29 go there. In retrospect—based on the information at the time I would say that we  
30 prematurely left and that we should have worked harder to save Vietnam. Although I  
31 understood the fears, strategists' fears of going into war with a country as big as China,

1 we didn't want to do that, I don't think. They have three times the population of America,  
2 maybe more than three times. But I kind of feel that we could have sealed off some part  
3 of North Vietnam. In any case, there are very well qualified people who have written  
4 about how we could have won the war. I certainly was not at that level at any time in my  
5 career in terms of understanding what we could have done and what the strategy of  
6 saving might have been. I have read some stuff since then. I read some good books that  
7 tell us that we could have won. I wish we had.

8 JS: All right. What is your opinion about U.S.-Vietnamese relations today and just  
9 the reconnecting to Vietnam today? What do you think about that?

10 CN: Well, I went back and I talked to my kids who go back often. I have—my  
11 kids have brought their kin from Vietnam to California. One of my kids brought his mom  
12 and dad over and I went back and I lived with the parents. In 2000 I was asked by one of  
13 my Vietnamese kids, his name is Luong Nguyen, his American name is Lou, he asked me  
14 if I would go back to Vietnam with him and meet his parents and so I did. Another pal of  
15 mine, a retired Army colonel, went back with me and we went up to Ban Me Thuot and  
16 stayed at the home of the parents of one of these guys. I was able to observe, because of  
17 course my doctorate, I became a professor of international business and because of that I  
18 was very interested in observing Vietnam as it is today. I had, as a matter of fact, a  
19 personal interest. When I had been at Monterrey I had done an extensive thesis on the  
20 issue: What would you have to do to increase the per capita income of Vietnam? At the  
21 time it was like fifty dollars a year would get them to have a per capita income of maybe  
22 five hundred dollars a year and I came up with a macro plan to do that. Going back in  
23 2000 I was able to observe and I frankly saw—I felt—the North Vietnamese are working  
24 hard to stay in a heavy socialistic environment just as China is. They are trying to have an  
25 underlying socialistic organization at the same time they are doing free enterprise. What I  
26 discovered was that Vietnam was buzzing with lots of work. Much of it was financed  
27 through the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) for projects that  
28 would improve Vietnam. I did see the electrification of Vietnam happening probably as a  
29 result of American dollars going to the IMF or World Bank, etc. I saw plants,  
30 manufacturing plants in and around Saigon and I am told that they are in the north, as  
31 well, taking advantage of the low wage rates to manufacture products for other countries

1 including Taiwan and Australia and Germany and France and whoever. High  
2 employment, everybody seemed to have a job. It was like an anthill, people running  
3 around on their little motorcycles and whatever. The struggle is—because the  
4 government of Vietnam is highly structured and highly controlling there is a lot of under-  
5 the-table business that takes place. Vietnam relies a great deal on the American people to  
6 come there and spend their money. I am talking about the American-Vietnamese that  
7 used to be—who fled and now go back routinely, they bring American dollars back and  
8 they are slowly but surely buying up businesses and investing in Vietnam. I know my  
9 kids are investing in building rental properties and all sorts of things in Vietnam and  
10 getting rich. I know that when I drove, when I took a jeep ride from Saigon down to the  
11 Rung Sat and Nha Be the terrain had changed immensely, new homes, everybody had a  
12 house. You know, it depends on your outlook. They were not little shacks like they used  
13 to be when I was there. These are solid places. What happened was, of course, the North  
14 Vietnamese took back all the land and then redistributed it and gave everybody a piece of  
15 property. They built homes on them and they built good homes. To the extent that I was  
16 able, as a data point of one observer, I thought that life for the peasants had improved.  
17 They had a house. They had a piece of property, etc. I did not feel, in Saigon, I did not  
18 feel endangered at any time. I didn't see many police, although they said that there were  
19 some around, I hardly saw very many at all. I did see lots of manufacturing going on.  
20 They had some really good roads. The road from Saigon to Ban Me Thuot was a super  
21 highway.

22 JS: Oh, wow.

23 CN: So things were, at least in 2000—now it is eight years later. I assume that  
24 they have even made more progress, but that was my observation as a professor of  
25 international business. They are making gains.

26 JS: Right, okay. All right, well, before wrapping the interview up is there any last  
27 thing you would like to say about your experiences or about Vietnam before we bring the  
28 interview to a close?

29 CN: Oh, gosh. It was a long road for me beginning in '63 and finally ending in  
30 '75. But I was involved in that war one way or another, one extent or another. I still  
31 have—as a result of that long experience, it was the war, it was my war during my time in

1 the service. Everybody, the boys that were in during the '50s had Korea and the boys in  
2 the '40s had the World War in Europe but my war was Vietnam and I feel strongly about  
3 it and I still follow it closely. I wish, from a human point of view I wish the Vietnamese  
4 people well. I liked the Vietnamese people. I found them—the ones that I knew closely, I  
5 got close to them, it was built on friendship and I hope that the people of the country  
6 survive and their country grows. To a certain extent, if that were to happen and the  
7 country not be overly socialistic but accommodates free enterprise, I would say we in a  
8 certain way to look at it we certainly won. We were winners if in fact they grow  
9 economically through free enterprise.

10 JS: Right, okay. All right, well, I will go ahead and bring the interview to a close,  
11 but if you don't mind I would like to talk to you for a few more minutes after I stop it.

12 CN: That will be fine.

13 JS: Okay.